

Scottish Tourism Week – how do others see us?



It's Scottish Tourism Week until 22 March 2017. It's no secret that tourism is a vital part of Scotland's economy, reportedly employing over 200,000 people across more than 14,000 tourism related businesses.

Only last night The Edinburgh Reporter was at the Scottish Thistle Awards National Final which showcased a wide range of hospitality ventures across the country.

Many employed in the industry are from overseas. For example, 57% (97) of the 168 staff within Radisson Blu Edinburgh, a leading 4-star hotel in the heart of Scotland's capital come from mainland Europe.

To coincide with Scottish Tourism Week, three members of staff (a Portuguese, Lithuanian and a Pole) in Radisson Blu Edinburgh were each quizzed about their opinion, from a European visitor's perspective, on the appeal of Edinburgh and Scotland as a tourist destination.

Thirty-nine year-old Pedro Duarte is a trained environmental engineer. However, he left Portugal with his wife and two kids to pursue a new life in Scotland's hospitality sector. Currently employed as a bar assistant within the hotel's Itchycoo bar, he refers to "the politeness of the people, the culture, surrounding countryside and the architecture" as key factors in the appeal of Scotland's capital city.

Duarte explained : "Edinburgh is very multicultural and as a Portuguese, we feel very welcome here – and call Scotland 'home.' I love nature and my wife loves animals so we've

plenty of choice and opportunities to explore around Edinburgh. I don't know what Scotland could improve (in its tourism offering). Scotland is a huge brand with its whisky, (bag)pipes, haggis and kilts."

Anna Malinowska is a 36-year-old Assistant Head Housekeeper and has worked at Radisson Blu Edinburgh for over 12 years. The Pole is passionate about her career choice, as she explained: "You need to have both stamina and passion for the work, cleaning the (bed)room with the same pride you would clean your own home to impress your family."

Like Duarte, she's impressed by Edinburgh, a city where she lives with her husband and 8 year-old daughter. "It's the beauty and atmosphere of Edinburgh that appeals. It's like Krakow (Poland) or Prague (Czech Republic) but with a great history. I love how a rainy day gives the (Edinburgh) city a dark atmosphere and that in the sunshine it suddenly comes to life. The city is transformed depending on the weather. The people too make Edinburgh. You always meet nice positive, open people."

Welcoming is how Malinowska describes the country but it's the castles that she believes are one of Scotland's greatest draws for overseas visitors. "We like to visit Scottish castles. There are so many across the country and they are all so different."

Yet Malinowska also believes cost may be a barrier for some Polish visitors to consider visiting Scotland. "The Highlands are beautiful and a big draw for Polish people, that's for sure. However, Scotland is quite expensive to visit. It can be pricey to book experiences and in the summer, even the cafes seem to put their prices up. Maybe that's one area that can be looked at if the country is to be more affordable for the ordinary Polish family to visit."

Ieva Mikoliunaite is another hospitality professional who for

the past decade has called Scotland home. For the past two years, the 30 year-old Lithuanian has worked as a group sales executive in meetings and events at Radisson Blu Edinburgh. It's a role she relishes: "I like the organizational aspect but most of all I like the chance to meet and speak to clients", she explained.

Prior to joining Radisson Blu Edinburgh, Ieva was employed at one of Scotland's top tourist attractions – Edinburgh Castle. She describes the allure of her adopted city as one "with a lot of historic appeal. I love history and personally, Edinburgh is a romantic and scenic city that is unlike any other in Europe. It's a very friendly, cultural and cosmopolitan place. But to be honest, my favourite place is Portobello Beach! It's maybe too cold to swim but it's charming and the perfect place for me to relax and unwind by the sea!"

In Ieva's opinion, Lithuanian people are well aware of Scotland's reputation for tartan, whisky and scenery. Yet she believes there could be greater promotion of its adventure offering for younger people – and emphasis on the attraction of the Scottish highlands beyond Loch Ness. "Nessie, the monster is very interesting to people back home, but I'm sure we would also like to learn more about other parts of the Scottish highlands. For Scotland has wonderful mountainous country – and Lithuania is very flat!"