Title of the Story: TRIPPING at home: the invention of domestic tourism in the Falkland Islands

Destination Name: Falkland Islands
Country: Falkland Islands

Submitter name: Kevin Millington
Email address: kevin@falklandislands.com
Position: Sustainability and Market Research

Nomination Category:
- [ ] Localizing the destination supply chain
- [ ] Decarbonizing the destination supply chain
- [ ] Culture & Communities
- [ ] Environment & Climate
- [ ] Nature & Ecotourism
- [☐] Tourism
- [ ] Reset & Recovery
- [ ] Other

Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices in the Top 100 training module “Good Practice Story”. Should you have any questions on your submission please refer to our FAQ page or contact top100@greendestinations.org.
DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Issues faced

The Falkland Islands are a remarkable destination rich in history, natural beauty, wildlife and culture. Situated at 52 degrees south, just 584 miles (940 km) from Antarctica (Elephant Island), the Falklands are an archipelago consisting of two main islands (East and West Falkland) and over 740 smaller islands ranging from surf-dashed rocks to 40,000-acre farms. Minimal development and infrastructure means that visitors can experience the abundant wildlife that draws tourists from all over the globe, albeit in small numbers due to its remote location and lack of flight connections. With over 750,000 penguins across five breeding species, the Falklands are the ultimate place to view these birds. The Islands are also home to vast colonies of sea birds, including the world’s largest population of black-browed albatross.

The Falkland Islands has a population of around 3,300, most of whom live in the capital, Stanley; only around 400 live in the countryside (known as “Camp”). Considering the size of the Islands, which cover an area of over 12,000 Km², this makes the Falklands the second least densely populated country in the world after Greenland. In addition to the resident population, the Islands hosts around 1,000 military personnel who reside at Mount Pleasant, around 40 km from Stanley.

The Falklands Islands are challenging to visit. There are three air routes to the Islands: from Sao Paulo in Brazil (one flight a week), Punta Arenas in Chile (one flight a week), and Brize Norton in the UK (two flights a week). The combined number of seats across these routes, per week, is just 445. Bearing in mind some of these are taken up by residents and business travellers, there are usually less than 250 seats a week available for leisure visitors.

The limited number of overnight leisure visitors is what makes the Falklands special, as astutely captured by two journalists on recent trips:

“Here, the only paths to follow have been carved out by sheep or penguins with the occasional roving track mixed in. A trip to the Falklands is like the Galapagos without the hand holding” - Adam Lukaszewicz

“I was awed by their remoteness and strange beauty. They are bigger, prettier, sunnier, more interesting, more unspoilt and more dramatic than I had imagined” - Marcel Theroux

However, despite only attracting around 2,000 leisure visitors a year, pre-COVID, tourism is important for the national economy, generating £5 million in expenditure and creating hundreds of jobs. Many farmers rely on overnight tourists to supplement their agricultural incomes, whilst other businesses such as shops, cafés, hotels, fresh food producers, and self-employed tour guides survive on overnight tourists.

As the COVID-19 pandemic swept around the world in the early months of 2020, the Falkland Islands was just bringing its annual October-March tourism season to an end. All borders were closed to tourists in the middle of March 2020, and all but a handful had completed their visits. Collectively, the Falklands felt blessed that the season was barely affected, and there was considerable hope that it would all be over by October, in time for the 2020-2021 season. How wrong this would turn out to be - by August 2020 it was clear there would be no tourist season and no income for the majority of businesses that served the annual cycle of visitors.
Methods, steps and tools applied

The Falklands was not alone in the predicament it faced, however whilst many other countries around the world with significant populations turned to their domestic markets to keep the tourism sector alive, how would this be possible with a population of 3,300, and some military personnel? Also, domestic leisure tourism was not even a concept most residents were familiar with – with most of the population working in or helping tourism businesses, most could not take trips themselves during the season. Moreover, the tourist season coincides with the busiest time of year for farmers, making it almost impossible for them to travel. The annual Domestic Tourism Survey shows that leisure travel expenditure by residents within the Falklands amounts to around £300,000 per annum – a mere fraction of the £5 million expenditure of international tourists. To fill this gap was going to require some significant inertia.

The Falkland Islands Government (FIG) set to work on a solution. Its aim was not just to help support tourism businesses, but also to promote mental health and well-being, and to encourage travel and relaxation within the Islands in place of travel overseas for holidays, which was almost impossible during the global pandemic.

The solution was TRIP: Tourism Recovery Incentive Programme. This was open to everyone who was ordinarily resident in the Falkland Islands and provided eligible adults with a £500 Digital Voucher and eligible children with a £250 Digital Voucher to be spent on accommodation, food and drink, experiences, and shopping provided by registered businesses. It also incorporated the BFSAI (British Forces South Atlantic Islands) TRIP scheme that provided eligible military personnel with a voucher worth up to £100 and each child between the ages of 2-16 with a voucher worth £50. FIG put the implementation and operation of the scheme out to tender, and this was won by local tour operator and travel agency firm, International Tours and Travel. The programme was set to run from October 2020 to March 2021 (the normal tourism season).

Key success factors

Based on the post-TRIP research carried out by FIG and the Falkland Islands Tourist Board (FITB) once the scheme ended, three key success factors stand out:

Acceptance and Uptake of the Scheme: 95% of the population registered for TRIP. Of those who did not register, the majority felt they would not have time to travel or could not travel for health reasons. Only 1% of the population did not agree with the scheme or felt it was not right to spend FIG money on personal leisure.

Economic Benefits: research showed that the length of domestic trips increased three-fold, as did the number of people taking a tour, compared to the previous season without the TRIP scheme. Self-catering accommodation occupancy was 12.5 percentage points higher than in the previous season when there were international visitors, at 54.6%. Whilst the room occupancy rate of serviced accommodation outside of Stanley was down 8.1% (to 56.0%) compared to the previous season, the level of bookings exceeded that achieved in 2017 (just 3 seasons earlier).

Creating Awareness of Domestic Tourism: 61% of persons who registered for TRIP said that they had such a good time they “would travel again in the Falklands next season, even without TRIP”, 24% said that they “would travel again, but only if TRIP was available”. Only 15% said that they “wouldn’t take a holiday in the Falklands next season” (although 23% of these said they would holiday again in the next five years).
Lessons learned

The tourist season (October-March) coincides with the busiest time of year for farmers and those in agriculture, which made it difficult for some people to take time off and travel. Consequently FIG extended TRIP to 31st May 2021, an extra two months, to enable these residents to take a holiday. This led to an extended season for many businesses in the sector, bringing in revenue in April and May which would usually be very quiet indeed, so much so that many businesses would typically close at the end of March.

56% of residents said that they would like FIG to run the scheme again in the future if the Islands are closed to foreign tourists, whilst 22% enjoyed themselves so much they would like the same scheme every year regardless! Only 13% felt public money should not be used again for leisure, or that it put too much pressure on the local airline (FIGAS) moving residents around the islands.

Results, achievements and recognitions

The Falkland Islands Government reported that in total they issued TRIP vouchers to the value of £1.4 million, of which £1.1 million was for accommodation and experiences, and £0.3 million for retail.

Over the period of TRIP (October 2020-May 2021), the local airline, FIGAS, which operates a small fleet of 8-seater, twin-prop Britten-Norman BN-2 Islander aircraft, carried 9,254 passengers. This was up from 7,354 passenger trips taken by residents over the same period the previous year, an increase of 25.8%.

The most popular destinations were Sea Lion Island 22.9% of all trips, Pebble Island (14.8%), and Bleaker Island (10.5%). However, whilst this shows the significance and success of TRIP, many more leisure trips were taken to destinations in East and West Falkland by car/car-ferry, where flying is not essential.

Whilst only measurable in qualitative terms, the impact on the well-being and mental health of the population is estimated to be highly significant. The concept of staying in a hotel a few miles from home was previously an alien concept, but people really embraced it, and are now repeating this outside of the TRIP scheme, justifying it was a way to pamper themselves and relax. Many people travelled to places they had never been to before, or not for many years. Over the last 10 years, tourism facilities in the Falklands have improved significantly and many residents were surprised at what the Falklands offered – Instagram and Facebook accounts became highly active with pictures of beautiful sunsets, penguins leaping out of the water, and other stunning Falkland landscapes.

The impact of the scheme has been so significant that the Falkland Islands Stamp Advisory Committee are planning the release of a set of stamps to commemorate the scheme. Residents are being asked to submit pictures taken on the TRIP scheme that highlight the tourism value of the Falklands.
Additional references

A small selection of photos taken by residents that capture the spirit of TRIP at some of the most popular destinations can be found at:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/obwnc4ewaa5kxmd/AAAMlqoVAnvghLiZg48Bp7Da?dl=0

Other more general links:

FITB Your Tube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCQsRCMv6jA3aFYaMWw43cg
FITB Website: www.falklandislands.com
FIG TRIP Scheme Link: https://www.fig.gov.fk/covid-19/tourismscheme/trip-scheme