

Challenges, opportunities and areas of best practice in delivering responsible tourism in island destinations: A case study of the Isles of Scilly

An introduction to the Isles of Scilly:

- Archipelago of over 2000 islands and rocks- five of which are inhabited, home to a population of 2,200 permanent residents.
- One of the most tourism dependent destinations in the UK over 85% of the employment is directly dependent of tourism.
- Primary product is nature tourism- The islands have excellent biodiversity and are home over 8,000 pairs of 13 different species of breeding seabirds, making it the most significant seabird colony in the south west. One of only two sites in England where Manx Shearwater and storm petrel breed.
- Tresco Abbey Gardens, one of the main attraction.
- The Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust manages 60% of the land area. Although they do a great job with the limited resources they have, as the IOSWT is a local charity their ability to manage almost 2/3 of the scenic beauty that attracts visitors to the IOS relies on unreliable funding sources. The Trust manages 2,000 hectares of land and coastal including 24 of the 26 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and 100's of Scheduled Ancient Monuments. Most of this land is designated as areas of special interest for conservation and environmental purposes.
 - Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
 - RAMSAR
 - Special Protection Area (SPA)
 - Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
 - Important Bird Area (IBA)
 - Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
 - Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ)
 - Closed Areas
- Tourism managed by the Island Partnership a CIC who run Visit Isles of Scilly. They have made remarkable improvement to the marketing of the islands, boosting the PR coverage and developing and events calendar. Hosting events such as Otillo swim run and home grown events such as Walk Scilly.
- Visitor numbers have been declining since the late noughties – it is an expensive destination to travel to and to stay. Competes with an international holiday as opposed to alternative domestic destinations. Scilly received around 140,000 visitors annually in the early 2000s to approx. 100,000 today. Visitor numbers have increased by 7% in 2015 and 3% in 2016.

- Bucking this trend is cruise tourism which has seen a rise during this period with 64 Ships scheduled to visiting this year and 64 already confirmed for next season. Only 56 of the 64 have been able to visit in 2018 due to lack of reliability in the weather.

Challenges:

As with all islands one of the main challenges is the islands geography, however geography also offers the islands a unique opportunity to control tourism, encourage spread of benefits and protect biodiversity.

Specific problems caused by the islands geography are:

- Limited natural and financial resources creates overdependence on tourism as an industry. Opportunity costs where tourism is invested in over other opportunities which could allow for a more diverse economy. It is important that the industry is viable long term as it is the lifeblood of the islands.
- Limited natural resources. Received attention this summer after a particularly dry summer. Depletion of ground water sources, water saving introduced and wide attempt to educate locals and visitors alike and to dispel myths that enough water can be produced through desalination. The smaller off island communities are still dependent on bore holes and wells for their water supply. Increases in the population during the driest periods of the year exacerbate this problem.
- Accessibility is a key issue and one that is simultaneously beneficial to controlling the growth of tourism, and detrimental in encouraging growth. British International Helicopters (BIH) ceased running in 2012 leaving the Isles of Scilly Steamship Company (ISSC) running both transport links air via Skybus and Sea via Scillonian. This has seen an unreliable air service despite improvements made and lands' end airport. There has been a controversial introduction of 'Island Helicopters' in May this year by the ISSC after objection to a competing helicopter service to run between Penzance and Tresco supported by Robert Dorian-Smith proprietor of Tresco Estate. It is clear to see that politics is preventing a reliable service being introduced compromising the sustainability and viability of the island community.
- Weather: reducing destination accessibility for air travel year round, sea travel in winter and cruise tourism where it is too rough for tenders to ferry passengers to and from the ships.

Further challenges can be identified in finding a balance between conservation and tourism:

- Wildlife trust responsible for managing 60% of islands land – which means the destination isn't manicured, and biodiversity is prioritised- this has caused some confrontation between community groups where there is disagreement on whether hedgerows should be cut back

to make the islands more visually appealing to those who visit. The wildlife trust is working to educate local community and visitors on issues relating to land management in order to protect biodiversity. These actions and management techniques help to safe guard the wildlife tourism resources at the destination.

Over tourism or mass tourism:

Until 2015 the Isles of Scilly has seen declining visitor numbers. Due to a reduction in demand but also the limited capacity of only one transport provider. Although over tourism has become very topical in recent years and has been discussed this summer in Cornwall, this isn't **yet** the case for the islands where tourism has not grown to an unsustainable level.

Pinch points are recognisable where the islands become crowded, most notably when the island host the World Pilot Gig Championships on the May bank holiday weekend. Here the islands are at capacity and the volume of visitors is more noticeable due to the concentration in Hugh town where the rowing event is based. This is for a limited period and is related to rowing which is integral to the islands heritage. At the moment the event is still organised locally and there is involvement from local crews, making local people more sympathetic to the event.

Destinations experiencing over tourism often identify cruise tourism as contributing to pressure on destinations with a large number of tourists disembarking at the same time. The islands partnership recognise that capacity and congestion issues are emerging around the impact of cruise tourism. The growth of the cruise industry in the Isles of Scilly is limited to a certain extent, again by the geography of the islands. This sector of the industry will need to be closely monitored and managed.

Factors contributing to the management of cruise growth and impact:

- Limited number of suitable anchorages – limits the size of the ships and the number that can visit at any one time. Three ships maximum and 2 of these would need to be small
- Limit on the draught in St Mary's Sound (one of the routes into the islands) and limitations on the size of ships due to the swinging circle needed in the anchorages. The largest ship is Columbus 63,000 tons 804 feet draught with a capacity of 1500 Passengers. Although this doesn't seem significant in comparison to the capacity of the larger cruise ships this is number is over 60% of the islands resident population.
- Use of local tenders for all islands except Tresco. Enhances economic benefit of the cruise visit, reduces conflict in the use of space in the harbour among local transport operators, particularly at low tide. The use of local tenders and a tender schedule, rather than berthing, means passengers can be taken ashore in smaller numbers 70-100 in one trip.
- Diverse itineraries to avoid overcrowding- More has been done by the Island Partnership and the harbour authority to promote diverse itineraries for cruise ships, rather than just visiting Tresco Abbey Gardens and St Marys. Most ships will visit more than one island and it is becoming more common to see lesser visited islands, St Martins and St Agnes appearing on cruise itineraries. This spreads the economic benefit of cruise tourism and reduces

congestion at the more popular destinations. This will need to be practiced further if cruise tourism is to be sustainable.

- Visit Isles of Scilly 'meet and greet ambassadors' – For many years welcome parties have been invited on board to present the port to passengers. This allows a unique opportunity to promote the islands, to encourage returning visitors but also to educate passengers on the islands wildlife and biodiversity.

There are a number of opportunities for responsible management offered by the small scale of tourism, and the geography of the islands:

- Greater control of tourism by DMO and clearer overview of all tourism activity.
- Environmental protection - Areas of the islands can be cordoned off as closed areas to visitors and locals alike to protect breeding seabirds. The island of Annet is an example of this.
- Excellent partnerships within the islands to commit to 'smart islands' plan.
- Self-limiting capacity due to size of the islands, accommodation provision and limited transport links.
- Cruise growth somewhat restricted by geography of the islands. DMO and other stakeholders will need to control the development of cruise tourism to ensure a sensible level of visitation is maintained.

Best practice:

Tresco Island: A private estate, run as a tourist resort. The benefit of its management is that the Estate has complete control of all business activity and is able to fully commit to their sustainability agenda without having to negotiate the perspectives of multiple stakeholders.

Tresco has made great efforts to reduce their environmental impact, including:

- From 2017, no longer use of single-use plastic straws (one of the worst polluters). These have been replaced by biodegradable straws. All plates, glasses and cutlery used at our outdoor events are biodegradable or recyclable. This is particularly important for events like the Low Tide Event.
- Tresco leads the way for recycling on the islands.
- Tresco Stores exclusively uses compostable and recyclable food packaging. No single use plastics are found in store. Plastic carrier bags have not been available in Tresco Stores for many years. Guests are provided with reusable bags within their accommodation.
- Tresco is one of the key partners in the Smart Islands Project, which aims to discover and deliver smart solutions to energy, waste, water and sewerage services.

- Tresco has received an award for its environmental business practices and has formally signed up to the 10:10 campaign, committing to reduce its carbon emissions. The estate is a member of the Higher Level Stewardship Agreement with Natural England.

The future:

Sustainability is identified throughout the 2018 destination management plan, but opportunities have been missed to develop the islands as an eco-destination. Good considerations are made regarding the social and economic sustainability of the islands.

2018 DMP recognises the work of the IOS wildlife trust, particularly for their work on achieving a 'plastic free coastline status'. It is also recognised that IOSWT needs the support of the tourism industry on the islands to achieve its goals.

The Isles of Scilly has great control of its entry points, even cruise ships. Access needs to be managed to encourage tourism growth at a sustainable level.