

## Learn, Taste, Experience – Iceland (LTEI)

### Project Summary

Learning about a country through its culinary arts is one of travel's principle pleasures. Food is a tangible reflection of geography, history, and culture; there are few more pleasurable ways to become well acquainted with a country than through its gastronomy. A report by the Pangaea Network recognised the growing significance of food tourism; trips made to destinations where enjoying unique and memorable food and drink experiences enriches the act of travelling. It also identifies culinary tourists as people who are willing to travel the world partly in order to sample and experience authentic national and international cuisine.

Gastronomy has become a core part of the tourism experience. Research by VisitScotland reveals that Edinburgh visitors spend £325million on Food & Drink and the local destination is encouraging businesses to develop new products around food & drink.

VisitEngland research revealed in 2012, 13 million day visits involved a trip to a food festival of farmers' market, and that in 2013, 26.2 million visitors expected to go to a food festival. Research also reveals that 68% of people would like to buy local produce while on holiday and 76% want to dine at restaurants serving local dishes. Research by UNWTO shows 88% of tourism destination respondents consider gastronomy as a strategic element in defining brand and image of the destination and yet there is little stable co-operation for developing and promoting food tourism between tourism operators and food producers. Having established visitor preferences it is important the local SME businesses recognise and are prepared to benefit from consumer trends.

This project will aim to harness the learning from the visit to South Iceland to let our participants see how South Iceland has developed its food and drink offer following the Icelandic Financial Crisis. Small businesses have had to diversify and develop their traditional business to meet and exceed the needs of today's visitor. This has been extremely successful and visitor numbers to Iceland have grown at a fast pace over the last few years due to development of service, products and branding. Our project will focus on how Icelandic SMEs and chefs incorporate local ingredients and "food" theatre into their presentation and how the education sector work with the businesses to develop staff and new students entering the profession.

The main objective of this project is to learn from the development and skills of Icelandic peers in linking local food and drink production with "Sense of Place", in ways which are sustainable and which enhance the overall visitor experience. In many ways too many destinations have forgotten what makes them distinctive. Equally they need to deliver experiences that match the visitor expectations they will with marketing promises.

Project aims are:

- to exchange expertise and best practice in training development and delivery, particularly in sustainable tourism and the role of food & drink tourism
- to exchange expertise and best practice in mechanisms used to motivate the tourism, hospitality and food & drink sectors to participate in training and education

- to give trainers/mentors the opportunity to look beyond their own working environments and develop a European approach to training
- to explore the transferability of expertise and examples of best practice and how they can be used in vocational training in Ayrshire and beyond
- to encourage our target sectors to collaborate with higher/further education sectors to develop current, relevant and fit for purpose qualifications and delivery models
- to improve the recognition of skills within the European tourism industry
- to build the foundation for new partnerships at local, regional, national and european levels and to facilitate future exchange/work placement activities.

The majority of participants will come from organisations where it is difficult to facilitate long periods of time outside of the workplace, but they can participate and benefit greatly from a focussed week-long intensive study tour programme.

We initially approached Visit South Iceland due to links/relationships already in place with that organisation. However, as discussions evolved it was agreed that the University Association of South Iceland (HfSu) be the host partner as this Association has been set up to improve access to education in the area, especially regarding tertiary education, encouraging research activities in the area, and work on regional development projects. The Association is represented by a mix of private and public sector representatives who will provide best practice examples and current development examples to our group.

For example, Food Bridge is a new programme in the food industry where the emphasis is placed on management and innovation combined with marketing and entrepreneurship as well as special courses in food related sciences. This programme is being developed by HfSu in conjunction with Matis (A government owned, independent research company, founded in 2007. Matís' vision is to increase the value of food processing and food production, through research, development, dissemination of knowledge and consultancy, as well as to ensure the safety and quality of food and feed products.) It will benefit our participants to hear about this project and how they bring the project together in encouraging collaboration of key industry players. This will be of particular interest to The Ayrshire Chamber and food processing/producer participants in developing future strategies using the learning outcomes of such a project.

Visit South Iceland, the local destination marketing organisation/tourist board are also heavily involved (are members) with HfSu, which means that they can provide the additional knowledge and input from the tourism & hospitality business provider perspective. This helps to bring the all the relevant topics together under a Food & Drink banner and highlight the importance of collaboration at the wider industry level. Visit South Iceland will assist with the practical aspects and requirements of this project such as: accommodation, travel and day-to-day programme. HfSu will focus on the learning content, identifying experts to provide presentations and workshop topics.

HfSu will benefit from this project by having a platform to promote their relevant projects/learning to a European audience. They will have the opportunity to network and share experiences with a UK audience who may form new networks and potential partners in future projects. HfSu may also take the opportunity to learn from our participant experiences to integrate into their own projects.