



Best Practice in Tourism Workshop at The Lost Gardens of Helicon

Cornwall's tourist attractions decarbonise & improve biodiversity

With support from University of Exeter

CLIENT: Cornwall Tourism Sector

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: CATA (Cornwall Association of Tourist Attractions)

SERVICES: Carbon literacy, bespoke workshops, carbon footprints, carbon-reduction strategy, biodiversity vouchers

KEY IMPACT

- Improved carbon literacy and knowledge of environmental challenges within the tourism industry
- Emission hotspots identified & carbon reduction strategies put in place
- Biodiversity projects initiated
- New relationship between University of Exeter and Cornwall's tourism sector

BACKGROUND

The Cornwall Association of Tourist Attractions (CATA) counts 40 of the region's tourist attractions as members. Attractions range from museums and theme parks, to railways, mines and gardens, and they vary in size from small to large businesses (2-600+ employees).

Cornwall's visitor economy generates £2bn for the region each year, with the attraction sector bringing in over £220m alone. Tourism accounts for around 20% of the region's employment and 20% of its GDP.⁽¹⁾

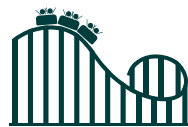
There are an estimated 5 million visitors to Cornwall annually.⁽²⁾ Huge fluctuations in human activity – especially during the high season – have a dramatic impact on wildlife, pollution, energy use and waste.⁽³⁾

There is an increased appetite for more sustainable tourism within the region and within the industry.⁽⁴⁾ Cornwall Council has set out an ambitious plan for the region to be carbon-neutral by 2030. Making tourism more sustainable is key to achieving this goal.⁽⁵⁾



£2bn

Cornwall's visitor
economy



£220m

Cornwall attractions
economy



570,000

Population of
Cornwall ⁽³⁾



50%

Summer population
increase ⁽³⁾

THE CHALLENGES

The University of Exeter's GreenFutures Solutions project ran an initial sustainability workshop in partnership with CATA.

We asked the attending tourist-attraction businesses about their specific sustainability concerns and the following challenges emerged:

Cost

Holiday patterns have not yet settled post-pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis and wet summer weather have had an impact on visitor spending.⁽⁶⁾ Participants voiced the need for practical, affordable ways to start making positive change in their businesses.

Waste

Waste management was a common concern throughout the sector – food waste in particular – with businesses wanting to reduce waste but not knowing where to start.

Buy-in

Attendees asked how best to embed sustainability into their businesses' culture. There was a concern about getting everybody on board – management, team and visitors.

Understanding the figures and benchmarking

Companies asked for support with interpreting the data and benchmarking what they were currently doing in order to be able to chart improvements.

Communicating sustainability

There was also a concern around celebrating sustainability achievements. Businesses wanted to know how to communicate the good things they were doing without 'greenwashing'.

THE SOLUTION

Workshops

We organised a series of bespoke workshops tackling the specific challenges that came out of conversation with CATA members:

- Sustainability best practice
- Tackling food waste
- Talking about sustainability (anti-greenwashing)
- Decarbonisation and Net Zero strategies

The workshops were super helpful – they helped me understand what is achievable.

Grace Jones,
Seal Sanctuary

Tailored support

Alongside the workshops, we offered tailored support in the form of:

Carbon reporting & decarbonisation plans

Individual carbon footprints for CATA members, help with understanding their emissions data, and recommendations of practical ways to reduce their emissions.

Carbon-reporting software

2-year licenses for carbon-reporting software Notch, to facilitate regular emissions reporting and continuous improvement.

Carbon-literacy training

Training – accredited by the Carbon Literacy Project – to help embed sustainability throughout the organisation.

Biodiversity vouchers

Support with initiating ecological projects on site.

RESULTS

Deeper understanding of environmental challenges

The businesses we worked with have increased their understanding of emissions, decarbonisation and biodiversity, as well as their companies' impact on the environment:

“We now have a much better understanding of carbon footprints along with our own benchmark and some suggested actions for improvement. It has also increased our awareness of the overall issues and challenges associated with being a sustainable business and being able to work towards a carbon-neutral position.”

(Kevin and Karen Hopkins, Screech Owl Sanctuary)

“When I started off recording our [emissions] data it was extremely overwhelming. It's a bit of a minefield, especially if you don't have a background in this. I want to make sure we're recording everything we possibly can so that we can make all the changes we can. The workshops have helped me to understand it all a lot better.”

(Grace Jones, Seal Sanctuary)

RESULTS

Carbon reduction strategies put in place

The CATA businesses we worked with have felt encouraged to take ambitious action:

“All of the learning and topics covered have been delivered to senior management to help make more sustainable choices across the entire enterprise from procurement to education. We will be dissecting all areas of our operations and attempting to make carbon savings at every possible opportunity. Some will be easier than others but nothing is off the table for consideration.”

(Tom Fielding, Newquay Zoo (Wildlife Trust))

Businesses now have clear carbon-reduction plans in place:

“It is good to actually understand the science, the footprint of our business and the specific actions we can take that will enable us to be more sustainable as a business.

We will be:

- **looking at ways to change our electricity supply by investing in solar panels.**
- **passing on our learning to the staff to encourage them to support us in this work by looking at car sharing for example**
- **engaging with our suppliers to get additional data**
- **reviewing where we get our supplies for the office and gift shop from**
- **considering the story and how we let supporters / visitors know about our work in this area”**

(Kevin & Karen Hopkins, Screech Owl Sanctuary)

RESULTS

Biodiversity projects implemented

We issued biodiversity vouchers to a number of CATA businesses to support ecological projects on their sites.

The Seal Sanctuary have commissioned a full site survey to identify ecological opportunities and review the potential impact of beaver reintroduction. Grace Jones of the Seal Sanctuary explains the motivations behind this work:

“Every business should consider nature. It doesn’t matter what your business does, it’s a necessity, because if everyone paid their part then our climate wouldn’t be struggling so much.”

The Lost Gardens of Heligan have used their voucher to conduct a feasibility study for a full biodiversity audit of the site, establishing a baseline of the flora and fauna at Heligan. Alasdair Moore explains:

“You can’t measure how well you’re managing the land and what you’re achieving unless you have some sort of baseline. This feasibility study was the first step showing us what we would have to do and what a full biodiversity audit of Heligan would look like”

OUTLOOK

The CATA businesses we worked with are now passionate advocates for more sustainable tourism. They come away from the GreenFutures project with increased knowledge and understanding, and practical ways to reduce their emissions and improve their organisations' impact on biodiversity.

This work has also helped the University of Exeter form strong relationships with Cornwall's tourism sector.

“It has been a very positive experience and has been good to get a practical outcome in terms of our carbon footprint calculation.”

Kevin and Karen Hopkins, Screech Owl Sanctuary

“The University of Exeter were incredibly helpful in helping us explore our biodiversity audit and I couldn't speak more highly of their support throughout the process.”

Alasdair Moore, The Lost Gardens of Heligan

“My experience of working with the University of Exeter has been very positive, very informative and very worthwhile. I can only hope there are further opportunities in the future to do so again.”

Tom Fielding, Newquay Zoo

This project supports the commitment to making Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly carbon neutral by 2030 and to encouraging green and inclusive growth for local businesses as per Cornwall Council's Good Growth Plan 2024-2035 and Cornwall and Isles of Scilly's Good Growth Investment Plan 2022-2025.⁽⁷⁾

References

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The University of Exeter has been commissioned to deliver the GreenFutures Solutions project on behalf of the Growth Hub by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund as part of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Good Growth Programme. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the UK Government's central mission to level up the whole of the United Kingdom and provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025. The Fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK by investing in communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills.
