

**TMI Hot Topic Conference** Friday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2017 @ Sheffield Hallam University

Notes from Workshop 2 : Food Tourism and Local Food and Drink Initiatives

In this session delegates were treated to three lively and interactive presentations by John Sheaves, CEO of Taste of the West Ltd., Beth MacLeod of Knockderry House on the banks of Loch Long and Katie Read representing the Lakes Distillery in Cumbria.

With a focus on the innovative use of food and drink in tourism, *John Sheaves* made clear the significance of food and drink to the South West tourism economy (an estimated quarter of total spend deriving from it), the move from a 'seaside fish and chips' to an increasingly higher value fine dining image for the region and the importance of locally sourced quality produce and short supply chains as key to the development of the visitor experience. *Taste of the West* has recently launched an online tool for promoting the best food and drink offers in the region and works with local initiatives such as the English Riviera Seafood Coast Project to support innovation in this key economic sector.

*Beth MacLeod*, meanwhile, gave a personal story of her journey from buying a failing run down country house hotel to building up over 16 years an award winning business with food and drink at the heart of the visitor experience in *Knockderry House*. On the theme of authenticity and innovation, she identified provenance, seasonality and taste as the basis of the business's food and drink offering. Innovation is key to the operation, especially to build on repeat visits, with new visitor experiences developing around the food and drink offer (eg hosting food and drink events). Consumers are increasingly knowledgeable and demanding in their dining requirements and are key drivers of innovation.

From a derelict building to a thriving visitor centre in Cumbria has been the story of the *Lakes Distillery*. *Katie Read* took the audience through the journey of the development of the Lake District's foremost award winning food and drink attraction, opened in 2015 by HRH the Prince of Wales. Visitors are drawn in increasing numbers to its distillery experience and the Bistro at the Distillery, while expansion into producing craft gin and vodka complements its successful whisky brand.

A visitor experience built on the trust of high quality produce from high quality local suppliers, with continual innovation in the food and drink offer was the unifying message underlining all three presentations.