

GARDENS RESEARCH 2004

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The gardens research was commissioned by VisitScotland and conducted by an independent market research agency, Progressive Partnership, in July 2004 with visitors to the VisitScotland stand at the RHS Flower Show at Tatton Park, Knutsford, Cheshire. The event was chosen because it represented an ideal opportunity to intercept customers with an interest in visiting gardens.



The **objectives** of this research were as follows:-

- *To establish whether these consumers also visit gardens on holiday / short breaks (probing on the format of the break, who they would go with, accommodation type etc.)*
- *To understand what the drivers are for this type of break;*
- *To assess whether Scottish gardens would be of interest to these consumers;*
- *To determine how prospective visitors would obtain information on gardens in general and specifically in Scotland;*
- *To establish how useful a specific brochure on Scottish gardens would be to these consumers.*

Key findings

Characteristics of gardens visitors

- Couples or friends rather than singles
- Freedom visitors (enjoying several, gentle activities, like walking, golf)
- Mostly local people (within 3 hour radius)
- Middle aged / older (50's +), Empty nesters with a lot of time on hands but not much spare cash
- Passionate about gardens, but not fanatics
- Enjoy culture – visit stately homes and castles
- Visit garden centres and shows, to pick up new ideas and to enjoy a day out

Visiting gardens during holidays / short breaks

- Gardens are an important part of their holiday, but not a key driver
- They take short breaks all year round and are open to new destinations
- They are highly organised and plan their short breaks in advance
- Following sources for info are used: word of mouth (recommendations from family / friends), magazines, local press (info on cottages and coach trips), internet, leaflets from Tourist Office (which they request), TV (holiday programmes, gardening shows)

Information on gardens / what interests them

- Three key elements are important to the gardens visitor: Colour, Diversity, Accessibility
- Visitors are looking for information on where the garden is located, what it has to offer (uniqueness), practical info (how to get there, opening times, seasons), nearby accommodation, other activities on offer (freedom visitors!). They find this info in tourist brochures (which they request), local guide books, internet and from the National Trust. Further information of interest to them includes the history of the garden & how it came into being, expert opinion (head-gardener), history and reasoning behind plants, new ideas and techniques (Eden project), how to recreate ideas in their own garden and planting facts and stats. This information should be made available in guide books and using signage around the garden. Guided tours are not of much interest to them.

Visiting gardens in Scotland

- **Unique Scottish twist to gardens.** The Scottish garden itself is expected to be wild, authentic, natural, rugged, lush and to signify adventure. The backdrop to the garden is expected to be dramatic scenery (mountains, lochs, coasts), changing colours, and different settings (like castles). Scottish gardens are perceived as unique compared to other gardens in the UK.
- **Advantages and barriers as a destination.** Although the respondents had heard about Scotland from friends / family or even been there before, and have a good impression of its beautiful countryside, history, culture and tradition, there was a distinct lack of awareness of Scottish gardens. Other barriers include the distance to travel (especially from South England), the competition and the weather (although this is much less of a barrier to this group of garden enthusiasts).

Implications and recommendations

- **Awareness building.** Garden magazines, holiday programmes on TV, internet, local events and promotion of key events (garden shows / festivals) can be used to build awareness of what Scotland has to offer. All of these sources were named by respondents when asked about where they find out about short breaks / holidays. Joint mailings with the National Trust and RHS would also be an effective way to target potential gardens visitors.
- **Brochures.** There are two potential options for gardens brochures. The first option would be to promote gardens along with other activities and attractions in a brochure, which still has gardens as the main focus. The second option would be to produce a gardens directory (like a reference guide) which would include all of the potential gardens to visit in Scotland.

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