



Mercat Tours

Scottish Tourism Month – March 2018

Leading Scottish tourism business sees 19.5% growth after investing in staff and community initiatives



As part of Scottish Tourism Month 2018, one of Scotland's leading tourism businesses has revealed that its secret to success is through investing in people and the community.

Edinburgh's original five-star history and ghost tour company, Mercat Tours Ltd has seen a recent 19.5% year on year business growth – a significantly higher than average growth within the sector (see notes) – after introducing a number of new policies which put staff and the preservation of Edinburgh's heritage firmly at the heart of the family business. This includes becoming a profit sharing company and the first walking tour operator in Scotland to secure accreditation as a Living Wage employer, reinforcing their commitment to fairness and equality for all.

Speaking about the importance of their business ethos Mercat Tours Managing Director, Kat Brogan said: "Scottish tourism thrives on people; whether visitors choosing Scotland, locals sharing a warm welcome or communities nurturing their unique culture. We believe that by investing in our team and the local community, our business and wider economy benefits.

"The staff and community projects that we support have a real impact on the tourism economy in Edinburgh. We help coordinate projects across the sector to try and multiply the effect for all people, at all levels; visitors, staff and community."

Changes that Mercat Tours introduced for staff in recent years include:

- Becoming a profit sharing company with all guides and office staff receiving an equal share of annual profits.
- A company policy decision to discontinue any seasonal contracts. All staff now receive guaranteed year round contracts.
- Securing accreditation as a Living Wage employer, by going further than the UK government minimum wage and making sure that all staff, regardless of whether they are direct employees or third-party contracted staff; receive a minimum hourly

wage of £8.75. This rate is significantly higher than the statutory minimum for over 25s of £7.50 per hour introduced in April 2017 and is calculated according to the real costs of living.

- Introducing a professional Napier University Guide accreditation exclusive to Mercat Tours' guides, which had seven graduates in 2017. The accreditation is free for staff and can count towards a master's degree.
- Purchasing a company holiday home for use by staff and also charities selected by the business.
- Encouraging staff to participate in business development decisions and the designing of new walking tours and experiences.
- Delivering three months of extensive training for new guides supported by their more experienced colleagues.
- Providing access to external continual professional courses through membership of Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, Scottish Tourism Alliance (STA), and Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions (ASVA).
- Providing additional staff benefits including the cycle to work scheme, the Government Childcare Voucher Scheme and a company pension.
- Attaining Investors In People recognition in record time.
- Regularly offering paid placements to Queen Margaret University or Napier University students.

Explaining the impact such investment has had on their business, Kat said: "Since my father founded Mercat Tours in 1985 our small team has flourished into a fully-fledged family business thanks to the passion, dedication and hard work of our incredibly motivated and loyal team – a third of whom have been part of the Mercat family for over 10 years. When I took over as Managing Director in 2015, I wanted to make sure that the value of our people was fully recognised and rewarded. The commitment and pride this has built in the team is powerful and we'll use the momentum to grow a sustainable future.

Highlighting the impact this has had on staff loyalty Jane Calwell, finance added: "I've been working with Mercat Tours for over 15 years now and would not want to work for anyone else. They've really made me feel like part of the Mercat family. I'm currently studying for my Association of Chartered Certified Accountants qualification, supported by the company. I originally began work with Mercat as a storytelling guide but was given the opportunity to work within different departments to explore my own strengths and interests. I receive great rewards for putting my all into my role and I'm very proud to be part of the team."

Speaking of Mercat Tours' accreditation as a Living Wage employer, Peter Kelly, Director of the Poverty Alliance said: "We are delighted that Mercat Tours are a Living Wage employer. Over a year ago they joined the growing movement of over 1000 companies in Scotland who want to go further than the government minimum and recognise that Living Wage accreditation is the mark of a responsible employer. I hope more organisations follow their lead by becoming accredited.

"The real Living Wage is one of the key tools at our disposal to help make an impact on levels of in-work poverty in Scotland. There is a strong business case for paying the Living

Wage; but crucially allows those in work to become more included in society, better provide for their families, and feel that their value and hard work is recognised by their employer.”

In addition to investing in staff, Mercat supports a number of charities and social initiatives that focus on protecting Edinburgh’s heritage and enhanced the future enjoyment of the city. This includes:

- OneCity Trust’s fundraising campaign for a statue to honour one of Edinburgh’s most remarkable residents, Dr Elsie Inglis - a pioneering doctor and leading Scottish Suffragist
- Edinburgh World Heritage
- Macmillian Cancer Support
- The Grassmarket Community Project

For more information about Mercat Tours visit: www.mercattours.com

Ends

For more media information or interviews with Kat Brogan, Mercat Tour Guides, student placements or Mercat’s charity partners, contact Kirsty Innes, tel 07790 910 646, email Kirsty@kirstyinnespr.com

Notes to editors:

- *According to the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions (ASVA):
 - Analysis of statistics submitted by 232 of the organisation’s member sites for its annual ‘Visitor Trends Report’ confirms that over 30 million visits were made to those sites in Scotland in 2017, a rise of 9.7% over 2016 figures.
 - Sectors which fared particularly well in 2017 include castles and heritage sites (+14.7%), museums and galleries (+7.5%), gardens (+13.6%) and distilleries/whisky-related attractions (+11.8%).
<http://mediacentre.visitscotland.org/pressreleases/scottish-visitor-attractions-record-a-bumper-year-in-2017-2422449>
- Mercat Tours is Edinburgh’s original five-star history and ghost tour company. Established over 30 years ago, the company’s accredited guides bring Edinburgh’s stories to life every day.
- The company was first established in 1985 by history teacher, Des Brogan, and three other history teachers, when they identified there were no other existing walking tours of Edinburgh. They researched and created four walking tours, with two of them (Secrets of the Royal Mile and Ghosts & Ghouls) still running today.
- Today, Mercat Tours is run by Des’ daughter, Kat Brogan, and now offers a wide range of tours to suit any budget, group size and interest.
- Mercat Tours is the only Edinburgh tours company with access to **The Blair Street Underground Vaults**, which were filled with rubble in the early 19th century and were only rediscovered in the 1980s. Since then they’ve become known as one of Edinburgh’s most famous haunted sites and offer a fascinating insight into Edinburgh’s underground life.
- Groups are limited to an absolute maximum of 30 people, with tours running every day and in all weather. With each tour leaving from the Mercat Cross on the Royal Mile in

the heart of the city, visitors will find the city's shops and restaurants within easy reach. Tours vary in length from 45 minutes to two hours, with specially tailored tours available for groups.

All tours leave from the [Mercat Cross](#) on the Royal Mile – next to St Giles Cathedral.

- There are tours for every generation (from age 5 and up).
- More information on the accessibility on Mercat Tours can be found in its [Access Statement](#).
- French, German, Italian and Spanish tours are also available for a limited number of tours. Written translations are also available in Russian and Mandarin.

Awards

- VisitScotland Five Star rating – first achieved in 2007 and maintained ever since
- The Green Tourism Business Scheme – awarded gold every year since 2012 for the company's commitment to the environment and economic sustainability.
- Scottish Business in the Community – named SME of the Year in 2014 for the company's commitment to improving Scots' lives.
- Scottish Thistle Award 2016 – recognised for Skills and Training Development, as a third of Mercat Tours team members have been with the company for over 10 years.

Photography

A range of images of Mercat Tours can be found in this [Dropbox](#).

Social Media Platforms

Mercat Tours can be found on the following platforms:

www.facebook.com/MercatTours/

www.twitter.com/mercattoursltd

www.instagram.com/mercattours/

www.youtube.com/user/MercatToursLtd

The real Living Wage

- The real Living Wage for outside of London is currently £8.75 per hour. These figures are calculated annually by the Resolution Foundation and overseen by the [Living Wage Commission](#), based on the best available evidence on living standards in London and the UK.
- The accreditation programme in Scotland launched in April 2014. It is an initiative from The Poverty Alliance, in partnership with the Living Wage Foundation, and is funded by the Scottish Government
- Over 25,000 people in Scotland have had a pay rise thanks to the Living Wage Scotland. For an example of one of them click here: <https://youtu.be/MaagH0UPXNo>
- More than 1000 employers headquartered in Scotland have become accredited. Accreditation is voluntary. In the UK as a whole, there are almost 4000 accredited employers.
- Employers choose to pay the real Living Wage on a voluntary basis. The Living Wage enjoys cross-party political support.
- Accredited Living Wage employers in Scotland span private, public and third sectors. Prominent accredited employers include SSE, Standard Life, Barr's, and

Mackie's. SMEs make up 75% of the total number of employers and one in three local councils accredited. Find out more at www.scottishlivingwage.org/accredited.

- 467,000 figure of people earning under the real Living Wage is cited in: SPICe, November 2016
http://www.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/S5/SB_16-94_The_Living_Wage_facts_and_figures.pdf