



2023 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title: Highland Communities bake their way to win the shortbread crown

Destination, Country: Inverness and Loch Ness

Submitted by: Emma Harrison, Destination Development Manager at Visit Inverness Loch Ness

In the category: Destination Management Environment & Climate Thriving Communities
 Nature & Scenery Culture & Tradition Business & Marketing

The Story in a picture:

Judges from across the North of Scotland taste their way through the panel process of businesses and communities that believe they can bake the best shortbread in the Highlands.



Summary:

No shortbread competition in the Highlands of Scotland we hear you cry! Fear not, Visit Inverness Loch Ness pulled Destination Management Organisations together to encourage as many businesses in the community to come together for a baking competition to produce and offer tastings for what they believe to be the best shortbread in the region - all for public consumption!



Good Practice Story:

Destination description

Brief background of the destination.

Its not just all about Nessie! The Inverness Loch Ness destination is located in the North of Scotland and covers 1,200 square miles. The destination attractions include Urquhart Castle and Culloden battlefield – an area rich with cultural heritage and a perfect place for story telling. It's at the heart of the Highlands.

Little known to visitors, the destination is not all about finding Nessie, and in fact, visitors should be flocking for the amazing food and drink on offer in the region and you never know, finding Ness could be a bonus. To support the culinary businesses and development in the area, Visit Inverness Loch Ness launched a Food and Drinks Strategy for region, and as part of the action plan we wanted to collaborate with Destination Management Organisations across the region and work together to continue pushing to ensure the Highlands is a desirable place for visitors to want to eat and drink.

Famous for fresh seafood, the region also offers USPs such as venison and oatcakes, and most definitely, shortbread.

Issues faced

Problems/issues solved with the Good Practice Story.

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Famous for fresh seafood, the region also offers USPs such as venison and oatcakes, and most definitely, shortbread. The issue here is that visitors and some locals are not aware just how fantastic the food offering is across Inverness and Loch Ness, nor where to find it.

Methods, steps, and tools applied

Solutions implemented to address the sustainability problems or issues.

The first step was to be creative. We needed to think of a fun idea to draw the masses to the destination, get the community thinking about food and drink and add in a classic bit of competition.

One October afternoon, 2 colleagues sat over a cup of hot tea with of course, a biscuit to dunk in. A food showcase that was fun we thought. Suddenly, the idea of finding the best shortbread in the

Highlands was more than just an idea. Perhaps we could crown the winner, and get communities and the entire Highlands involved. We needed qualitative data to back up our idea. The first port of call were 8 Destination Management Organisations in the area. Would they like to be a part of a bigger picture? Of course they would. Working within their own communities across the Highlands, each DMO would call out to the local businesses to ask if they'd like to take part in the competition. From there, they would be invited to a mini- event in their region to whittle down a final 3.

There were a range heats ranging from cooking in a venue and getting their bakes judged by professional chefs, to village halls with bakes for the general public to vote on their favorite.

We had over 65 competitors across the region in 8 destination areas spreading across 10,000 square miles of the Highlands. Baking their tartan socks off, they produced the best they could to meet the criteria- the best looking, the most creative, and the best tasting shortbread they could imagine.

On 25th March, 800 people entered Inverness Cathedral and tasted 21 businesses shortbreads. The visitors and community met others from across the Highlands, and shared stories, shared a dram and learned more about what is on the doorstep. Promoting said communities helped them to thrive, and visitors were already booking trips to new places, discovering more all the time.

We approached sponsor options. Deans, Walkers, the local council and Scotland Food and Drink and suddenly we had an event. By reaching out and sharing our idea and story prospect, we began to see partnership working at its finest. With some dedication and time, the issue that Inverness is not on a foodies map may start to change once this event runs year on year.

This marketing campaign created fun, energy and creativity for hundreds of members as well as showcasing how working together can make a cultural tradition of shortbread into a staple event for the future- a future proof of our local communities.

Key success factors

Critical elements that led to successfully solving the issues.

Working with several Destination Management Organisations was pivotal in the success of the project. Each went out to their local businesses to drum up interest promoting food and drink whilst doing so. Working with many stakeholders in the area has led to strong relationships including Scotland Food and Drink who have agreed to fund some of the event next year too. By creating a project plan for the event, along with marketing design, communications plans, this made it easy for other DMO's and keeping the competition simple, easy to follow but great fun meant more people wanted to get involved.

We had many volunteers at the event, and communities then started to feel a little competition happening. Skye of Localsh were suddenly up against Dornoch, Inverness were suddenly up against Caithness, but all in good humour. Communities were thriving, swapping contacts, arranging site visits, and the public enjoyed themselves thoroughly for the whole day. Bringing in music students from the University of the Highlands and the Islands was a fantastic edition, and a piper from the nearby school.

Lessons learned

Challenges faced while implementing the Good Practice and their solutions.

Working with multiple Destination Management Organisations proved to be very effective and a lesson will be to ensure we are working with them again on several projects within the community. It was difficult to get the word out on the event, but for its first year, we did manage to feature in many newspapers (around 35 stories in newspapers) and were on the radio.

Other lessons learnt would be to advertise this far earlier next year, and potentially open this to non-business members too. The competition was open to everyone – not just bakers, but anyone within a business, but perhaps the general public has a keen eye for shortbread making too. The event can grow, and more food offerings may be on the table in years to come.

Achievements and Results

Direct and indirect results of the Good Practice.

Our issue was that there was no food festival in Inverness, and the solution was of course The Shortbread Showdown which has now become a new tradition. The intergreal event brought in over 800 people, we worked with over 10 area stakeholders, and worked with 65 businesses and 1 charity. We sold 150 books full of recipes of shortbread, all for the local community charity.

Visitors will become more aware of the competition and it is with hope they will travel the destination to see the final. Next year, this will be taking place in May.

Tips for other destinations

Your suggestions or recommendations for other destinations facing the same issues or implementing similar solutions

Working together makes a project much stronger. Working together as communities make us help, understand and promote each other and can only assist in making Destination Management Organisations the best they can be for both communities and the visitors we attract. By creating a fun event, this can indirectly get people thinking about food and drink in the area and want them to discover more, whilst making a trip out of it.

Working together can mean that visitors will want to explore further, staying in your wider area for longer which is not only for the economy, but a great chance for them to learn more about our amazing communities and people within them.

Recognitions and Additional references

Recognitions and awards the Good Practice received and supporting evidence.

<https://www.visitinvernesslochness.com/>

Inverness Press

Press & Journal: <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/lifestyle/food-and-drink/5417149/traditional-recipes-highland-shortbread-showdown-inverness/>

The Highland Times: <https://thehighlandtimes.com/inverness-and-loch-ness-tourism-businesses-take-the-shortbread-biscuit/>

Northern Times: <https://www.northern-times.co.uk/news/five-bakers-to-battle-it-out-in-visit-dornoch-heat-of-highla-303991/>



Inverness Courier: <https://www.inverness-courier.co.uk/news/is-best-shortbread-in-the-highlands-baked-in-inverness-300941/>

Press & Journal: <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/inverness/5398258/inverness-and-loch-ness-heat-of-the-highland-shortbread-showdown-to-kick-off-this-weekend/>

Other Area Press

John O’Groat Journal: <https://www.johnogroat-journal.co.uk/news/highland-shortbread-showdown-search-on-for-best-shortbread-300969/>

Larder magazine: <https://lardermag.co.uk/the-search-is-on-for-the-best-shortbread-in-the-highlands/>

Press & Journal: <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/highlands-islands/5312065/businesses-do-battle-in-the-first-ever-highland-shortbread-showdown/>

Ross-shire Journal: <https://www.ross-shirejournal.co.uk/news/is-best-shortbread-in-the-highlands-baked-in-lochalsh-00929/>

Highland Times: <https://thehighlandtimes.com/the-search-is-on-for-the-best-shortbread-in-the-highlands-with-the-launch-of-the-highland-shortbread-showdown/>

24/03/2023 <https://planetradio.co.uk/mfr/player/206637133/> 2hrs 15 minutes in

24/03/2023 <https://planetradio.co.uk/northsound/player/206638113/> 2hrs 34 minutes

25/03/2023 <https://planetradio.co.uk/mfr/player/206808106/> 1hr 59 mins in

25/03/2023 <https://planetradio.co.uk/mfr/player/206808107/> 1hr 58mins in

27/03/2023 <https://planetradio.co.uk/mfr/player/206808121/> 2hrs 18 minutes in

