



DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

DORCHESTER HERITAGE JOINT COMMITTEE

Heritage Role in Tourism

“Why does it matter”

The Importance of Heritage for Tourism

A number of national bodies have considered the importance of Heritage and published studies and reports regarding the role and importance of Heritage Tourism.

Heritage England, in *Heritage and the Economy 2018*¹ noted that:

“Heritage is an important part of the tourism industry in England, attracting millions of domestic and international tourists each year. Some tourists visit England primarily to visit heritage attractions, while others take part in heritage activities during visits that are made for other purposes. This in turn supports millions of jobs and contributes to national and local economic growth.”

The report noted that in 2016 there were 17.8m heritage related inbound visits (overseas visitors) spending £9.3bn in the national economy. There were 204m Day visits contributing £4.4bn spend and 14.9m domestic heritage-related overnight trips in England (approx. 15% of all overnight trips²) worth £3.2bn.

In total, heritage tourism in England was estimated to generate 236.6m visits and £16.9bn to the national economy

The report recorded that:

- Three quarters of adults (c40m people) visited a heritage site at least once in 2018
- Two thirds of domestic tourists quoted that “being able to visit a historic building or monument as their ‘sole reason’ or a ‘very important reason’” for a domestic holiday or short break
- Heritage tourism is more popular in Britain than the EU
- In 2016, Over three quarters of visitors to historic attractions in England were local visitors, a steadily increasing proportion since 2008
- History and heritage is a strong product driver for most overseas markets, is an integral part of the UK brand and drives millions of inbound visits each year.

¹ <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2018/heritage-and-the-economy-2018/>

² https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/40413193-260c_gb_tourist_annual_report_2018_fv-v3.pdf

The report notes the importance of volunteers in the operation of heritage and history attractions - dedicating significant amounts of time, knowledge and expertise in a wide range of high skilled and low-skilled roles including fundraising, outreach, events and exhibitions staffing, specialist conservation work, to governance roles and trusteeship.

Heritage Lottery Fund in the impact of heritage tourism for the UK economy (Oxford Economic)³ noted
192m Heritage motivated trips in 2015,
with £17.5bn spend and
£20.3bn contribution to GDP
Supporting 386,000 jobs in the UK

The report defined Heritage Tourism as heritage attractions, e.g. castles, galleries and museums as well as attractions in the natural environment such as urban parks, beaches, country parks, and nature reserves.

The report records that:

- For tourism generally, fewer trips were taken in 2015 than previous years (-0.9%), but that spend had increase (+2.7%).
- It estimated 1.7bn trips to and around the UK, of which 90% were domestic day trips – equal to 23 trips per resident.
- The South West hosted 20.5 million people who spent £1.7 billion in 2015 (11 percent of all UK visits and 10 percent of all spend). The 3rd biggest market after London and SE
- Heritage tourism motivated visits have declined overall (*195m in 2011 down 2% to 192m in 2015*) however
- Tourists' spending on heritage motivated visits has increased from £16.1 billion in 2011 to £17.5 billion in 2015 (up nine percent)

What are visitors looking for

In her PhD thesis (2017) at Bournemouth University “Understanding the Flow Experiences of Heritage Tourists”⁴, Dr Gayathri Daisy Kanagasapapathy notes that

Tourists are moving from a passive experience to wanting to participate in and engage with the “destination” or attraction.

Heritage tourism variously has been defined as

experience of life in a different time or place, and

enhancing learning, satisfy curiosity and feelings of nostalgia, grow spiritually, relax, get away from home, spend time with loved ones, or discover themselves

a personal connection to the objects or places being visited

³ https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/research/20160927_-_the_impact_of_heritage_tourism_on_the_uk_economy_-_final_repo.pdf

⁴ http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/29882/1/KANAGASAPAPATHY%20C%20Gayathri%20Daisy_Ph.D._2017.pdf

She further notes that “A destination that is marked by an extensive and rich history and heritage leaves an impression upon the mind of the tourist”.

The Town, The Opportunity

Dorchester offers an exciting opportunity to satisfy visitor interest in Heritage.

The town has over 3000 years of history on its doorstep, with major assets such as Maiden Castle and the various Roman sites including the town house in Colliton Park.

It has been at the heart of an agricultural area, and fulfilling a trade and commerce role, and civil function for centuries.

It has experienced devastation through several “Fires from Heaven” , played its part in the English Civil War, supported and enabled locals wishing to emigrate and found settlements in New England, offered residence for the “hanging” Judge Jefferies after the Monmouth rebellion, and been the place of trial of the Tolpuddle Martyrs at the birth of the trades union movement.

It has been home to internationally renowned authors, surgeons, inventors and Naval Admirals.

It played its part as temporary host to the forces assembling for the D Day landings and was home to the Dorset (later Devon and Dorset) Regiment from the 1880s.

It is the fictional Casterbridge in Thomas Hardy’s writings.

More recently:

- It is the location for HRH Prince of Wales development of an urban extension to Dorchester at Poundbury– attracting international interest and influencing development across the UK and beyond.
- The development at Brewery Square, with its mix of high quality residential and retail space, strong food offerings and its outdoor cinema screen, fountains and performance area and active programme has brought a new offer and opportunity to residents and visitors at the southern end of the town.

Both Poundbury and Brewery Square could be considered to be the new “Heritage” in the town.

Meanwhile, the northern and historic area of the town, has and is seeing significant investment through

The Shire Hall Historic Court House Museum - opened in 2018 after a multi £million conversion to museum

The Kings Arms Hotel – iconic building from film and mentioned in Hardy’s novels will reopen in 2020 under new ownership after a long period of closure and major investment

Dorset County Museum, set to open in Spring/Summer 2020 having been closed for two years for significant investment and alteration, providing new galleries, a learning centre, collections storage, a library and visitor facilities

Roman Town House, located in Colliton park, is to undergo conservation and have improved visitor access, amphitheatre style visitor seating and interpretation with a grant from Heritage Lottery (£0.248m). Due for completion by 2021.

Each of these is within 200m of one another.

With these major investments across the town, the time is right to raise national and international awareness of the town's visitor offer.

Summary and Conclusions

While the value and volume across other tourism areas have fluctuated in recent years, the value of heritage tourism is reported to have seen annual growth in recent years. It is also an area which has wide appeal with over 75% of the population visiting a heritage site at least once in the past year, and over 66% reporting that the opportunity to make a heritage visit was a key influencer in deciding on a short break or holiday in the UK.

It is also clear that visitors, together more generally with town centre users, are seeking an active experience of a place as opposed to a passive experience.

Dorchester, with over 3000 years of history, fantastic heritage old and new, factual and fictional characters of international renown, and unique and exceptional examples of former lives, is well placed to grow its tourism visitor to the town offer through heritage.

With a number of recently or soon to be completed major investments in heritage assets in the town there is a particular opportunity to raise the local national and international reputation and awareness of the town's visitor offers and heritage experience.