

Visitor Attraction Best Practice

Lessons Learned from Leading Attractions on How They are Increasing Visitor Numbers and Spend



Image Sources: Astrid Lindgren World, Black Country Living Museum, Bursledon Brickworks, Bompas & Parr, Iain Macfarlane, Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre, Tayto Park, The World of James Herriot

Excerpted from Tourism Resources Company's [Visitor Attraction Best Practice](#) study (2016) as commissioned by Scottish Enterprise and the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions

Whether you're running a multi-million pound visitor attraction housing artefacts from around the world, or a volunteer-led museum with such meagre budgets you can hardly afford biscuits for tea, your mission is the same: to see your attraction thrive.

So with thriving in mind, here are real life examples of how leading attractions across the UK and beyond are addressing the challenges of increasing visitor numbers and spend.

Food

You can't deny the pleasure that comes from a home-cooked meal; made with fresh ingredients and reflecting the local environment and character. Not only is food becoming increasingly important as part of the overall visitor experience, but in some cases, food *is* the attraction.

[Dinner in the Sky](#) offers 22 guests the opportunity to dine while dangling from a 180ft crane. While Glasgow's Titan Crane has been known to offer a table with an elevated view. Or you may choose to heighten your sensory dining experience while dining in the dark with [Dans le Noir?](#)

If you're more of a morning person you may prefer Cereal Café, the UK's first speciality cereal eatery, with more than 120 different types of cereal on offer, not to mention 30 varieties of milk.

[Stoats Porridge Bar](#) in Edinburgh is a similar innovation closer to home while New Lanark's mobile ice cream bicycle vendor makes the most of the sun (when it appears) to sell its [own brand ice cream](#).

Pushing the boundaries of food are Bompas & Parr with [a pop-up jelly parlour](#) in Harrods Food Hall in addition to curating the world's most extensive art installation dedicated to honey. The event, on behalf of Relais & Chateaux international hotel group, offers [gastronomic tasting of honeys](#) collected from the group's hotel properties around the world. Tickets at £9 per pop.

Or what about Dinner at the [Twits](#)?



Home-made ice cream at New Lanark. Source: Iain Macfarlane

So what's in food for you?

Food can be a revenue generating opportunity in its own right. Astrid Lindgren's World, Sweden, is overcoming the challenge of a short season by attracting a local lunchtime market to increase daily takings.



Tayto Park offers beautifully presented....potatoes. Source Tayto Park

The taste of success lies in authenticity, using local produce prepared with care and discovering or resurrecting and then presenting local delicacies.

Local produce sells – not only to sit-in but also to take-away whether from a pop-up or street food vendor. Corris Craft Centre has a Welsh food and drink shop, Bwtri Y Crochan, supplementing its income.

Food festivals, tours and farmers' markets can also broaden an attraction's appeal and generate additional revenue. Just some of the local examples include the Loch Fyne Food Fair, Cairndow or Taste of Grampian, Inverurie. If you fancy some alone time try the Garlic Festival, The Isle of Wight. In 2012 Whitelee Wind Farm held their own farmers' market. The local honey from Ed's Bees was delish.

Retail

'Brand Britain' is continuing to gain in popularity; with perhaps more opportunities to come from oversea visitors, given the strength of the pound following Brexit.

But 'wally dugs' have had their day. Today's visitors are demanding greater quality, authenticity and uniqueness from the gifts they buy.

New Lanark Mill shop has partnered with manufacturers in its physical and online shops to offer gifts and clothing using the home-grown and spun wool. The Mill shop also hosts knitting days, conveniently located in the Mill Café. Special baa-rgains are available to those attending the workshops.



Attention to detail in merchandising at New Lanark whets the visitor's appetite before reaching the main shop. Source Iain Macfarlane

In 2015 Black Country Living Museum (BCLM) saw a substantial trading surplus. The surplus is a result of a new business model which, in part, focuses on retail within the attraction. Onsite spend per visitor has increased by 30% (2015).

Retail is now an intrinsic part of the BCLM experience with products changing seasonally, more closely reflecting the themes of the museum and available at a variety of price points, another trick of the trade to increase spend.

By getting your retail offering right, you can expect to increase spend per head and visitor engagement.

Seven tips to get your tills 'a ringing

Work with local suppliers – e.g. Corris Craft Centre and its Welsh food shop, Bwtri Y Crochan.

Sell the right stuff – while a range of price points will increase spend, merchandise inconsistent with your brand will turn visitors off.



Black Country Living Museum developed retail as an intrinsic part of their business model. Source: BCLM

Consider passing trade – e.g. your retail offering may appeal to an audience wider than just your visitors, are there opportunities to sell online or collaborate with other retailers?

Make it look good – the look and feel of any shop is key to encouraging customers to spend.



The merchandising at Bursledon Brickworks is bright and attractive. Source: Bursledon Brickworks

Make it easy – the easier you make it to spend, the happier your customer will be to buy.

Consider contactless and payment by smart phone options.

Chester has installed [contactless payment points in its medieval walls](#) as a way of encouraging donations.

Invest in your team. Delivering world class customer service can only enhance your retail offering, with World Host training providing a grounding in customer satisfaction.

Upsell – you might not be offering ‘fries with that’ but you too can increase retail revenue by upselling.

And if all of the above seems like more of a challenge than you can handle, bring in the professionals. Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre (JBDC) lifted retail spending by 10% by employing a retail manager.

The most successful attraction retail facilities are those embracing retail professionalism in merchandising, marketing, management and analysis.

Events

From pop-ups to scary museum nights, well-targeted and publicised events can help you reach new markets and reinforce relationships with your existing visitors. But nothing can be left to chance, attention to detail is key to enhancing the visitor experience.

Pop-ups are an adaptable, flexible way to make good use of free space. This summer (2016) saw the [Pop-up Cities Expo](#) in Edinburgh as architects from around the world showcased some of their more imaginative and unique structures.

Temporary themed exhibits can increase attendance – a visit by the space shuttle Endeavour boosted attendance at the California Science Centre by 31%. The Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid saw attendance increase by 24% while hosting a temporary Salvador Dali exhibit.

[Adventures in Space](#), another temporary attraction to raise footfall, is a short term exhibition offering insight into the architecture of science fiction, hosted by Glasgow’s Lighthouse from July – October 2016.

[Dismaland](#), a temporary art project based in derelict land in Weston-Super-Mare attracted 150,000 visitors over a five-week period.



Queuing for Dismaland. Source: Geof Sheppard

[Secret Cinema](#) also makes use of abandoned or unusual venues by turning them into live cinema experiences where guests find themselves part of the performance. Productions range from Back to the Future to Dead Poet's Society with tickets priced from £78.



Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre launched [Bluedot](#), an intergalactic festival of music, science, arts, culture and the exploration of space – resulting in 8-10,000 visitors over the course of a weekend.

Similar visitor numbers would normally take one month to achieve.

The Tate Britain Museum combined both temporary and out-of-hours use in its [After Dark](#) project. Billed as “roaming the gallery from the comfort of your sofa”, four robots were used to record and live-stream images from the museum at night, while controlled remotely by visitors.

Jean-Michel Jarre featured alongside Prof. Brian Cox of BBC R4's the Infinite Monkey Cage. Source: JBDC

Edinburgh Zoo offers [Summer Nights at the Zoo](#), a not-for-kids event where adults can further their learning of the DNA of a strawberry daiquiri or dance the night away in the silent disco. Also possibly not-for-kids are the ghost hunts organised by [Dark Encounters](#) at Bursledon Brickworks. Scary or not, Bursledon find the hunts an additional income stream for very little effort on their part.

But events for kids, particularly the hands-on messy variety, do generate their own revenue.



Chocolate making a Corris Craft Centre. Source: Corris Craft Centre



Figure 1 Q&A session. Source: JBDC

'Meet the experts' are also popular, but possibly more so with the grown-ups.

When grown organically and developed year-on-year, events offer an opportunity to appeal to new visitor markets and repeat visits from local residents. They also create critical mass within a locale generating more day visits and overnights stays from a wider audience.

Revenue

Enhancing your food and retail offering along with hosting temporary and innovative events are all means of increasing and diversifying your revenue stream. Here are some...

Seven more ideas for generating additional income

Themed accommodation – e.g. Tiny Town, Astrid Lindgren. [Whipsnade Zoo Lookout Lodge](#) offers a once in lifetime slumber next to a white rhino. Advertised as a 'magical at night' the brochure doesn't mention whether the rhinos snore or not.



Peaky Blinders was...shot at several locations across Black Country Living Museum. Source: Vladzixc

Filming location hire – e.g. BCLM earned £51,000 from filming projects in 2015. Maybe not appropriate for every attraction but the strategy enhances profile and can help drive visits and additional spending.

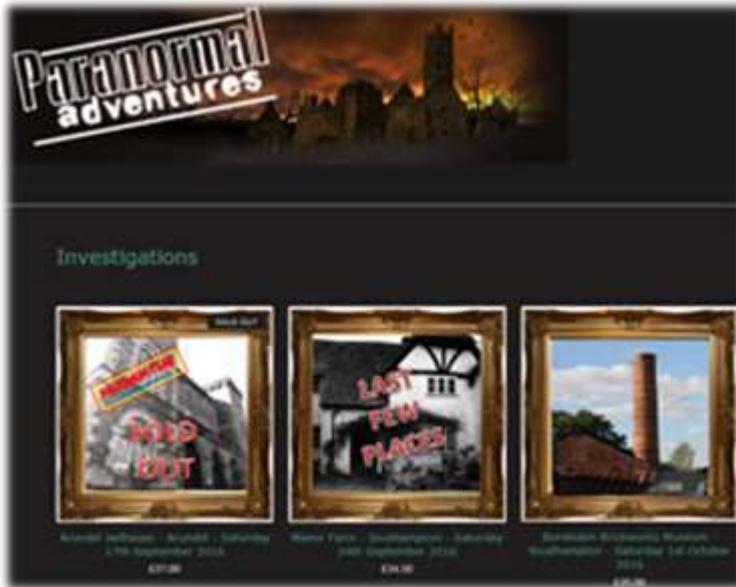
'Outlander' has been responsible for Culross, Culloden, Doune Castle and now Glasgow Cathedral enjoying big increases. Although it's hard to drive demand in this area, sites can ensure that they are 'film friendly'.

Easier payment methods – onsite and online – encourage visitors to spend.

Wrist band technology offering reservation and reduced queuing is attractive to visitors, even at a premium price. The [Blast Pass](#) from Schlitterbahn Water Park & Resort allows visitors to reserve rides and cut queuing times, but costs in addition to the price of admission.

Rental space – e.g. Corris Craft Centre has nine independent craft studios, each with all-year-round rent paying tenants. Naturally, their handmade crafts are also for sale and offer an additional revenue generating opportunity for visitors to participate in hands-on craft activities.

Comfy seating sells (Kynren's Diamond priced seating is padded, in contrast to the cheap seats. New Lanark has Friends-style couches). A strategically positioned sofa, comfy chair or two or outdoor picnic facilities can increase onsite dwell time and increase spend in your shops and cafés.



Scaring people witless pays. Source: Bursledon Brickworks

Playing nice with others pays dividends too – e.g. Bursledon Brickworks works with a local history group and ghosting hunting events company, both of which increase its revenue.

World of James Herriot (WOJH) is the flagship for the Herriot Country Tourism Group, a partnership which attracts more visitors to Herriot Country and WOJH.

Collaboration

Working in collaboration can boost revenue, increase quality and improve destination credentials. Bursledon Brickworks is notable for combining its efforts with Manor Farm & Country Park, Royal Victoria Country Park and Bursledon Windmill to create a destination worth visiting for the day.

Bookable as the [‘Hamble Heritage Weekend’](#) the ticket price even includes a free shuttle bus between attractions. But there are other ways to collaborate too.

The [Falkland Centre for Stewardship](#) benefits from the cross marketing opportunities that come from working in partnership with Kew’s Millennium Seed Bank, as part of the UK National Tree Seed Project.

[Epic Ireland](#), considered the first digital-only museum in the world, see its collaboration with the Irish Family History Centre, as an essential part of its “awe-inspiring, uplifting and thought provoking” visitor experience.

Bompas and Parr leads the field in “flavour-based experience design, culinary research, architectural installations and contemporary food designs.” With clients ranging from Barbican Art Gallery, Disney, Louis Vuitton and Victoria & Albert Museum, Bompas and Pass collaborate with their clients and specialists from all disciplines to create “emotionally compelling or inspiring experiences”.

While commissioning some of these experiences may be stretching your budget, their list of [projects](#) offers inspiration for all DIY event organisers. Armpit sniffing date night, anyone?

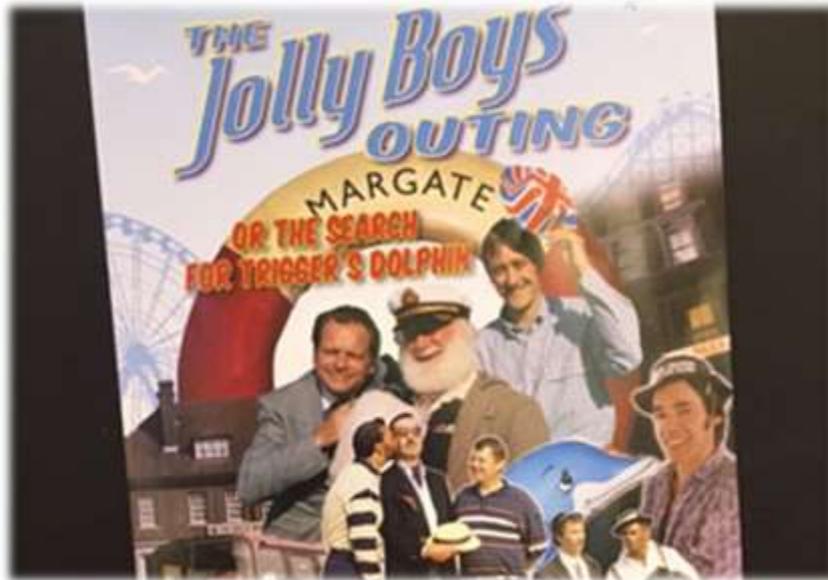
Branding

Up your kudos and benefit from associating with some big brand names, without spending big budget bucks.

New attractions need a strong brand to help them launch. [Star Wars Land](#), based on...Star Wars, represents the largest expansion footprint in Disney’s history. [Paramount Park](#) in East London will feature rides and entertainment based on Hollywood blockbusters and British film studio classics.

But existing attractions can harness the power of brands too – and they needn’t always be on Hollywood’s epic scale.

An Only Fools and Horses Exhibition brought 3,000 visitors over the course of one bank holiday weekend to [Dreamland](#), Margate. Considerably more than a standard bank holiday.



Increasing the power of your brand through association. Source: Kent News

The Scottish Borders Railway, on its way to meeting its year 1 target passenger numbers raised its profile by scheduling the [Flying Scotsman](#), and benefitting from some additional coverage courtesy of Network Rail!

Alton Towers is tapping into the brand preferences of a much younger market with the announced development of a [CBeebies-themed](#) hotel. And while much smaller, but no less significant, the Clangers helped [JBDC](#) to introduce young children to the wonders of space.



The Clangers, helping to inspire the scientists of tomorrow. Source: JBDC

In a world of Argosing, googling and swooshing, where does branding leave you?

Branding offers heightened profile and recognition, if you happen to be the owner of a famous brand name.

If not, branding can still raise your profile by associating with relevant, not necessarily the biggest, brand names. Hosting the Antiques Roadshow resulted in the second busiest 'website day' for New Lanark, the day before the roadshow arrived. Presumably as visitors prepared their travel arrangements for attending the show.

Astrid Lindgren's World created a wider destination area by promoting complementary locations appearing in the author's books and films.

Black Country Living Museum sources cheaper beer for its events by accepting sponsorship from local brewer, Banks Brewery. The Museum also benefits by reaching a wider audience (i.e. drinkers of the local beer) than its core market while Banks Brewer receives increased exposure to its brand, selling more than 1,500 pints during two special museum events.



Tayto Park uses its core brand to draw visitors into the theme park, while using Tayto Crisps to boost crisp sales.

The Tayto experience, almost good enough to eat. Source: Tayto Park

Technology

There's a fine line to be trodden in finding the right technology for your attraction. With so many bandwagons available, you risk a costly mistake with no guarantee of arriving at your final destination. However, choose virtual reality (VR) and there's no travelling required.

[The Climb](#) challenges players to complete solo climbs at exotic locations around the world. [VRCoaster](#) combines real rollercoaster rides with super heroes and dragons. [Tension](#), the UK's first VR attraction, allows visitors the opportunity to tight-rope walk across the Grand Canyon. Falling is optional.

Moving back into the tactile world, [Museum in a Box](#) is using 3D printing to create miniature versions of artefacts from museums around the world. Looking good but maybe not so tasty are the 3D food creations from [Foodini](#). And coming soon to a restaurant near you, Le Petit Chef, a holographic food experience. Bouillabaisse never looked so...well, [see for yourself](#).



Looking good, tasty and available now on Royal Caribbean's [Quantum of the Seas](#) are alcoholic beverages prepared by robotic bartenders. Guests submit their order via tablets with each robot preparing up to one drink per minute.

Robots aren't limited to just tending bar. At the [Henn na Hotel](#), Japan, the complement of ten robots are said to be capable of running the hotel, including checking guests in / out and carrying luggage. Keys are replaced by facial recognition systems.

Catch the bar keeper's attention with your iPad. Source: Makr Shkr

Kasparov and Chester are two robots based at the [National Museum of Australia](#). They provide visitors with laser-guided virtual tours of the museum. Kasparov even has his (?) own Twitter account, [@kasparbot](#).

But you don't need robots to make the most of technology.

Click Art Museum, described as India's biggest museum is using trompe l'oeil illusions to great effects. Something which, with a little imagination and not a lot of budget, could be recreated on any spare bit of wall.



Grab the attention of passers-by with trompe l'oeil. Source: India Times

In many instances a more interactive experience is being delivered via tablets and smartphones. Cleveland Museum of Art's [Collection Wall](#) allows visitors to choose the artworks they would like to view and working in tandem with a smartphone or tablet app, creates a personalised tour of the museum.

Mention of apps brings us to Pokémon Go, currently taking the UK by storm. Love it or hate it, some attractions have been quick to capitalise. [Bristol Zoo](#) raised £6,000 in 30 minutes from their Pokémon Go event. It was so successful, they held [another](#). They do however emphasise not entering the animal enclosures as even a Charizard is no match for a real, live lion.

Closer to home Edinburgh Zoo and Falkirk Wheel have capitalised on the phenomenon.



Pokémon Go is attracting adults and kids alike. Source: Falkirk Wheel

The overriding lesson to be learned from using technology is this: choose well.

Marketing & Social Media

Every day seems to bring a new marketing or social media challenge; gurus abound, telling us how to get it right.

But with the availability of so much information, especially in the form of personalised marketing, visitors are at risk of being turned off. Authenticity is crucial, as is using internal resources to create PR opportunities.



The Clerk of Works is a regular contributor to Salisbury Cathedral website blog. Source: Salisbury Cathedral

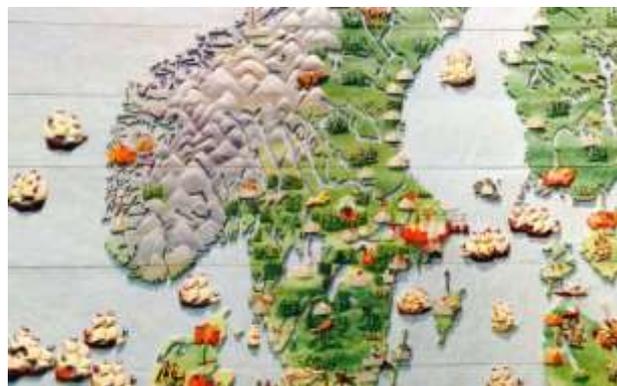
When the Clerk of Works at Salisbury Cathedral climbed the cathedral spire, he took a video head camera with him. The resulting film was an instant PR hit. But not only with the BBC and national newspapers, it triggered a wave of renewed enthusiasm and ideas from staff and volunteers. An email campaign, revenue from website advertising and a more engaging blog from staff and volunteers followed.

Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre uses a series of public events throughout the year to reach more audiences and achieve their core mission of inspiring future scientists. Each event is viewed as an opportunity to attract new visitors and deepen relationships with existing ones. By working in partnership with other events (think Tim Peake's ISS mission) and Marketing Cheshire they access wider networks, take advantage of reciprocal opportunities and ultimately reach a bigger audience.

New Lanark is one of the few organic spinners for specialist flocks of sheep. The main ethos of their textile manufacturing is 'Scottish' or 'British' made. In this regard, their accreditation of the British Wool Marketing Board is a very powerful marketing tool.

Taking a long term view is also important.

The Vasa Museum, Sweden, has been running marketing campaigns in Europe and the US since the 1960s. They view this long-term planned marketing as contributing towards their success today. Vasa also works closely with Visit Sweden and Stockholm Visitors Board as well as local tourist and cruising companies.



Source: Stockholm on a Shoestring

Lastly, Vasa staff go out of their way to be nice to journalists, film crews and anyone else who'll help promote their message (usually for free).



World of James Herriot (WOJH) embarked on a creative marketing campaign including a TV series (The Yorkshire Vet), the naming of a high speed train (James Herriot) and a tweeting puppy also named Herriot. Herriot the puppy has 500 followers.

The campaign is deemed to have increased visitor numbers by 12% in the last year and website visits by 17% - the pup now also has its own bespoke range of dog foods.

Actively managing marketing and social media (whether by people, puppies or robots) allows the opportunity to create new relationships with customers yet to visit and prolong relationships with those who have already been and might return.

Herriot the tweeting puppy. Source: WOJH

Monitoring

Are you making the most of potential dialogues with your visitors?

Kynren / Eleven Arches, a spectacular open-air live event, uses [Facebook](#), in particular, to promote its shows and gather feedback. It uses TripAdvisor too, and has sent a survey to each ticket booker post-event.

Tayto Park also uses social media but accepts that keeping on top of it all can be a challenge.

New Lanark, like many attractions, uses social media in addition to paper-based feedback forms.

Mystery shoppers are also an option.

The key to whichever method of dialogue you are using is to offer promotional opportunities in exchange for customer data.



Social media allows instant feedback (within reason). Source: Facebook

Use the chance to talk to your customers to find out more about what they like and dislike; their expectations and experiences of your attraction. And where possible, offer immediate feedback.

By monitoring feedback and opening up dialogues with potential visitors you can find out what your visitors really want and then give it to them. This is marketing in its simplest form.

And that's not all

Here more lessons learned from thriving attractions from around the world.



Getting hands-on at Corris Craft Centre. Source: Corris Craft Centre

The visitor experience

Visitors want a more authentic and immersive experience.

Actors and live theatre can help satisfy this need, as can knowledgeable and helpful staff.

The demand for interactive experiences is also growing, one that can be met with more hands-on facilities, e.g. pottery at Corris Craft Centre.

Visitor Access

Access for All is a growing requirement. From wheelchair access to buggies, comfortable seating to coach driver facilities, not to mention dog conveniences, are you considering the access needs of all your visitors?

Education / Outreach

Align your education resources with the national curriculum and you'll maximise your opportunities for visits.

Add a high degree of interaction and you'll increase your numbers further.

And by providing free entry for educational visits, you may even be creating visitors of the future. (Or at the very least, young visitors who return in the school holidays with paying parents and grandparents).



Ensuring not only scientists, but visitors of the future. Source: JBDC

Volunteers

Train your volunteers, be it, World Host, Circus School or Archery skills, invest and they'll deliver an enhanced visitor experience.

Appoint team leaders based on merit rather than seniority and try the Kynren approach where jobs were matched to volunteers rather than creating a job and finding a volunteer to do it.



Kynren has possibly broken the mould when it comes to using volunteers. Source: Kynren

Funding

Explore temporary events and exhibitions as a route to revenue, try and include sponsorship and garner local business support. Crowdfunding may even be an option. Or public appeals, particularly where the attraction has sentimental links to the locals.

Growth / Development / Refreshing

Refreshing exhibits regularly is a must, particularly to attract repeat visitors. World of James Herriot (WOJH) increased visitor numbers through a modest investment in art, children's activities and an interactive demonstration.

Tayto Park grew by expanding the car park, a simple but obvious way of increasing visitor numbers. Corris Craft Centre has been growing and developing for 35 years. Now the range of activities available represents a complete visitor destination, boosting day out opportunities for locals and visitors.

And finally

It takes all sorts when China's Window of the World is offering [The Samadhi 4D Experience of Death](#), a simulated cremation. One can only guess that theme park revellers are just *dying* to get in...