Tourism Ambassadors
Case Study: Brecon Beacons
### Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many Ambassadors/Greeters?</td>
<td>120</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who are they?</td>
<td>Primarily proprietors and employees of tourism businesses located within the National Park, plus a few other interested volunteers</td>
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<td>What area do they cover?</td>
<td>Brecon Beacons National Park</td>
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<td>What training?</td>
<td>WorldHost, 'Sense of Place' and 'Park in Your Heart'</td>
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<td>When was the scheme set up?</td>
<td>2009</td>
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<td>Is it still going?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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Description of the programme

The Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP) Authority began to develop links with tourism providers in their area about 25 years ago in order to encourage their cooperation with the overall tourism provision in the Park.

They contacted all tourism providers in the Park, setting aside some funding to offer familiarisation visits for the tourism trade to different locations around the National Park. They also developed a few training modules, on ‘Food’ and ‘Heritage’, to help inform tourism providers about what the whole park had to offer, beyond just their own town or village.

Over a number of years this programme was developed into more in-depth training, with the trade wanting to become better informed about the National Park and what it had to offer their visitors. These activities eventually evolved into the successful Brecon Beacons National Park Ambassador scheme of today.

Why it has been set up?

The original aim of the Park in establishing links with tourism providers was to give them the tools and knowledge to enable them to inform their guests and other visitors about activities and facilities in the National Park, hopefully encouraging longer stays and repeat visits to the area.

This overall aim remains the essentially the same, with the objectives for developing the BBNP Ambassador scheme expressed more recently as:

- Deepen tourism businesses’ knowledge of the Park
- Pass their knowledge and passion of their Park to visitors
- Influence visitor behaviour and help with visitor management
- Develop a good relation with the Park

When was it started?

The current scheme for fully trained BBNP Ambassadors began in 2009.

Whose idea was it?

The scheme was conceived and developed by the BBNP Authority.
How was it developed?

Ambassador training subsequently developed into 3 full days of training.

In 2007 the BBNP commissioned a report to seek out the basis for a ‘Sense of Place’, a sense of the unique character of local areas from all around the Park. This report provided the themes (e.g. Buildings, Language, and Heritage) for a ‘Sense of Place’ Ambassador training module delivering a well-researched and informed training session appropriate to each individual area in the National Park.

Staff at Brecon Beacons National Park Authority helped create the second training module ‘Park in Your Heart’, which covers 480 million years of the Park's past, its geology, landscape and wildlife; this module also considers how climate change might impact the Brecon Beacons – and how tourism businesses and their guests can help to mitigate these changes through the use of public transport for example.

The third day of training, which completes the Ambassador programme, is ‘WorldHost: Principles of Customer Service’.

Park staff deliver the ‘Park in Your Heart’ module. The training for ‘Sense of Place’ and WorldHost is delivered by an external provider.

From ‘A Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism in the Brecon Beacons 2012-2016’

The delivery of information and interpretation through word of mouth to visitors where they are, rather than requiring them to go to specific centres, is widely recognised as a highly effective way of communicating ideas and messages. This has been well pursued in the Brecon Beacons through the Ambassadors scheme which provides formal recognition to individuals who have been trained in knowledge about the area and in ways of putting this across.
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Approach

How do people become involved in the Ambassador programme?

Presentations by BBNP staff to tourism providers and word of mouth

Who are the people?

- The people initially recruited for training as Ambassadors were all accommodation providers within the park and, as a part of their business, were meeting face-to-face with visitors on a daily basis.

- Ambassador training is now offered to a wide range of people associated with tourism, including walk leaders, photographers, activity providers and staff from large hotels.

Events

- After they are fully trained, Ambassadors are invited to events and further training offered by the BBNP Authority.

- A conference is held every spring to bring trained Ambassadors together for learning and networking.

Training

- To become BBNP Ambassadors, trainees must successfully complete a 3-day course consisting of the three modules: Sense of Place; Park in Your Heart; and WorldHost.

- On completion of the course, Ambassadors are presented with a certificate, a car sticker and a map of the Park to display on the wall of their establishment.

Activities and timescale

BBNP Authority runs the 3-day Ambassador Training course 3 times a year to train new Park Ambassadors.
Now and Beyond

Work to date

Early in the development of the Ambassador training programme, staff realised that it was vital to maintain the relationship between the Park and the tourism trade that the training had delivered. In order to reap the long-term benefits of the programme, it was essential to keep Ambassadors interested in the Park and active in promoting its tourism offering. These considerations led to the idea for Continual Professional Development (CPD) for Ambassadors:

- After completing the 3 core modules, all Ambassadors are required to undertake some form of training or attend an approved event with the BBNP every year in order to maintain their status as fully trained Ambassadors.

- BBNP have developed further training modules that allow Ambassadors to specialise in different topical areas. Two of the most popular advanced training modules are the Geopark Ambassador and the Dark Skies Ambassador, which are delivered by BBNP staff several times a year.

- The BBNP are also looking to develop another module that is concerned with the future of the Park and green energy, as they would like the Ambassadors to be in the forefront to help make the Park more sustainable and environmentally friendly.

- Ambassadors can fulfil their CPD by attending the annual spring conference for trained Ambassadors. The conference is a ‘hands-on’ event, where Ambassadors have an opportunity for new learning experiences and meeting like-minded individuals and businesses from across the Park to share best practice. The conference also showcases presentations delivered by guest speakers with specialist knowledge and allows ample time for networking.

Outcomes

There are 150 fully trained Ambassadors, with 120 of them currently active in BBNP.

Achievements

The effectiveness of Ambassadors in BBNP in promoting the tourism offer there is recognised in A Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism in the Brecon Beacons 2012-2016. The Plan further recommends that their use be expanded in several ways, including:
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- Raising the profile of Ambassadors in pre-visit contacts enabling visitors to take the role of Ambassadors into account when selecting places to stay and sites to visit
- Helping Ambassadors to share their knowledge of the area and passion for the Brecon Beacons more widely
- Extending the coverage of the Ambassadors scheme to include people
- Working in a range of service positions that interface with visitors and more generally in local communities.
- Making connections to the Valleys Community Tourism Ambassador programme, especially in areas of overlap such as Blaenavon and Brynamman.

“We are very excited to launch this new Park Ambassador Scheme which we believe is a first for UK National Parks and possibly the first in Europe. Our new Park Ambassadors come from a range of diverse businesses, making them extremely influential when it comes to advising people on how best to enjoy and experience the National Park.”

Carol Williams, Tourism Growth Area Project Officer

Future plans and expectations

A new approach being developed is the Local Ambassador course.

- This is held over a few hours in an evening to enable working people to attend the session, which is much less demanding than the full Ambassador training course. The delegates of the Local Ambassador course are given some pre-course research to do before the session to help them benefit more fully from the short session.
- Some of the people who have already completed the Local Ambassador course are community representatives who quite often meet visitors, for example, town councillors and volunteers in local attractions. After completing this Local Ambassador course over an evening session, some of the delegates have been inspired to do the full Ambassador course.
- The BBNP hopes that some of their fully trained Ambassadors may be able to deliver this 2-hour Local Ambassador course; and feedback from fully trained Ambassadors suggest that some of them would be very happy to take up the challenge.