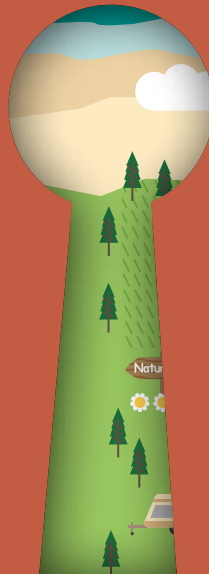


# PARK LIFE

## Sharing Park Success





# WELCOME

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During the last 14 or so years, I have got to know many holiday park operators and the thing which stands out for me is their passion, drive and enthusiasm. I've often thought what a good thing it would be to capture that knowledge and find a way to share it. Which got us thinking...

The result is 'Park Life' – an insight into some of the premier holiday park operators in the country. They are all award winners but, more than that, they all share that magic ingredient; that something extra special that makes customers return year after year.

This guide celebrates these successful businesses and shares their tips for success. We hope that you enjoy their stories and take away some of their ideas, so that we can ensure that this great sector continues to be a key part of the UK's tourism industry for many years to come.



## **Kirstie Apps, partner**

Kirstie is a legal expert in aspects of running holiday and residential parks and is a partner in Stephens Scown's dedicated parks team. Stephens Scown is an associate member of the British Holiday & Home Parks Association (BH&HPA).

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When I first read these case studies I was reminded again, of the diversity of the holiday parks sector we have in the UK. I hope that this guide will offer you inspiration for ways you can make your own business stand out and create memories for your guests that will live on for years to come.

A favourite part of my role is meeting new park owners. If you would like to share your story, please do get in touch by emailing [parks@stephens-scown.co.uk](mailto:parks@stephens-scown.co.uk)



## **Richard Baker, partner and head of Stephens Scown's parks team**

Richard is a partner and the head of the parks team at Stephens Scown. He acts for a number of park operators, with particular expertise in commercial property issues. He is also involved in the sector as the chairman of judges for the Cornwall Tourism Awards and runs his own small holiday business.

# 2

## Expert Insight - Park Awards

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**Robin Barker, CEO of Services for Tourism, a business that specialises in tourism excellence, shares his insights on award winning holiday parks.**



There are many facets that make a park award winning. It's not necessarily the park that offers the most lavish facilities or brandishes the latest hi-tech gadgets that win awards. Rather, it's a park that has been mindful enough to create something that exceeds customers' expectations.

These ideals and expectations usually begin when a prospective visitor looks at a park's web pages. If the website is packed full of appealing imagery, and strong informative content that answers the most likely questions, this will build a level of anticipation and desire. Naturally, the customer will have formed a level of expectation before they arrive at the park.

Most award winning parks have motivating websites, backed up with a strong social media presence. Whatever social media platforms a park decides to use, be it Pinterest, Facebook, Twitter or Instagram; they should do it, and do it well. This will need regular maintenance and should engage people with good conversational content.

On arrival at a holiday park, a visitor's expectations should meet or surpass those that have already been formed in their minds. First impressions matter a lot. Signage to the park and on arrival is a huge factor. If the signs are covered in algae and look dirty, then it could suggest that the rest of the park is unkempt.

The next stage involves the driveway into the park. Is the driveway well maintained or full of potholes? Are the flowers and planting on site looking good? Is there ample parking near the reception?

The first encounter with a member of staff is incredibly important. Crucially, the first interaction should leave the customer feeling valued. Staff should be friendly and welcoming. Ideally, the reception staff should be smiling and maintaining good eye contact.

Nothing should be too much trouble. With an ageing population and growth in three generation groups you need to be accessible and inclusive. This requires a park to adopt creative ways of thinking. For example, customers now expect a strong WiFi signal in their accommodation. Currently, not many parks offer the level of WiFi that is now required. Consumers, and often their children, are becoming more demanding when it comes to their internet usage, so this is a key area for investment.

The practice of sustainable tourism and how a park contributes towards its local community are key factors. Bonus points are gained if a park actively encourages its visitors to recycle their waste or if they use creative ways to make the bin storage area look good, enticing even. These things suggest to what degree a park is interested in sustainability. Strong community ties fare well too. This makes commercial sense as it reinforces the brand with the destination and the businesses in the area. This collective ideal is more likely to entice a visitor to return to an area.

The best way forward for park owners is through ongoing innovation and creativity. Tourism is a sector affected by many external factors, such as fuel costs, exchange rates and the weather. However, a holiday park will remain strong if it continues to invest in its people and in marketing. Tourism never stands still, and nor should a holiday park – keep investing and keep innovating!

### **Robin Barker, CEO, Services for Tourism**

**Robin has a very broad experience in tourism management, delivery, marketing and consultancy, following six years as head of Direct Marketing for Saga Group, nine years running his own marketing services company, two years at National Maritime Museum Cornwall and five years at South West Tourism. He holds a Fellowship from the Institute of Direct Marketing and from the Tourism Management Institute.**

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# 4

## Claylands Park

**In 1959, Fred and Margaret Robinson acquired a small 14 acre farm in Cabus, Lancashire. They had a vision to convert this perfect canvas, set on the banks of the River Wyre, into a masterpiece of landscaping for holidaymakers to savour and enjoy. Little did they know that, almost 60 years later, this idyllic retreat would become a multi award winning park.**

Claylands Park has been transformed into an abundance of lush green foliage boasting over 5,000 indigenous trees. Visitors are welcomed into a calm and inviting environment, where they can soak up the peace and quiet in an instant. This David Bellamy Gold Award winning park is beautifully landscaped and in harmony with its natural surroundings. Through careful ecological management and diverse planting, the park attracts an abundance of wildlife. Naturally, this provides endless hours of fun for young visiting explorers as they watch the wildlife go about its daily agenda.

Claylands Park, now run by Fred and Margaret's son Alan and son-in-law Andrew Brewer, continues to focus on ecology. An environmental consciousness permeates this park, and has led to many awards, as Andrew explains: *"One of the aspects, highlighted in our winning the Holiday Park of the Year category at the Lancashire Tourism Awards 2015, was that of sustainability. We are very conscious of our impact on the environment and care tenderly for the wildlife habitats and the natural landscape of the park. It is our intention to create the perfect living environment for wildlife. We often see ducks, squirrels, rabbits and hedgehogs, that all need managing to varying degrees."*

Other examples of ecological management can be found in Claylands' proactive encouragement of guests to recycle and its use of low energy lighting throughout the park. There are also four well stocked ponds which are an oasis for wildlife and great for fishing, as acknowledged by Andrew: *"Many of our guests visit us especially for the fishing. So we make sure the ponds are always well stocked and sometimes we host fishing competitions for the holiday makers."*

Claylands Park has received the highest possible accolade in 21 separate awards; an acknowledgment of its hard work in sustainability and good customer relations. Andrew says: *"Primarily, we're a diverse caravan park with a lot to offer. Our grounds are kept in immaculate condition and our customer service is second to none. Every member of the Claylands team is dedicated to making sure our customers have a great holiday experience, so it's good to know their hard work is being recognised by the awards."*



Alan Robinson, Margaret Robinson and Andrew Brewer





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**AWARDS/NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- Winner, Holiday Park of the Year, Lancashire Tourism Awards 2015
- Winner, Lancashire Tourism Awards 2015
- Gold Award, North West in Bloom 2015, 2014 & 2013
- Finalist, Lancashire Tourism Awards 2014 & 2013
- Finalist, Visitor Facilities category, Wyre Stars in Tourism Award 2013
- Gold Award, David Bellamy Conservation Award 2009, 1999
- Winner, Holiday Park of the Year, Lancashire Tourism Awards 1998

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**CONTACT DETAILS:**

Claylands Park, Weavers Lane, Cabus,  
Lancashire PR3 1AJ  
Tel: 01524 791242  
Email: [andrew@claylands.com](mailto:andrew@claylands.com)  
[www.claylandspark.co.uk](http://www.claylandspark.co.uk)

This winning combination is reflected in the large number of repeat bookings, as Andrew adds: *“Our caravan park is located just off the A6, so we are in an ideal spot for Blackpool, and the Lake District, and Yorkshire is a mere half hour drive away. Most customers come from places such as Wigan, the Manchester area and Fleetwood. There is a high degree of local trade, and 85% to 90% of bookings are from returning customers. People don’t want to travel a long way to find their own little paradise. Our idyllic site is in the heart of the countryside, giving guests an easy chance to escape daily life.”*

The relaxing ambience and hearty home cooked food, at the on-site Stepping Stones Riverside Bar and Restaurant, lures day visitors to the park. Andrew says: *“We advertise our restaurant in local magazines. In particular, we tempt the retired and elderly with attractive lunchtime offers. This regular local custom fills the restaurant during the day, while our park guests dine there in the evening. By using this strategy we are able to maintain full employment for our catering staff.”*

Andrew has been the treasurer of the BH&HPA North West branch for the last ten years, so he is well positioned within the industry. Andrew reveals: *“There’s a lot of competition in the area, although I don’t see this as a threat. Competition is good for business as it brings more people to the area. It’s important to keep ahead by being in tune with what the customers want.”*

The ability to respond to the needs of the discerning visitor, together with careful ecological management, proves that Claylands Park continues to be a big hit with guests and industry assessors.



# 6

## Ladram Bay

Starting out as tenanted farmland, over the years, the site at Ladram Bay Holiday Park has changed significantly. A small occasional campsite has become one of the largest privately owned holiday parks in the country. Now owned and managed by brother and sister team, Robin Carter and Zoe House, the holiday park is continuing its transformation, albeit in a different way.



*Robin Carter, Zoe House, and their team with olympian Jo Pavey*





## AWARDS/NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS:



- 5 Star Rating, VisitEngland
- Gold Accolade, David Bellamy Conservation Award 2016/17
- Diamond Award Winner, Hoseasons 2016
- Winner, Company of the Year, Devon Venus Awards 2016
- Platinum Award, Loo of the Year Awards 2016
- Travellers' Choice Award, TripAdvisor 2016
- Silver Award, Holiday Park & Holiday Village, Visit Devon Tourism Awards 2015
- Silver Standard, UK Pool & Spa Awards 2015
- Winner, Express & Echo Business Awards 2015

Ladram Bay has been heaped with tourist and environmental awards over the years. Its success must be, in part, due to its incredible location. Overlooking Devon's stunning Jurassic coastline, in an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Ladram boasts its own secluded, private beach, as well as a host of facilities and family activities. The family feel extends to the management team. General Manager Claire Williams is a third generation Manager of the park, following in the footsteps of her father and grandfather.

Carla Newman, Marketing and Events Manager at Ladram Bay, is extremely proud of the park's award winning status: *"The Carter family and all the team at Ladram Bay, have been working incredibly hard to reach the coveted VisitEngland 5 Star Standard which has now been achieved. We're also proud of gaining the David Bellamy Gold Accolade, the Hoseasons Diamond Award 2016, the TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice Award 2016 and winning Company of the Year Award at the Devon Venus Awards. These accomplishments have been gained as a result of a lot of hard work and investment."*

Indeed, the investment has resulted in impressive new facilities. One of Ladram Bay's newest attractions is the multi-million pound pool complex with an interactive splash zone. There is also a new Jurassic themed adventure golf course. Carla describes how these new features contribute to the park's ongoing success:

*"The Directors have made a substantial financial contribution to Ladram Bay over the last two years. The new pool complex and Jurassic golf course are proving to be a big hit with customers. The facilities have been improved to help us reach the 5 star standard. As this has been accomplished, we strive to maintain the high standards, whilst creating positive and memorable family experiences."*

In addition to the plethora of family activities available, Ladram has also garnered great reviews for its food and drink offer. The Pebbles Restaurant, which recently enjoyed a state of the art refurbishment, overlooks the bay and offers delicious locally sourced products. There is a well-stocked supermarket, as well as the Beach Shack and the Coast Takeaway for essential holiday fish and chips. Carla believes that holiday park customers expectations are getting more sophisticated and keeping ahead of their needs is essential to the business:

## CONTACT DETAILS:



Ladram Bay Holiday Park, Otterton, Devon EX9 7BX  
Tel: 01395 568398  
Email: [info@ladrambay.co.uk](mailto:info@ladrambay.co.uk)  
[www.ladrambay.co.uk](http://www.ladrambay.co.uk)

*"The park is advancing with a family emphasis at its heart. We are looking, continually, at ways to improve the guest experience. Customers are given questionnaires that, once completed, provide us with invaluable feedback. Any suggestions, complaints or comments are acted upon quickly, as are the reviews on TripAdvisor. In addition, we have a very active presence on social media. Our posts include a mixture of Ladram news, special offers and alluring pictures of our stunning scenery."*

Ladram Bay is all about the big holiday experience, providing its customers with added value. There is a strong focus on family fun, with the resident entertainments team, providing a jam-packed schedule of sensational team shows, lively cabaret acts, family activities and events. Ladram Bay also offers an extensive programme of instructor-led activities at a reasonable charge. There is raft building and body zorbing, as well as a range of water sports and the opportunity to hire a motorboat. Primarily, these activities are designed to cater for the diverse range of tastes of all of its visitors, as Carla reveals:

*"It is important to offer a first class service to a wide audience. Although our demographic of visitors mainly come from Birmingham, Bristol, Bath, and as far afield as Holland, Germany and France, we also reach out to the local community. For example, our after school swim offer encourages local people to use the pool facilities at affordable prices."*

Even though the Directors are very careful not to overdevelop Ladram Bay or make it too commercialised, the park is in a strong position to respond to any fluctuations that may arise in the industry. Carla anticipates fortuitous times ahead for the UK holiday industry: *"We think the future is looking bright for the UK tourism industry in general. Our belief is that many people will be opting for a staycation style holiday over a trip abroad. Informative websites with good imagery sells and enhances the appeal of a UK holiday, and efficient online booking systems really help to generate more visitors."*

No doubt, with promising times ahead, Ladram Bay will continue its award winning success. Yet it's not the pursuit of awards that drives this business forward. What matters, at its core, is customer loyalty and enjoyment. The Directors prioritise customer retention and want each guest to have the best holiday experience possible, creating memories and having fun.



Patrick Langmaid, Owner

## Mother Ivey's Bay

**Patrick Langmaid, owner of Mother Ivey's Bay Holiday Park in Cornwall, explains why understanding your customers and staff is the secret to his park's success.**

It's not the top-notch facilities, impeccable customer care and high-end accommodation that make Mother Ivey's Bay Holiday Park unique, but rather it is the socially responsible approach to its business that really seems to set it apart from its competitors. The Padstow based park was recently crowned the winner of the Holiday Park and Holiday Village of the Year 2015/16 category, at the South West Tourism Excellence Awards, and this latest award will join the plethora of other prestigious accolades the park possesses.

Rather than adopting a traditional hard-sell marketing approach to its business, the style that the park chooses to embrace is one of social responsibility. Owned by the Langmaid family since 1988, the park is currently under the directorship of Patrick Langmaid, who is determined to forge positive connections between the park's guests, the staff and local community. Patrick explains:

*"We place corporate social responsibility at the heart of our business. We believe that if you are in tune with your customers, they will resonate with you."*

Part of this process involves matching the generous donations made by guests to local charities. Patrick continues:

*"Our customers like to be given the opportunity to get involved with the gifting aspect of our business. During the summer our visitors helped to raise £2,500 for the Cornwall Wildlife Trust through generous donations. We matched this financially, awarding the same amount to the local Wadebridge Foodbank."*

Building strong charitable community links is a fundamental part of this business. Instead of the St Merryn Steam and Vintage Rally having to be cancelled, due to a lack of venue, Mother Ivey's stepped in and allowed the organisers to use two of its fields, enabling this much-loved traditional event to remain in the village.

Yet, this warming approach to social conscientiousness goes above and beyond charitable donations. The strong moral ethic relates to staffing practices and Patrick's belief that he has a duty to look after his workforce.

Mother Ivey's became the UK's first accredited Living Wage holiday park in January 2015. Staff also have great career prospects, are given plenty of training opportunities and are able to take pride in their work. The park is a happy environment in which to work and there is good reason for this. Patrick explains:



**AWARDS/NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**



- Cornwall Tourism Awards 2015/16:  
Winner of Winners Award  
Gold Award, Holiday Park and Village  
Gold Award, Access and Inclusivity  
Silver Award, Dog Friendly Accommodation
- Gold Award, Holiday Park and Village, South West Tourism Excellence Awards 2015/16
- Certificate of Excellence, TripAdvisor 2015 & 2016
- Gold Award, David Bellamy Conservation Award 1999-2016
- Runner-up, Caring Company, Cornish Guardian Community Awards 2015

**CONTACT DETAILS:**

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[www.motheriveysbay.com](http://www.motheriveysbay.com)



*"We pay the real living wage to our staff and believe that this is a large factor in our success. By paying well we attract the best staff and, of course, there are many HR and social benefits to this too. We pay our staff what they are worth, not what we can get away with."*

In addition to putting social responsibility at the heart of the business, Patrick also prioritises any feedback he receives:

*"There is a great value to entering an awards competition, even if you don't win. Essentially, it is our peers doing a spot of mystery shopping and supplying us with invaluable feedback. We take all the comments on board and adapt our practices to make improvements."*

It is, in part, this quest to constantly improve that ensures Mother Ivey's remains as a front runner in the industry and is able to adapt to changes without having to become too commercialised or resort to hard sell tactics.

On the question of sales and marketing, Patrick comments:

*"We don't use third party platforms to obtain sales. This part of the business is dealt with in-house. We operate a strong online booking service, own an aesthetically pleasing website and manage our own social media pages."*

*"Our database of guests is incredibly valuable to us and we use it meaningfully. Rather than sending multiple generic mailshots, we are careful in what we send electronically to the people registered on our database. We prefer to send out fewer, yet more bespoke, personalised emails. We put a lot of thought into how we talk to our customers and the ways in which we do it."*

It is clear that Patrick's approach to business is one of transparency, so much so that he is prepared to discuss his positive business practices with other park owners:

*"I find that sharing knowledge with other holiday park owners really helps. The holiday park industry is generous about sharing useful information and I am happy to welcome other holiday park owners to Mother Ivey's, to explain how our park is run, why it is run in a particular way and how this works well for us."*

This award-winning holiday park will continue to make its visitors, staff and local community a collective part of its warming, socially responsible story.





**VisitEngland Director, Patricia Yates, explains how the increasing popularity of UK holidays has made holiday park customers even more discerning.**

England is packed full of incredible experiences that you can't find anywhere else. Our stunning coastlines, vibrant cities, history, heritage and countryside offer something for everyone.

With the ease and convenience of taking a holiday at home and the huge range of quality destinations and tourism products on offer across the country, Brits are getting out and exploring more than ever before. In 2015, domestic holiday trips and spending were both up 7% on the previous year to 43.7million domestic holidays in England and £10.7 billion respectively. And in 2015 the number of short breaks in England was up 10% compared to the previous year.

In Spring last year we ran an inspirational TV advertising campaign to showcase the amazing moments and experiences that can only be had across the nations and regions of Great Britain and Northern Ireland using #OMGB, to show people why they should book a holiday and explore Britain this summer.

From taking a dip in Wastwater Lake in the Lake District to riding the waves at Surf Snowdonia, from watching sunlight breaking over the Scottish Highlands to walking in the footsteps of giants along The Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland, the campaign promoted the diversity of activities right here on our doorstep, and is anticipated to generate more than 1.1 million additional overnight stays in 2016 with a £80 million boost to the UK economy.

Figures from VisitEngland's 'business confidence' survey this year showed that from the Easter holidays until July, 44% of caravan/camping accommodation providers reported an increase in visitor numbers compared with the same period in 2015, and a further 34% maintained performance. And business confidence amongst accommodation providers in England in August 2016 was at a record high. In a survey of 500 accommodation providers, more than half expected an increase in visitors following the EU referendum with a particular boost expected for the domestic market.

Expectations are higher for visitors to holiday parks, both in terms of individual accommodation but also in the central buildings.



Holiday makers have come to expect ‘super pitches’ which are larger and fully serviced, high quality and spotless toilet/shower blocks and rented holiday homes (static caravans) finished to an excellent standard with large, multi-channel televisions and fully fitted kitchens. Visitors are increasingly looking for a good value complete package of the highest quality. Holidaymakers expect a range of services including wi-fi, serviced pitches and additional facilities such as shops, cafe/restaurants and playgrounds, but most of all they seek friendly service, cleanliness and ease of use as well as a quality experience.

Looking ahead 2017 promises to be another year packed full of fantastic reasons to take a holiday at home. VisitEngland has declared 2017 the ‘Year of Literary Heroes’, in recognition of the 200th anniversary of Jane Austen’s death, 20 years since the first Harry Potter book, and the 125th anniversary of the first Sherlock Holmes publication to name just a few. Britain’s rich history will also be on show with Wales celebrating the ‘Year of Legends’ and Scotland designating 2017 the ‘Year of History, Heritage & Archaeology’.

We will continue to engage and collaborate with businesses and organisations across our country’s tourism landscape, working together to drive growth in tourism and spread its economic benefits across our regions.

## Patricia Yates

**Patricia has been with VisitBritain/VisitEngland since 2005, becoming Strategy & Communications Director in 2007. She is responsible for research, tourism affairs and communications.**

**She started her career as a journalist working on research and technical publications. She followed this with a long period editing *Holiday Which?* where she scoped the strategy for and led on all *Which?*’s research, campaigning and public affairs work in tourism, travel and transport. She also launched and edited the *Which? Guide to Hotels* for many years.**

**Patricia is the Chair of TIER – the Tourism Industry Emergency Response group - which coordinates the tourism industry messaging at times of crisis and a Fellow of the Tourism Society. She is an observer on the board of the Tourism Alliance for VisitBritain/VisitEngland.**





# 12

## Oakdown Country Holiday Park

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The walls of Oakdown Country Holiday Park's offices could quite easily be transformed into a gallery of awards and accomplishments, as this Sidmouth based park continues to win high acclaim. Director and Park Manager, Alastair Franks, describes the efforts required to continue this success.



## AWARDS/NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS:



- Five Pennant De-Luxe Park, AA 2016
- Top 100 Park, Practical Caravan 2016
- Winner, VisitEngland 2016
- Gold Award, David Bellamy Conservation Award 2016
- Certificate of Excellence, TripAdvisor 2015 & 2016
- Best Campsite of the Year for England and Overall, AA 2015
- Silver Award, Camping and Caravanning Park, Visit Devon Tourism Awards 2015
- Bronze Award, Camping and Caravanning Park, South West Tourism Awards 2015

Over the years, Oakdown has been showered with a consistent stream of prestigious accolades, such as AA Best Campsite of the Year 2015 (England) and the Bronze Award in the Camping and Caravanning Park category at the South West Tourism Awards 2015/16. In essence, these honours reflect the team's determination to provide visitors with a high-end holiday park experience in a beautiful retreat.

Oakdown's spacious groves, seclusion and tranquillity, amid open East Devon meadowland, blend to produce a harmonious environment that has been created by the Franks family for over 40 years. The area encompasses a wealth of wildlife and quiet beaches for the discerning visitor to explore at their leisure. As Oakdown's aim is to remain a leading player in the holiday park industry, the owners do not rest on their laurels, they move the business forward in a resolute fashion.

Alastair Franks explains what makes Oakdown so successful: *"We spend a lot of time and effort on making the park appealing to guests. The team sing from the same sheet and work hard on every aspect of the business. We assess everything; from ensuring that the reception is warm and welcoming, to making sure that the grounds remain looking tidy and presentable. My parents worked hard in their pursuit to offer high quality holidays and to deliver a consistently high level of service. It is my job to maintain that."*

Many of the guests who visit Oakdown come from the South Midlands, Birmingham, Nottingham, and Bournemouth and, interestingly, there has been an increase in visitors from the nearby Exeter area, suggesting a niche in the immediate local market. Alastair says that repeat business is high and there is something for everyone at the park. Accommodation ranges from luxury holiday homes, to quality touring and camping pitches and cosy glamping pods. Alastair explains: *"Luckily, we benefit from the company of many loyal customers. Some guests have progressed from pitching up a tent in the early days, to buying a mobile home on the park. We like to think that the reason for their repeat business is, in part, due to the high level of service they receive from us."*

Aside from lofty customer standards, the five star holiday park status is retained by upgrading and renewing the accommodation. New leisure lodges have been installed, providing spacious and luxurious living quarters and creating a home from home ambience. Oakdown has also responded positively to the increased trend in glamping by investing in a number of glamping pods which get booked up incredibly quickly.

## CONTACT DETAILS:



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The owners value feedback from guests and use it to improve the facilities across the park. Yet, the work doesn't stop there, as Alastair explains: *"We endeavour to upgrade our amenities to ensure our award winning standards are maintained. This winter we will be renovating the reception area, we'll be researching other glamping options and we'll be looking at other ways to expand the park."*

When asked what customers love most about the park, Alastair replies modestly: *"Guests love the peace, quiet and the sense of security. The area, with its dramatic coastline and undulating countryside is also a big draw. Oakdown has been developed sensitively and is teeming with wildlife. Uniquely, we have our own trail, lined with an avenue of trees that leads to the world-famous Donkey Sanctuary. Also, our 9 hole golf course adds extra appeal."* In fact, the Oakdown golf course, adjacent to the park offers a unique selling point. Guests are able to tee off on a well presented par 3 course, suitable for all abilities.

No stranger to the challenges the holiday park industry bestows, Oakdown has reacted favourably to change by adapting its strategies. Alastair comments: *"In the past, when the touring market went slightly quiet, we decided to focus our attention on holiday caravan sales. This proved to be very successful. Modernisation has always been a huge challenge, as is keeping ahead of the competition, yet we remain forward-thinking and adapt our processes accordingly."*

It is clear that Oakdown has no intentions of letting its high standards slip. Now, it looks forward to what it sees as a favourable few years ahead.



Alastair Franks, Oakdown Director,  
with his parents and family





*Rachel Turner, Park Manager*

PADSTOW  
TOURING PARK



## Padstow Touring Park

The esteemed Padstow Touring Park, run by sibling team Alex, Gareth, Philip Barnes and Rachel Turner, is widely recognised as a 'best in class' park, impressing numerous tourism assessors. Rachel explains why her Cornwall based park continues to be a source of inspiration to others in the industry.

## AWARDS/NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS:



- Five Gold Pennant Award, AA 2016
- Five Star Gold Award, VisitEngland 2016
- Certificate of Excellence, TripAdvisor 2016
- Highly Commended, Holiday Parks category, VisitEngland Awards for Excellence 2016
- Gold Award, Camping and Caravanning category, Cornwall Tourism Awards 2015/2016
- Silver Award, Camping and Caravanning category, South West Tourism Awards 2015/2016
- Gold Award and Special Distinction Award, David Bellamy Conservations Awards 2015/2016
- Platinum Award and National Category Winner, Loo of the Year Awards 2015

The trophy cabinet of Padstow Touring Park is now brimming with a range of highly acclaimed awards, including the Gold Award from Cornwall Tourism, the Five Star Gold Award from VisitEngland and TripAdvisor's illustrious Certificate of Excellence. However, the owners show no sign of complacency and re-visit their efforts continually. As a result, there is a dedicated customer centric approach to their business.

Rachel explains: *"We are committed, wholly, to improving our park. Our business is highly customer focused and we are dedicated to meeting their needs. We listen to feedback to understand our customers better. We read through and respond to the reviews on TripAdvisor and UK Campsites, we keep a close on eye on the comments on our social media pages and we examine the reports from mystery shoppers."* Collectively, this supplies the park with insightful and impartial information, enabling it to adapt and focus on the finer details.

Paying careful attention to detail is crucially important to the business, as Rachel reveals: *"It's often the small things that make a huge difference to someone's visit. Recently, our amenities block was the National Category winner in the Loo of the Year awards for its high-end finish, internal planting and use of real wood that give a spa feel. It also features under floor heating, adding a welcome level of comfort to the visitor for when the weather gets cooler."*



Accommodating the needs of the winter trade is something that the park is continually developing. Rachel explains: *"At the moment we are increasing our number of hard standing pitches to cater for the increasing demand of the out-of-season business."*

## CONTACT DETAILS:

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Tel: 01841 532061  
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*"We offer warm, quality amenities and our heated coffee shop is furnished with comfortable leather sofas, giving our guests the chance to experience Cornwall in all seasons."*

The focus on the low season trade is, in part, a response to the increased footfall from Padstow's year round calendar of events. Notably, the Christmas Festival in early December is growing in reputation and popularity and, to strengthen its community links, Padstow Touring Park makes a financial contribution to the event by sponsoring the firework display. Rachel says: *"We are proud of our community and want to build strong relationships with other businesses in the area. We encourage our visitors to go to the events, to use the local shops and to visit the nearby restaurants, cafés and tea rooms."*

*"During the summer we have regular local, pop-up takeaways visiting our site, giving our guests an experience that is unique and quirky. Visiting families are able to enjoy time off from alfresco cooking and, instead, tuck into a wood-fired pizza, some tasty Mexican cuisine or a hearty cooked breakfast."*

Beyond catering for the appetites of guests, Rachel is full of praise for the surrounding area with its dazzling coastline, stunning sandy beaches and excellent cycling opportunities: *"We are lucky as our park is located in such an idyllic spot. I often venture out in the evenings taking aspirational photos of the spectacular natural landscape and then post these images onto our Facebook pages. These visually appealing pictures usually result in a large number of Facebook likes that can sometimes lead to bookings."*

Refreshing the website and social media pages, on a frequent basis, are part of an ongoing work programme. Rachel explains: *"It's important to keep progressing and there are challenges, but most are centred on the continual modernisation of our park. This involves keeping one step ahead of the out of season business, complying with ongoing Health and Safety changes, and adapting to the changing expectations of our customers."*

On reflection, it's not hard to see why Padstow Touring Park has won so many awards. Its keen eye to detail and customer centric style applies to all facets of the business. It is a high-end holiday park with a classically natural feel and the aspirational images, on the park's website and social media pages, are certain to ignite fresh interest, while the regular visitors will just keep on returning.

## Q and A with Justin Reid

### TripAdvisor Head of Destinations - Europe, Middle East & Africa



Justin has worked at TripAdvisor since November 2014, and is responsible for all destinations across Europe, Middle East and Africa. For him the key focus for any destination should be to ensure they are getting their best content in front of the right audience at the right time.

Justin spent 12 years at VisitBritain from 1999 to 2011 during which time he was Head of Digital and created the social media channels that are so successful today. In between these two jobs he spent time at an Internet start-up company specialising in Facebook apps, and agency side specialising in employee branding where he was responsible for making BP appear like a more attractive employer around the world. Not surprisingly he's very happy to be back within the tourism fold.

Outside of work Justin is a father of two, a keen runner and a rugby fitness coach.

#### **How does TripAdvisor help holiday parks to improve their offer?**

We are not the experts, it's the users that are experts. TripAdvisor offers free customer research. We, therefore, advise owners and management teams to look at what their customers are saying, good bad or indifferent, and the patterns that are formulating. If you are getting repeat negative feedback, about certain points, then that is what you should focus on. That's the beauty of TripAdvisor, there are 390 million unique users every month leaving reviews. These are the opinions that count.

#### **Have you noticed a trend towards staycations this year, post Brexit?**

It is too early to say what the impact is. People will still want that annual holiday every year to be the best they can have. What may happen is that people, who go on multiple holidays, may cut back to just one a year. However, quality is likely to remain the determining factor. If you offer a really good quality holiday at a really good quality destination in the UK, then yes people will come to you. It comes back to what you can do to make that experience as good as possible and then encourage people who have had that experience to share with others.

#### **What makes a customer leave a great TripAdvisor rating?**

The reviews can only reflect what is reality. If you improve your website or you are going to be more interactive online, that is not going to improve people's actual experience, when they visit. It starts with the actual experience people are having at the park. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the difference between a 4 and 5 star review on TripAdvisor is that someone's name is mentioned. For example, "*Dave on reception gave us some brilliant advice, which really helped us enjoy our holiday.*" It is about good old-fashioned customer service, giving people a great experience and that will be reflected in your score online.



### Should holiday parks respond to the review they receive, good or bad?

We always encourage owners or managers to respond to the reviews, even if it's a simple thank you. If someone has had a bad experience don't say "no you didn't", acknowledge if it's bad and offer to do something to rectify it. You could say, "please come back in the future and we can show you what a great destination we are." We suggest you treat people online the same as you would offline, so if a guest is really positive, then you are polite enough to say thanks. If someone isn't happy, you can offer to try and make it better.

### If you could offer holiday park owners and managers one piece of advice, what would it be?

The main thing we say is go to this URL [www.tripadvisor.com/Owners](http://www.tripadvisor.com/Owners) this is where all business owners can claim the page and be the official voice of that page. If people can review something they will, you are not going to stop that, but you can have a voice by joining in the conversation. If there is one takeaway from anything on TripAdvisor, owners should go to that URL and make the best use of what is there.

### TripAdvisor explained

TripAdvisor® is the world's largest travel site\*\*, enabling travellers to unleash the potential of every trip. TripAdvisor offers advice from millions of travellers, with 435 million reviews and opinions covering 6.8 million accommodations, restaurants and attractions, and a wide variety of travel choices and planning features — checking more than 200 websites to help travellers find and book today's lowest hotel prices. TripAdvisor branded sites make up the largest travel community in the world, reaching 390 million average unique monthly visitors\* in 49 markets worldwide.

### Step by step guide to TripAdvisor

1. Go into TripAdvisor and claim your business at: [www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Owners](http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Owners). Click on your business type on the left and then do a search for your park.
2. You have the opportunity to write a description of the property and include details about accommodation and facilities. Travellers want to know as much information as possible.
3. You can update your listing at any time and add your own photos. You will also receive emails when people review your business and you will have the opportunity to respond to reviews.
4. You can obtain free stickers to put in the windows of your establishment or elsewhere in your hotel. You can get them at: [www.tripadvisor.co.uk/StickerRequestSupport](http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/StickerRequestSupport). This will encourage guests to share reviews.
5. Add the TripAdvisor app to your Facebook: [www.tripadvisor.co.uk/FacebookApp](http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/FacebookApp) and follow the steps to add it. Great reviews from TripAdvisor can be shared on social media.
6. You have the opportunity to upgrade to a Business Listing at: [www.tripadvisor.co.uk/BusinessListings](http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/BusinessListings). This will allow you to add contact details, promote offers, drive direct booking referrals and enhance your TA presence. The cost varies.
7. Why not include some video footage? Travellers love this and it will give them a good idea as to what to expect.
8. There is also a booking programme and potential for advertising: [www.tripadvisor.com/MediaKit](http://www.tripadvisor.com/MediaKit).

\*Source: TripAdvisor log files, average monthly unique visitors, Q3 2016

\*\*Source: comScore Media Metrix for TripAdvisor Sites, worldwide, July 2016



*Debie Connolly, Park Manager*



# Raywell Hall Country Lodge Park

Raywell Hall Country Lodge Park has been hailed as 'one of Britain's most popular and successful lodge parks' after collecting a series of top tourism awards. Debie Connolly, Park Manager at Raywell Hall, explains how the park is winning national recognition.



## AWARDS/NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS:



- 5 Star Rating, VisitEngland
- Gold Accolade, David Bellamy Conservation Award 2016
- Best Lodge Escape Destination in the North of England, Hoseasons 2016
- Finalist, Remarkable Holiday Park/Holiday Village, East Yorkshire Tourism Awards 2016
- Certificate of Excellence, TripAdvisor 2015
- UK's Top 10 Luxury Lodge Breaks, The Sunday Mirror 2015

Decorated with a string of awards, on the back of exceptional reviews from customers and accolades from industry inspectors, Raywell Hall Country Lodge Park delivers consistently high quality services to its guests.

This idyllic hideaway, located at the foot of the Yorkshire Wolds Way, has been recognised for the great work it has done to protect and enhance the natural environment. Bestowed with the David Bellamy Gold Award for conservation, Raywell Hall's excellent accommodation has also been rewarded. Named as one of the UK's Top 10 Luxury Lodge Breaks in 2015, by The Sunday Mirror, the park has also been awarded 'Best Lodge Escape destination in the North of England 2016' by holiday giant Hoseasons.

On receiving such acclaim Debie comments: *"We're delighted that, through our commitment to providing a first-class experience, we're now winning recognition among our visitors and industry assessors. We like to think that we go the extra mile to ensure that our customers are happy with what we offer. We set very high standards, so that every customer who walks into a lodge thinks they are the first person to ever have been there. This requires impeccable inspection procedures and a constant review of our services."*

Raywell Hall's inviting and idyllic grounds are interspersed with 58 luxury lodges displaying contemporary furnishings, spacious living quarters and lavish outdoor hot-tubs. The lodges also feature breathtaking views across the countryside. The hot-tubs are a unique selling point of the park as Debie explains: *"Our hot-tubs drive people to book with us. Therefore it is important to maintain this aspect of our business and ensure that quality is never compromised, so the hot-tubs are kept immaculately clean and the water quality is checked daily."*

Sharp attention to detail and thoughtful gestures stretch across all facets of the business. On arrival, guests are welcomed with a pack of essentials filled with items such as soap, tea, coffee and dishwasher tablets. The complimentary chilled bottle of prosecco, waiting in the fridge, is especially well received.

## CONTACT DETAILS:

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[www.raywellhall.co.uk](http://www.raywellhall.co.uk)



Although the majority of the lodges on the holiday park are owned by customers, there are also 11 lodges available for rent. Repeat bookings are high, with 45% of business coming from customer retention. All rental bookings are made via the leading holiday bookings firm Hoseasons, as part of its prestigious Autograph Lodge Holidays Collection. This partnership works very well for Raywell Hall, ensuring occupancy rates of over 90%.

New lodges have been added over the past year and, to meet the increasing demand, there are plans for more over the coming 12 months. Debie describes the next business venture:

*"We have created a new investment team to market to people who want to invest in a lodge for the sole purpose of renting it out to holiday makers. Currently, we have four lodges serving this purpose. Plans are also in place to build an extra 12 holiday homes."*

Whatever the future holds for Raywell Hall, it is certain that it will continue winning awards and appealing to happy holidaymakers, especially with nearby Hull becoming the City of Culture in 2017.





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## Tree Tops Caravan Park

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The foundations of the multi award winning Tree Tops Caravan Park are rooted in strong farming values. Its nurturing of the landscape and integration with the local community, is indicative of the huge respect the park has for its surrounding environment. So much so, the grounds are simply brimming with an abundance of plants, fruit trees and wild flowers, making it a haven for wildlife.



## AWARDS/NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Winner, Best Caravan Park Award, Wales in Bloom 2016
- Gold Award, David Bellamy Conservation Award 2016
- David Bellamy Enduring Commitment to Conservation 2015
- Silver Award, Best Place to Stay, Holiday, Touring and Camping Park, National Tourism Awards For Wales 2015
- Best Place to Stay, Caravan Park, Campsite, Hostel, Flintshire Tourism Awards 2014
- Special Distinction Award, David Bellamy Award for On-Park Propagation 2013/14



## CONTACT DETAILS:

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[www.treetopscaravanpark.co.uk](http://www.treetopscaravanpark.co.uk)



Interestingly, the humble beginnings of this North Wales Park, were the result of a very rare allergy to cows. After many years of successful farming ventures, dairy farmer John Owen suffered a disagreeable reaction to cows. This left him in a very challenging position. Farming was a hard way of life in the 1950s, and with three children to feed, John and his wife Sian decided to diversify; transforming part of the farm into a welcoming environment for tourists. Tree Tops was first licensed as a holiday park in 1960 and, since then, the land has been developed carefully and progressively, to meet the needs of the most discerning visitor.

Tree Tops is now run by John's daughter Maureen, husband Harry, (pictured below), and son Andrew Walker. It's apparent that the family's aspirations run as high as the park's founder.

Andrew explains: *"We aspire to be the best that we can be. We have no plans to acquire additional parks and expanding that way. Instead, we would rather own one really good caravan park and develop it to the best of our ability. We view our park as a small village and work to give it the same feel."*

The diligence to make improvements to this scenic holiday park, located just four miles from Prestatyn, has resulted in several major distinctions. With an acclaimed Visit Wales Five-Star Rating, Tree Tops has also held the Best Caravan Park Award, from Wales in Bloom, since 1992.

The recent £1 million expansion of the park has been given the green light from the local council's planning committee, of which Andrew says: *"Recently, we bought some neighbouring land that we wanted to develop. We were lucky enough to get the full support of the local planning committee and still are recognised in the area for doing things right. We work alongside the local council and wider community and are on the committee of our local tourism group."*



Maureen and Harry, Park Owners

The new development, one of the largest expansions in the park's history, is called Parc Ynys Hir and is expected to give a £500,000 boost to the local tourism economy. The landscaped project includes the planting of 19,000 shrubs, trees and plants. This is in addition to the 15,000 bedding plants the gardening team nurtures on an annual basis.

The spectacular collection of colourful plants and profusion of floral displays explains, in part, why Tree Tops is an award winning park. Andrew explains: *"I think we win awards because of our different perspective on business. We invest in the park, in its aesthetics, its sustainability and environment, rather than in marketing and sales. Word of mouth is a great form of marketing, for the business, and this has carried over into social media, such as Facebook, where the park had a following of over 16,000 people."*

Tree Tops Caravan Park centres on holiday home ownership rather than caravan rentals. Visitors are a mix of families, empty nesters and retired couples looking for a seaside retreat, away from the hustle and bustle of city life. Andrew says: *"Most of our customers live one to one and a half hours away. Our quiet park offers a safe, stable environment for all our guests. Children are able to gain a sense of freedom here as they are able to climb trees, explore wildlife and use their imaginations to play games."*

To meet the expectations of visitors, Tree Tops also invests in the quality of its sales stock, Andrew mentions: *"If we wouldn't sleep in one of our pre-owned caravans, then we won't sell it."*

Instead, any tired stock is sold externally. When purchasing new caravans and lodges, Andrew explains: *"We are mindful of our customers' rights, so it is important to get things spot on. As customers expectations rise, we respond accordingly, and work with the manufacturers of the caravans to resolve quality issues quickly. We want to offer that home from home experience, so we aim for quality across the board."*

With first class caravans and lodges, five star standards, stunning sea views and beautiful surroundings, this picture perfect park has come a long way since its days as a dairy farm.



## Marc Astley, CEO of Astley Media, explains why the customer experience is more important than ever....

In a world where most companies employ similar people, from similar backgrounds, offering similar services for similar prices, it is now imperative that businesses stand out from the crowd.

Have you ever stopped to think what makes your park so special? Have you ever thought about 'your story' and how to tell it? Have you ever looked for a 'higher purpose' in what you do?

If the answer to any of the above is 'no', in terms of taking a fresh approach to your PR and marketing we'd suggest that's a good place to start.

For here is the problem: Your guests expect their stay to be brilliant. Anything other than that will be a disappointment.

I would argue that you are not in the accommodation/ tourism/hospitality business... you are in the experience, escapism, storytelling and memories business.

And if you share that view I would hope that you would begin to look at what you do very differently.

We have a saying that we use often at Astley Media: *"Marketing was all about the stuff you made and the things you did...It is now all about the stories that you tell and the experiences you create."*

### What does that mean?

It means that today, marketing is the way you answer the phone, the state of your flowerbeds, the provenance of the food you serve and the quality of the toilet paper you buy.

The unstoppable march of the Internet and social media means that every single one of your guests is an inspector with the ability to reach large audiences at the push of a mobile phone button.

They are also undercover reporters armed with recording equipment and video cameras.

But don't let this scare you. Accept it, embrace it and make it work in your favour.

By focusing on experiences that create great memories you will begin to make strides towards turning the visitors who like or even love what you do into unpaid advocates for your brand.

Enabling them to immerse themselves in and share your story will be one of the most effective (and economical) strategies you can adopt... if you get it right.

Most of your guests are up to their ears in facts and figures and five star reviews.

What they really need is faith, belief and trust in what you do – and that requires a complete rethink of the way you behave, both internally and externally.

If you haven't done so recently, take a look at your business through your customers' eyes.

Because your brand is no longer what you say it is...

Your brand is what your customers believe it to be and tell each other it is.



**Marc Astley**

**An experienced journalist, writer, editor and media commentator with a wealth of contacts in the Exeter area, Marc launched Astley Media in January 2012.**

**The company offers PR marketing and design services to a wide range of clients including bus company Stagecoach and global procurement platform blur Group.**

**Astley Media is the only Devon agency to win three awards from the Chartered Institute of Public Relations in the past four years.**

**Marc is a trustee of the Exeter Foundation, a charity that is affiliated to Premiership rugby club, the Exeter Chiefs; vice president of Dream-A-Way, which supports disabled and seriously ill people and marketing advisor to Hospiscare.**

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# Expert Insight - Shopper Anonymous

**Jonathan Winchester is the Chief Executive of Shopper Anonymous who with their network of UK Regional Directors works with 951 UK independent businesses to help improve their customer service through mystery shopping and feedback programmes.**

A customer's holiday experience is emotional and long. From the booking experience to the return home, parks need to be constantly on their game to ensure customers hail praise for life. Having offered feedback to parks for years here are our top three tips to ensure your business delivers a memorable experience...

## 1. Identify where the first impression is made

The first few seconds of any experience has the most influence on how a customer feels about your park. There are numerous first impressions in your customers' journey and working up a strategy that makes each one memorable is a very good place to start. For example, what happens when a customer calls your park at 9pm to book a holiday? Is the quality of the call as good as it would be at 10am on Monday morning? Does the language used by the team member 'paint a picture' for the customer that makes them rush to book? When emails are sent into the park, what is the quality of the response in both timing, grammar and follow up? Indeed, do you have a follow up strategy? From the booking, to the arrival at the park and at each service point on site, each and every first experience needs the same attention.

## 2. Please Make Me Feel Special (PMMFS)

Perhaps the single most important activity we conduct in our team training sessions is to help the team appreciate how they can make every customer feel special. The team need to appreciate that every time they come within 20 yards of a customer they need to visualise that the customer has written on their head PMMFS. It stands for Please Make Me Feel Special. What are they going to do to meet this requirement? I can't explain a three hour team training course within this article but it starts with appreciating body language!

## 3. Measuring - identifying issues now

Many parks measure the customer experience, once it is all too late - when the customer is back at home. This makes it hard for you to rescue the situation and prevent poor feedback hitting TripAdvisor.

We recognised that there needed to be a method by which clients who have a longer customer interaction can identify any issues within the experience. So we developed FeedbackDirect where, during the experience, the customer can tell you how they are feeling about your business through a text response. We identify at which point in the customer journey we need to ask how the customer feels. They receive a text during their experience with a link to a happy, normal and sad face screen. The customer responds and all the results appear on a dashboard for the team to respond. It is a fabulous way of measuring and then reacting to issues on the park and delighting the customer prior to them getting home and hitting the TripAdvisor button. What is more, it Makes Them Feel Special!



**Jonathan Winchester**

**Jonathan is the Chief Executive of Shopper Anonymous who with their network of UK Regional Directors works with 951 UK independent businesses to help improve their customer service through mystery shopping and feedback programmes. Jonathan can be contacted on 07812 767084.**

**Over a seven-year period, Jonathan Winchester built one of the largest customer service feedback companies within Australia and New Zealand. The business offered more than 1,000 businesses customer service feedback on a regular basis. In 2006, having moved back to the UK, Jonathan established Shopper Anonymous UK. Born in East Sussex Jonathan started his career at Harrods in London on the management training program. His experience within retail, especially through service and quality improvement programs with other employers, enabled Jonathan to establish Shopper Anonymous, when he moved to Australia in 1994. As well as running Shopper Anonymous, Jonathan is well known for his sound business advice and training seminars. More than 2,000 staff have gained vital skills and experience through Jonathan's training seminars and more than 10,000 have heard him speak at conferences.**

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# Whitecliff Bay Holiday Park

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The consistently good reviews given to Whitecliff Bay by visitors on TripAdvisor support the park's status as a front-runner in the holiday park market. A bronze award winner at the eminent Beautiful South Awards 2016, Whitecliff Bay is owned by Away Resorts. Carl Castledine, Chief Executive, reveals why insight is integral to future success.

Sandwiched between a beautiful sandy beach on one side and rolling countryside on the other, the Isle of Wight park is a welcoming sight for visitors. At Whitecliff Bay, the needs of all family members have been considered carefully. Carl explains the reasons for this broad approach: *“Our strategies are centred on providing a multi-generational family holiday experience. An example of this can be seen with our Little Campers’ Breaks that target families with pre-school aged children. On arrival, the little guests are made to feel special, enjoying the pleasure of a separate check-in desk where they can collect a fun activity pack.”*

Parents and grandparents are also catered for, with good quality facilities, easy access to the enticing sandy beach and first class entertainment on offer. In 2016, Whitecliff Bay launched a Village Green activity centre as a focal point for the park. The Green is covered with a large canopy, in case of inclement weather, so visitors can enjoy a wide range of organised activities, while remaining dry. Carl says: *“Our Village Green concept comes from our desire to create experiences that feel traditionally British and this fits the bill perfectly. We’ve even included quirky touches such as seats made from fibre-glass cows!”*

Entertainment scores highly at this park and is one of the many reasons for its multiple accolades. Carl mentions: *“The outdoor cinema, with the stunning Whitecliff Bay as a backdrop, is a big hit with families. As the guests settle down to watch a film they can choose to divert their attention away and watch the ships cruise by in the background. Hay bales are provided for seating and blankets are supplied to keep the guests warm. The small campfire even enables people to toast marshmallows. Another popular event is our mammoth cream-pie fight, held at the park each year on the August Bank Holiday Weekend.”*

Seeking to serve the customer, in the best possible way, is at the forefront of this business. Part of this involves anticipating the needs of tomorrow’s customers, as Carl explains: *“It is our intention to be proactive rather than reactive, so we aim to stay one step ahead of what our customers may want. Already, we are accommodating the needs of the millennial generation who are especially in tune with a wide variety of digital platforms. In our entertainment zone, we have big screen technology and we have installed fibre optic (broadband) throughout the park. We expect the millennial generation to want modern, contemporary experiences.”*



Carl Castledine,  
Chief Executive

Another innovative approach to the future of the holiday park experience will be seen at Whitecliff Bay in April 2017. To challenge the, sometimes, negative perception that some holiday makers have with caravans, based on the result of customer-focussed research, Whitecliff Bay will be launching a new style of accommodation in the spring.

Carl describes the new caravan in more detail: *“We are modernising and adding a contemporary twist to the traditional style, beige caravan. Prior to the Easter holiday, we will be introducing a new style of caravan that has been designed with the needs of the modern family at its heart. The new accommodation will fashion a bright and colourful, exotic exterior and will be modular in structure. The interior plan positions the two bedrooms at either end of the accommodation, enabling each family member to gain a sense of space, for when they need it.”*

The parents’ bedroom will have a boutique hotel feel to it, boasting thick duvets and tasteful furnishings, and the adjoining en-suite includes a bath allowing parents to take a soothing soak after a busy day with the kids. Carl continues: *“As for the children, their bedroom is designed in a completely different way. The kids’ rooms have been planned with fun adventures in mind and feature a play den.”*

Carl’s blueprint is in the industry. Raised by a family of holiday park operators, he is passionate about the industry’s longevity and does not want to see it follow the same path as the UK coastal hotel market, which has seen a steady decline. Carl concludes: *“I think there will be an optimistic environment in the UK tourism industry over the next few years. However, it’s so important to keep evolving and giving the customers what they want.”*

**AWARDS/NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- Gold Award, David Bellamy Conservation Award 2015/16
- Bronze Award, Touring, Camping and Holiday Park/Village category, Beautiful South Awards 2015
- 4 Stars, VisitEngland Award 2015



**CONTACT DETAILS:**

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# Woodland Holiday Park

***“Put the product first and the profit will follow”*** says Andrew Hird, the General Manager of Woodland Holiday Park. This ethos is employed across all aspects of the park and is partly responsible for Woodland’s rise to award winning status. For the second successive year, Woodland is celebrating being a finalist in the Holiday Park of the Year Award category at the Norfolk Tourism Awards.

Woodland’s recent positioning as a finalist, in the regional tourism awards, has been a timely recognition of the park’s hard work and dedication to raising standards. Andrew explains: *“Four and half years ago the park was a sleeping giant. Customer expectations were not great and the biggest challenge involved changing the team’s way of thinking, to help move the business forward.”*

Andrew acknowledges that, in order to achieve this, it was important to employ the right people with the right mindsets, who were aspirational and had a determination to help transform the park. Now that the staffing changes have been implemented, the results speak for themselves. Andrew explains: *“These changes are now starting to shine through, which is wonderful to see. Our programme of customer experience development continues today. We are striving to deliver sustainable and predictable levels of service in future.”*

This enhanced customer experience is encountered the moment a visitor reaches Woodland’s tranquil location, as they are transported into a relaxing pace of life. Entrenched deep within the woodland forest are a number of luxury log cabins furnished to extremely high standards and there’s a selection of two and three bedroom caravans filled with everything needed for a getaway, with all the comforts of home. On site, there’s an extensive clubhouse featuring a splendid indoor swimming pool complex and a spacious restaurant area for all guests.

Offering a first class service, across so many different areas of the park, is a real challenge, but one that Andrew is hungry to realise, in his pursuit for excellence. Andrew comments: *“Our key focus is to deliver high levels of hospitality across the board. Fundamentally, our staff are able to make such a difference to the holiday of our guests.”*



Andrew Hird,  
General Manager





## AWARDS/NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Finalist, Norfolk Holiday Park of the Year Award, Norfolk Tourism Awards 2015
- Finalist, Norfolk Holiday Park of the Year Award, Norfolk Tourism Awards 2014



## CONTACT DETAILS:

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Email: [bookings@woodland-park.co.uk](mailto:bookings@woodland-park.co.uk)  
[www.woodlandholidaypark.co.uk](http://www.woodlandholidaypark.co.uk)



In order to monitor customer satisfaction levels, various methods are used to extract information and provide constructive feedback. Andrew says: *"We employ an outside agency, that uses mystery shoppers, to assess certain aspects of our business. The shoppers are invited to stay with us, evaluate our services and then supply us with impartial and helpful feedback. The results from the reviews are taken seriously and we look carefully at the rating awarded to us. Our goal is to achieve an overall positive rating of 80%."*

The mystery shoppers are asked to consider every minute detail; from the cleanliness of the accommodation to the quality of the toilet rolls used on site. Everything is reviewed, assessed, and then adapted to keep standards consistently high. Andrew explains further: *"We believe this is a brave approach, in our pursuit of raising ideals. The mystery shoppers look for reasons to be critical, yet we are able to use the results positively. It helps to develop our training and the customer and staff interaction."*

Bookings have increased in the last year. This is a result of the improved service and better infrastructure. A recent, fortuitous circumstance came from the conversion of the A11, which changed from a single to a dual carriageway. This opened up the market enormously for the North Norfolk holiday park. Of this, Andrew says: *"The opening of the A11 dual carriageway has made a big difference to our business. Since it became a dual track we have seen a 16% growth in trade. Traditionally, most of our visitors come from the Midlands area, but now we are welcoming visitors from London and the Home Counties, so we are looking at the needs of these new customers and will adapt our practices accordingly."*

The next big thing on the agenda, for Woodland Holiday Park, is with its investment in a number of high-end holiday properties, designed to attract a variety of clientele. This follows the £100,000 investment to create one of the best-equipped gyms in the county. In January 2016, the new Technogym opened its doors. Offering sports loving guests over 20 Technogym Wellness stations, this new addition even attracts professional athletes, including some of the England football team.

It's clear to see that the progressive development at Woodland is spearheaded by a strong management team. When asked what drives the park onward, Andrew replies: *"Our motivation is to be the finest that we can be. Norfolk is a very popular holiday destination and we strive to be the best in class and compete on a national level."*

# Woodovis Park

**When arriving at Woodovis Park, near Tavistock, visitors are greeted by a long avenue of fine, mature beech trees that lead to 14 acres of striking countryside. The instant, enticing landscape is one of the many reasons why this park has triumphed at so many award ceremonies.**



Purchased 18 years ago, by husband and wife team John and Dorothy Lewis, Woodovis Park has been declared a Gold Standard Holiday Park for a range of criteria, including sustainability, ecological management and customer service. Boasting a range of Blue Ribbon Awards, the park's real crowning glory is that it really seems to care.

There is a charming, inclusive element to this park that sets it apart. Woodovis provides a safe, inclusive environment for all of its guests and, in particular, the staff go out of their way to make guests feel special. Nothing is too much trouble and it seems the word has spread. This is reflected in the increased proportion of bookings from families with children with special needs.

What's more, the park has a UK wide appeal, welcoming guests from all over the country, including some from the coastal parts of Cornwall.

Understanding how precious a holiday is to its guests and with an ambition to fulfil these high expectations, Woodovis possesses first class facilities. John says: *"Our facilities are now second to none. We inherited a swimming pool, 18 years ago, with an unflattering bubble over. So, this was removed promptly and replaced with a five star indoor heated swimming pool complex featuring a spa pool and luxury Physiotherm Infrared Therapy Cabin."*

An entertainment programme that is perfect for the park's unique culture matches fine facilities. John explains how Woodovis has stepped away from the traditional clubhouse and arcade style set-up: *"We have a purpose-built undercover area allocated for children's activities. Children can listen to fascinating tales told by an international storyteller, at one of the story telling sessions, or attend one of the lively circus skills workshops. Plus, the water walking, archery and pony and trap rides are universally popular with our younger guests."*



**AWARDS/NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**



- Gold Award, David Bellamy Conservation Award 2016/2017
- Gold Award, Holiday Park/Village of the Year, VisitEngland Tourism Excellence Awards 2016
- Gold Award, AA Campsite Award 2016
- Top 100 Sites Award, Regional Winner for Devon, Practical Caravan & Practical Motorhome 2016
- Gold Award, Camping & Caravanning Park, South West England Tourism Excellence Awards 2015-2016
- Bronze Award, Sustainable Tourism, South West England Tourism Excellence Awards 2015-2016
- Gold Award, Camping & Caravanning Park, Visit Devon Tourism Awards 2015
- Bronze Award, Sustainable Tourism Award, Visit Devon Tourism Awards 2015

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John and Dorothy Lewis with their team



All the activities are heavily subsidised by Woodovis, so the forward cost to the customer is minimal. As a result, many of the families prefer to stay on site. Aside from the organised activities, the children can follow the nature trail around the park or head into the woodland where den-building opportunities exist. This green space is managed carefully. In fact, the park's commitment to the environment, and its passion to sustain it for generations to come, has been recognised by a series of eco awards. Notably, Woodovis was decorated with the Green Tourism Business Scheme's Gold Star Award, after being assessed against a rigorous set of criteria.

The tranquil green surroundings provide an ideal environment for a camping, glamping, touring or caravan holiday. The glamping pods are extremely popular. These snug heated pods offer a charming alternative to traditional camping and are perfect for those who want a little bit more comfort. John says: "The pods get booked up very quickly. Many of the bookings come from Virgin and Red Letter Days and are given as presents. The occupation of pods is around 85%."

Despite this high demand John explains why he's not going to expand the glamping pod side of the business. "We don't want to overdevelop our park, although there is space for us to do so. We charge a premium price for our experience and do not want to dilute the customer experience. It's important to keep the numbers down, so the facilities aren't compromised from over-use."

Instead, the park is diversifying into caravan storage. John reveals: "Our 2016 project has involved constructing a high security compound for people to store their caravan safely in, away from home. When the customer wishes to visit the park, they call us up and we move the caravan for them to a designated pitch."

Although Woodovis Park has won many distinguished awards for its superb facilities and services, the park is most proud when its guests leave positive comments.



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