



# A 1066 Country case study

## Driving the tourism agenda digitally

There are many different challenges facing the tourism industry at present. Brexit inches closer every day, and while it's crystal clear that our tourism landscape is about to change, we don't yet know how it will impact either us or our nearest geographical neighbours.

There's also the seismic shift that's taking place across the industry as increasing numbers of visitors are demanding that their tourism experience is digitised. From the point of booking to the feedback and reviews, every tourist expects different elements of their trip to be digitally accessible.

Destination organisations, heritage venues and attractions looking for support from Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) are now poking a diminished pot which a few years ago had annual funds of around £400 million per year to allocate to worthwhile projects. The advent of multiple different lotteries including scratch-cards means that funds are now being redirected away from the Heritage Lottery coffers.

Now, less than half at £180 million must stretch to support just as many initiatives aimed at improving their visitor experiences and hopefully fortunes. Many venues must now ensure their HLF applications are lean and do not spend to reinvent the wheel.

Individually, these threats can feel insurmountable – after all, to address them does necessitate travelling beyond the traditional comfort zones. Nevertheless, these multiple threats represent the types of opportunities that only come along once in every few generations and can pay stunning dividends if embraced.

This may be taking scant notice, perhaps, of the sea changes that have to take place to facilitate such moves, yet – at Geotourist – our experience is that working through these challenges is a lot less painful and does not have to cost the earth if you are prepared to do the research and innovate. Who are we? We're a British company that produces multilingual GPS-activated tours all over the world. Removing the need for costly devices, our app-based tours use visitors own smartphones and, as



we take care of technology development, there's no need for a deep level of tech knowledge or huge IT budget to create a single destination proprietary app. We can give travellers the opportunity to set their own agenda without missing out on the local knowledge that they would otherwise simply walk past. Our tours can be translated into the 21 most spoken global languages, so instantly the language barrier to attract visitors from upcoming markets crumbles. As signatories of the UK China Charter, we are proud to support inbound Chinese tourism with Mandarin tours that complement our English language tours. In reality, this means that Mandarin-speaking visitors to the Royal Mile in Edinburgh can listen to the same content as the English version. The only difference is that they don't get to listen to the Gaelic tones of Neil Oliver, Scottish historian and BBC presenter, tell the tale of skull-duggery and murder, which adds so much to the atmosphere of our English language tour. We're working on it though! As well as studying the changing inbound landscape, we can clearly see a change in what visitors want. While they do want to access everything with a tap of the fingertip, whether it be the temperature of their hotel room or booking a day trip, there is a clear overwhelming need to

access the human experience through storytelling. Millennials may set their stall out in terms of driving the call for travel as a deeply experiential activity, but the idea of wanting to connect with the past, present and future through storytelling isn't something new. Done digitally, and done through the Geotourist app that tracks and measures movement, it means that the story stays with the visitor: Not only can visitors listen again at leisure but tours and trails sound like stories being told, whether by the chairperson of Rye Historical Society, writer and broadcaster Ghillie Basan in the Cairngorms or Game of Thrones and The Crown actor, Anton Lesser as he tells us the hidden stories of Battle in Sussex.

At Geotourist, we can scan the global landscape. We know what inbound visitors want because we're already talking to them in their own countries. We know that they love heritage and craft breweries, family-friendly walks and highly targeted content, as with our LGBTQ walks of Denver and Capitol Hill, architecture, geography and walks with four-legged friends. The one-point Winston Churchill tour outside Westminster offers the same opportunity to connect with the world around you as the top 10-points tour of "hidden" Venice that helps visitors immerse themselves in



the fabric of Venetian living without having to tackle the crammed traditional tourist hot spots.

However, we've learnt many of our best lessons at home in the UK and nowhere more so than with our work in 1066 Country, East Sussex.

Working with the 1066 Country umbrella organisation, as well as with separate entities that crossed authority boundaries, we helped the region to create and promote the concept of 'Second London'. As with much of our work, we help DMOs and organisations to encourage visitors to firstly visit and then extend their stay. 1066 Country offers rich pickings for visitors, with the historic seaside towns of Hastings and Bexhill, the quintessentially English Rye and the thriving small town of Battle.

The brief was clear: to provide visitors easy access to explore 1066 Country so that visitors understood that 1066 Country is

the sum of all its fascinating and diverse parts.

Each different town had a different agenda, yet the Geotourist platform was able to meet their individual needs.

Hastings sought to highlight its modern side alongside its strong historical legacy as well as attract both local and international visitors; Battle was an educational piece to show the town in its own rights, geographically removed from Hastings, but also that it offers more than just Battle Abbey; Bexhill sought to attract visitors from neighbouring Hastings, and Rye wanted to show that its rich history complemented Hastings and encourage visitors to make a trip to Rye during their stay.

The outcome of Geotourist's work in 1066 Country has endured and outlasted the immediate campaign with the following tours and trails free for visitors to enjoy

still:

**Keane Trails** – Visit sites, in Battle, Bexhill and Hastings.

**Battle Heritage Tour** – Anton Lesser walks through Battle and site of the Battle of Hastings.

**Bexhill Heritage Tours** – With four heritage trails around Bexhill.

**Hastings Stade** – A walk through the iconic fishing and cultural quarter.

**Rye** – The Huguenot History of Rye, England's best preserved medieval town.

The Geotourist 1066 Country trails work for the visitors, offering immersive tours across the region, giving independence back to the visitors to conduct tours at their own pace and individual timetables. The trails also act as lasting evidence of how powerful and cohesive cross-authority projects can be, demonstrating how one provider can serve multiple stakeholders. In terms of stakeholder management, Geotourist acted as the central point in pulling the elements together and, perhaps more meaningfully, it meant that visitors only needed to access one app for all 1066 Country tours, which they will have seen while doing activities on the app in London. The tours have been listened to over 11,000 times, with Bexhill and Rye obtaining visitors from Hastings and Battle who had seen the tours on Geotourist. Thinking back to our two looming threats, it seems that there is an opportunity to think more smartly and embrace them in one fell swoop.

Transforming your tourism offer into a digital package that transcends both the generational gaps, geographical borders and crashes through language barriers is a massive concept, but it will most certainly pay to take a breath and understand that the work has already been done for you.

