



2020 MESSAGE from ASVA Chair

SUSAN MORRISON



As ASVA's new Chair one of my first responsibilities is having the pleasurable task of wishing all ASVA members a very happy New Year! I am very conscious that I have come into the role of Chair of ASVA at a dynamic and exciting, though potentially uncertain time for our industry. What I can say with certainty is that 2020 will clearly be a very interesting year, with a number of challenges and opportunities facing our sector in the months ahead.

It is fair to say that 2019 was very much dominated by one news item, Brexit, and this caused a great deal of uncertainty both within our industry and in the country as a whole. Even before Brexit has happened, we have been able to see that it has had an impact on tourism in Scotland. Figures from the first two quarters of 2019 show that there has been a European downturn with trips to Scotland down 37.59% and spend down 40.19%, with a noticeable slowdown in visitors from France and Germany in particular. On a more positive note however at the same time there was also a domestic upturn, with Scottish trips up 26.36% and spend up 21.68%. Whilst we do not know what 2020 will look like, it is likely that it will follow a similar pattern with a downturn in European visitors offset somewhat by an increase in 'staycationing' from Scottish and UK visitors.

One thing we do know in 2020 is that Brexit is now happening, though we do not yet have any clarity on what this actually means in a real sense for our economy, our reputation internationally, our workforce or indeed visitor confidence. Our commitment to our members is that ASVA will continue to work with the Scottish Government and key agencies such as Scottish Enterprise, VisitScotland and the Scottish Tourism Alliance to ensure that we can provide our members with as much advice and support as possible in the post-Brexit landscape. We will do everything we can to ensure that the views and concerns of our sector are being listened to and considered both at a Scottish and UK level.

Regardless of what happens post-Brexit we can still look forward with confidence as we have proven that we have a very robust and adaptive sector in Scotland. Visitor numbers in 2019 across ASVA member sites have been consistently strong, keeping pace with the excellent numbers reported in 2018, where more than 30 million visitors passed through the doors of our attractions. As of time of writing it is looking likely that when the Annual Visitor Trends report for 2019 is published in early March, we will be reporting healthy results with figures matching, if not exceeding, those in 2018.

There is a myriad of reasons why we continue to see our sector perform strongly, e.g. the comparatively weak pound, the continued use of Scotland and Scottish attractions in TV and film, varying weather conditions etc. Without a doubt, the fact that attractions continue to invest time, money and resources into improving visitor experience, offering ever more high quality, compelling and engaging experiences, is a key factor. Last year saw the implementation of VisitScotland's revamped Quality Assurance Grading Scheme, with the revised scheme placing an increased emphasis on attractions delivering high quality customer service and more personalised experiences. The scheme has been designed explicitly to be aspirational and to reflect modern visitor demands and more has undoubtedly been expected of visitor attractions in terms of quality of offering as a result.

2020

2019 was another big year for ASVA. It was our Chief Executive, Gordon Morrison's first full year in post, and it was a year in which ASVA continued to develop and grow, both in terms of membership levels and in our offering to members. As of the beginning of 2020 ASVA has 246 organisations in membership, representing just under 500 attractions from all across Scotland. This is a record membership for ASVA and we are delighted that we have been able to grow our network to this level in 2019. We will, of course, not be resting on our laurels and will be seeking to grow the membership yet further in 2020, particularly in areas of Scotland where there is underrepresentation at present. Looking at feedback from ASVA members over the last few years it is clear that our members value the networking opportunities afforded with ASVA membership, and this is something we are very keen to build on. By increasing membership levels across all areas of the country, we will not only broaden the network, we will also hopefully be able to host more events and workshops in different locations, affording more networking opportunities for everyone.

SPEAKING OF **events and workshops**

in 2019 ASVA enhanced and expanded our development programme to provide more high-quality events for our members. We used direct responses from the membership survey of 2018 to help us ensure that the content for our events were meaningful and beneficial to our industry. In total we delivered 15 open ASVA member events, more than one a month, bringing together many hundreds of attractions professionals, networking and sharing best practice on a diverse range of topics.

Established workshops, such as 'Become a QA for a Day' where delegates got to experience a day in the life of a VisitScotland assessor and 'Exceeding Visitor Expectations', which featured practical training on how to deliver consistently 5 star levels of service on a daily basis, continued to be hugely popular and we are already committed to continue to deliver these in 2020. On top of that, we collaborated with a number of partners to deliver visitor attraction specific events on retail best practice, marketing best practice, digital best practice and the use of immersive technology to enhance visitor experience. I would like to thank our partners at the Association for Cultural Enterprises, VisitScotland, After Digital and Interface for their collaboration on a number of these endeavours.

In 2020 we will continue to collaborate with individuals and organisations who can bring expertise to ASVA to help us deliver an even more comprehensive programme that fully meets the needs of our members. Already planned and advertised on the ASVA website are a series of visitor attraction specific digital workshops, hosted by digital guru and friend of ASVA, Stephen Whitelaw.





Annual Conference 2019

ASVA's showcase event of the year, the annual conference, was a huge success in 2019. Under the theme of *'Best Practice Makes Perfect: How to Deliver Great Experiences'*, the event explored all areas of best practice across our industry, from expert advice on retailing and catering to how to deliver memorable experiences and how to encourage visitors to spend more money when they visit. Topical concerns such as environmental sustainability and how to make your attraction more accessible and inclusive were covered, along with very interesting presentations on how dynamic pricing can be used to increase both profitability and visitor satisfaction and an exploration into what your visitors actually want when they visit your attractions. This was very much a conference designed to provide delegates with practical hints and tips that could be taken back and acted upon to improve business

performance and visitor experience. From the feedback we received post event this was a very popular theme and one we delivered on.

In terms of the number of delegates, the 2019 conference was by far our biggest yet, so much so that we had to increase the capacity at the venue by almost 30% to accommodate the additional demand. In 2020 the conference will be held at Crieff Hydro Hotel on Thursday 5th & Friday 6th November. We have taken on board learnings from last year's event and listened to many of our members suggestions and recommendations about how we can improve yet further so you can expect to see some more positive changes in 2020. Make sure you save these dates in your diary – as the highlight of the attraction calendar it will likely sell out once again this year.

ASVA awards

I'd also like to take this opportunity to offer my congratulations to our award winners announced at the ASVA Conference Gala Dinner:

Three high calibre and very worthy winners this year, representing the very best of our industry. I am also pleased to report that the awards attracted a large number of quality entries last year, with judges commenting on the high calibre of entrants, making the judging process both challenging and rewarding.

I can confirm that we will be expanding the awards this year, introducing some new awards, enabling us to better recognise some of the amazing work that is undertaken across the attractions industry. ASVA as an organisation is committed to shining a light on the best in our industry and the ASVA awards provide the perfect showcase to shout about the brightest and best each year. Make sure your achievements are recognised and get entering the awards when they open later this year!

- Best Visitor Experience –**
Floors Castle and Gardens
- Marketing Award –**
Glasgow Museums with their 'Dippy on Tour' campaign
- Rising Star –**
Emma Sweeney from the Hill House (National Trust for Scotland)



THANK YOU

I would like to end this message with a thank you to all ASVA members. ASVA continues to grow and thrive and it is all down to the support, advice and loyalty that we receive from our members. Thank you to all who engaged with us in 2019 and we look forward to working with you in 2020. I'd also like to thank my fellow board members who continue to give up time to the organisation and whose support and encouragement is greatly appreciated by the ASVA executive team.

ASVA is an organisation that exists to support our members and to help our industry be the best that it can be. Please ensure that you make the most of your membership and, if you have any suggestions or ideas about how we can continue to develop we would love to hear from you.

All the very best for 2020!