



**REGIONSAMARBEIDET**  
Buskerud Telemark Vestfold



# BTV: Telemark Canal

**A Series of Cultural Tourism Projects in Norway**



# CONTENTS

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- 1 Prologue ..... 1**
- 2 Telemark Canal Project ..... 3**
- 3 Priorities ..... 4**
- 4 Benchmarking ..... 4**
- 5 Recommendations ..... 5**
  - 5.1. Extending Appeal ..... 5
  - 5.2. Understanding Optimum Cruise Trip Time ..... 5
  - 5.3. Building the Appeal of the Cruise Trip ..... 5
  - 5.4. Website ..... 6
  - 5.5. Brochure ..... 7
  - 5.6. Entry Signage ..... 7
  - 5.7. The Food Experience ..... 8
  - 5.8. Orientation and the Nature of the Experience ..... 8
  - 5.9. Exiting the Telemark Canal Experience ..... 9
  - 5.10. Café and Retail: the Centrality of Staff ..... 9
- 6 Conclusion ..... 10**

# 1 PROLOGUE

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## **Information about Glasgow Caledonian University – The Heyerdahl Institute Multi-purpose project & Buskerud-, Telemark- and Vestfold Project from 2004-2008.**

Since 2002 Glasgow Caledonian University has had a formal collaborative agreement with The Heyerdahl Institute to work together on a variety of projects. The University is one of Scotland's largest with its 15 000 students and has people from 70 countries studying in its eight schools. It can offer a wide range of services across all these areas ([www.caledonian.ac.uk](http://www.caledonian.ac.uk)).

The Heyerdahl Institute is a new international organisation, located in Thor Heyerdahl's home town of Larvik. According to the articles of association, it has three main objectives. It aims; to promote and continue the research and development ideas of Thor Heyerdahl; it would like to pave the way for international social dialogue through international conferences: and it hopes to increase the visibility and importance of Norway's international role. The institute was founded by Vestfold County Council in the year 2000( [www.heyerdahl-institute.no](http://www.heyerdahl-institute.no))

The cooperation the two organizations has led to a number of activities taking place, including:

- The creation of a new MSc Cultural Heritage Studies with a strong multi-disciplinary emphasis. The degree is based on the study of cultural heritage, management theory, collaboration between public and private bodies and sustainable resource management.
- Grants provided by Telemark and Vestfold County Council for Norwegian students to study this Masters degree.
- Formalisation of a Europeans Union Erasmus exchange between Glasgow Caledonian University and Telemark University College.  
Negotiation of an EU-contract between Glasgow Caledonian University and Buskerud University College.
- Personal and student exchange trips: Scotland to Norway and Norway to Scotland.
- Fact-finding trips by NHO-Vestfold, Innovation Norway and Vestfold County Council.

In 2004 The Heyerdahl Institute and Glasgow Caledonian University were successful in gaining funding for the Buskerud-, Telemark- and Vestfold ( BTV-project) to build on the success already achieved by working on the three main objectives:

- **To promote the building of international alliances in the Buskerud, Telemark and Vestfold region.**
- **To develop international educational co-operation across county borders**
- **To direct attention towards bridging the gap between business and research**

There has been made good progress in the majority of the planned activities from 2004-2006 and both Glasgow Caledonian and the Heyerdahl Institute are very happy with everything that has been achieved.

### **2007-2008**

For the last period of the project, 2007-2008 the organisations will be working together with the regional network for projects in Buskerud-, Telemark and Vestfold with a focus on cultural monuments and added value.

As a result of the Institute's relationship with Glasgow Caledonian University we are proud to include the Moffat Centre, as a part of wider Glasgow Caledonian University, in this pilot project. The Moffat Centre has worked in over 30 countries on more than 350 tourism projects. In this project period we will provide the Buskerud-, Telemark and Vestfold network with the following :

1. **Initial Workshop in Stavern, Norway 23-24 January** ( organised by Vestfold County council with workshop and lectures led by the Moffat Centre/GCU and the Heyerdahl Institute)
2. **Learning journey to Scotland 16-19 April** ( led by the Moffat Centre/GCU and the Heyerdahl Institute)
3. **Work shop in Norway**, developing and identifying future strategies for the BTV-projects for 5-10 years (**Autumn 2007** ) ( led by Vestfold County council, The Moffat Centre/GCU and the Heyerdahl Institute)

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## 2 TELEMARK CANAL PROJECT

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The Telemark Canal is an important part of Norwegian engineering history and played a significant role in transport and trade. Passengers are transported in historical boats at a slow speed through the channels and locks which comprise this fascinating history.



However, the product is highly seasonal and even in its peak season the customer base is predominantly Norwegian and ageing.

The type of experience offered is sedentary and has limited appeal for families or those wishing to enjoy more active pursuits. The on board experience is confined to on or below deck. The below deck experience is either bar or café based. On deck the offer is simply seating and viewing the passing landscape or journey through the locks.

The journey offers limited narrative commentary and there is no on board interpretation. The full journey from Skien to Dalen is 11 hours long. Such a trip is only for real enthusiasts. The most popular stretch of the canal is Olefoss to Lunde. This trip equates to approximately 1.5 hours and this accords with what is known for similar river based experiences.

### **3 PRIORITIES**

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The Canal needs to expand its existing customer base and increase visitor numbers.

### **4 BENCHMARKING**

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The canal product here is highly analogous to the river trip business. Internationally such businesses have faced many challenges in maintaining visitor numbers. People live busy hurried lives and even in leisure their commitment to trips of a sedentary nature will be time pressured. Accordingly, focus has to be given to highly scenic, entertaining shorter journeys with less emphasis given to journeys such as on the full extent of the canal.

There has been significant investment in adding haute cuisine and dining to canal or boat trips for evening or lunch trips. Furthermore, wine tasting on board trains or boats has become a novel addition to vineyard trips to provide differentiation and appeal.

The food offer is already developed however it is not significantly differentiated from other supply and is a satisfactory rather than a unique experience.

The award winning Jacobite Cruise business in Inverness (<http://www.jacobite.co.uk/faq.asp>) is perhaps the most profitable and enduringly popular of the private Scottish cruise business. This is a model for application of a high yield strategy for such tourism. It focuses attention on sales and marketing of the most profitable trips and then considers revenue generation potential from each element. Vital here is understanding the potential of the consumer to purchase either food, retail offers or further trips with discounts and frequent use rewards. This is one of the few water based businesses that utilises the revenue focused approach of budget airlines and merits closer scrutiny.

## 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Telemark Canal if it is to increase customer appeal has to become less formal and more fun oriented in the offer. If it remains as is currently the case it will simply fail to appeal to young people and families. The audience will continue to age and decline.

### 5.1. Extending Appeal

If visitation is to increase appeal must be broader

The website must major on the spectacular scenery of the most scenic element. The website should also feature:

- Fun stuff for Children
- On line booking
- On line shopping
- Blog sites and commentaries by satisfied visitors
- A meet the staff element (featuring pictures and individuals in their uniforms)

### 5.2. Understanding Optimum Cruise Trip Time

All of the UK research points towards focus on short 1 and 2 hour maximum trips. These are the easiest options for sale and distribution. If they are combined with on ground bike hire (to tour villages and cities) then the appeal of the offer increases substantially.

The shorter cruise offer should focus on the most scenic passages of the canal and those aspects where other elements (bike hire, quality food, wine tasting etc.) may be combined with the product. The appeal will be strengthened if dynamically packaged with other elements.

### 5.3. Building the Appeal of the Cruise Trip

There is no doubt that as a brand the Telemark Canal and the restored heritage vessels are undoubtedly attractive. However the visitor experience is not a huge success and if we are to seriously develop the appeal of this activity the focus has to begin with the visitor journey.

The consumer's perception of the organization is enhanced or undermined at various contact points with the organization.

Fundamentally, this Canal Voyage must understand that visitation is all about an experience for the consumer. This must be evident from:

- **Website**
- **Brochure**
- **Advert**
- **Arrival**
- **Entrance**

- **Arrival**
- **First contact with crew**
- **Retail**
- **Café.**

Every element of the experience has to be emphasized in each stage of the customer journey. From website to exit the experience has to put the consumer at the centre.

Currently you happen upon the wondrous elements of the voyage almost by chance. The interpretation and commentary is limited and the crew although friendly do not engage fully with consumers.

The canal has to become a 'must do' activity for visitors to Bergen, Stavanger and Oslo.

## 5.4. Website

The web must convey and better market the nature of the experience. It is the key **information and marketing** tool that merits development. The front page must feature the unique selling proposition of the Cruise:

- the scenery (with moving images)
- the on shore attractions that are passed
- the wonderful film set like experience of vessels
- the attractions and sites visited

The website should **major on the landscape, the interesting and extended narrative and fun.**

The site should offer a clear map and driving directions with numbered roads. Drive times to the nearest hour should also be included.

Detailed below are a number of key operating tips for web and e-mail marketing (to past customers) which may be of value:

- Keep written web passages short and absolutely no more than a 60 second read
- Do not use 'we' in the web site or in any e-newsletter
- Allow the site to fast load without images
- Ensure the company name and the offers are in the subject line of any e-newsletters
- Always use visual images as a superior alternative to text.
- Incorporate a video element of the water and the vessel
- Feature real customer and real locations
- Use lighting and evening trips for atmospheric imagery

The other key electronic marketing aid will be e-newsletters which should be mailed to **all email addresses** that have been collected. This is a most valuable marketing resource. These individuals have visited or made contact with Telemark Canal trips in the past and are thus well disposed to return, particularly, if the return is to a new and improved product.

The crucial data on the web are things like opening times and costs. The selling elements are images, water and fun / pleasure.

A good idea is to introduce a **10% discount voucher** on the web which can be printed off and returned to the counter on admission. This at least will allow managers to measure the significance of the web as an orientation and selling tool. An alternative to a 10% discount on admission is a printable voucher for free tea or coffee in the café. When presented to café staff it can be a prompt for them to sell cakes and other foods as an additional purchase. These **deals and special savers** must be prominent on the front page (preferably top right) to gain attention.

The generic website should also be high on Google search optimisation. Key search terms at the moment return tour operators and guided tours sites.

The aim here is to increase referrals. This can also be achieved via Google paid adverts (these will be found on the right hand side of the search title page). These are the 'click through' adverts which are only paid if the user clicks on the title. The other way of increasing search engine optimisation is increasing the number of references to Telemark Canal in [www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com) This is an increasingly influential peer review site that allows consumers to place reviews, discuss and recommend accommodation, attractions and activities throughout the world. Currently Telemark representation is very limited.

Referencing an attraction will increase citation index in the search engine and will help with search engine optimisation (listing in the search engine).

The **front page** should also feature key events links to a page detailing when and where events will take place. For example, the evening dining cruises, wine appreciation, etc.

The website and the brochure are at the heart of the experience and should feature blogs and appreciative comments of those group and corporate bookings that have seen and enjoyed the experience.

An e-blast / e-newsletter campaign is recommended to the Bed and Breakfast, Farm house and hotel accommodation organizations and independent operators within a 3 hour drive time.

## 5.5. Brochure

Any brochure for the Canal and travelling on it must emphasise the water and stunning scenery as key elements of the experience.

The brochure must also feature the website address, opening hours, and an attractive excerpt from the menu and of course a clear and accurate map. Drive times and actual route titles are vitally important (as is the case with any website).

## 5.6. Entry Signage

The **experience of entering** the cruise at the moment is somewhat low key. There is a clear need to emphasise the entrance and welcome visitors via staff in uniform.

The key here is the appearance and approach of the staff. Every member of staff has to become immersed in a much stronger customer focused culture.

The period and the style of the vessel, the majesty of the scenery merit such an approach. If staff have bought into the concept of putting the customer first then they are much more likely to be enthusiastic and pass on this enthusiasm to users.

The current uniform, attitude and narrative is carried out in a less than enthusiastic (albeit friendly) way and fails to convince visitors or build buy in.

In order to improve quality of service an input on customer service training would be recommended that can be delivered across a short period. Such training would provide the basis for staff training to be delivered and service standards to be maintained. It should be developed as a training resource initially and built on in future years.

It is a foundation for change and development to move the cruise to focus on extending customer appeal and creating much more of an experience than is presently the case.

## 5.7. The Food Experience

The **Café has to get better both as an eating experience and as a part of the greater Cruise experience**. This can be done without a radical refurbishment and can be achieved by better orientation and guidance in terms of menu content and eye appeal.

The **food offer** currently lacks promotion and merchandising. It is simply divorced from the Canal experience and has little or no linkage to what is on offer.

The **menu** should link to the Canal with historical or historically created dishes. The staff can be used to reinforce this. Local foods and fruits should be used where possible and the offer should be differentiated by this local identity.

The **merchandising of cakes, salads, quiches** etc are vital to increasing sales. Core items such as a selection of cakes should be always available and should provide a backbone for the food offer along with home made soup and bread. The Canal can be a cold experience and hot soup if merchandised appropriately will do much to build appeal. Even in summer it is a mainstay of visitor attraction catering in the UK. Furthermore it is an ideal way to increase profitability (by utilizing vegetables and waste from previous service offers).

The **cake sales** could possibly be significantly enhanced by the offer of cakes in the form of an Afternoon Tea in the Edwardian style. This is to combine scones, jam and cream with cakes and sandwiches on a three tiered plate. This is a heritage approach to the service of high return items. They look appealing to other diners and enhance sales significantly. A fully constructed Afternoon Tea should be displayed at the counter.

## 5.8. Orientation and the Nature of the Experience

The recommendations here are all about marketing and getting wider awareness of the experience.

The development of events offers a real chance to build the appeal of the Canal and trips on board outside of traditional voyage times. This can begin with safe and established themes such as:

**Easter, Mothers Day and Fathers Day** have all been effectively used in tourist promotion in the UK and Ireland. Essentially, Easter is built upon as the opening date wherein there are a range of children's activities undertaken and treats for parents are included.

The **Mother and Father's Day** appeal can be developed around allowing either the Mother or Father to travel free on that date if accompanied by another paying adult. The task then is to attempt to market lunch or Afternoon Tea to such parties.

The potential of **Children's Parties** should not be underestimated and the idea of a **Junior Detective hunt** with a simplified crime theme could be a reasonably unusual pull factor for parents and grand parents.

The child appeal of the vessel can be significantly enhanced by simple additions such as 'Dressing up clothes' and simple toy merchandise that relate to the nautical theme.

Anniversary, Birthday and celebratory occasions and the possibility of exclusive use should be marketed in the form of an inclusive package. The key here is inclusive pricing which appears to offer a deal.

Marketing the product to companies for away days and specific events again offers a range of potential sales options. The pricing formula will be critical and the event sale should propose three menu scenarios with and without alcohol. The aim here is to offer a packaged range of menu items which combine clearly all elements with an inclusive price. The a la carte menu encourages negotiation and barter which is time consuming and invariably leads to price reduction.

The simplest menu offer should combine in one packaged price:

- Cruise charge
- Food
- Beverage

This type of group menu can be offered along with a personally guided tour or an Exclusive Tasting experience (e.g. wine, malt whisky etc). The meal can easily be combined with a briefing on the beverages and the history / geography of the area.

Once again emphasis has to be placed on the Telemark Canal Experience and when visitors enter this unique activity service and friendliness should be second to none.

## **5.9. Exiting the Telemark Canal Experience**

In returning to the analysis of the customer journey the end of the visit must be as pleasurable and theatrical as the beginning. As visitors return to dry land at the end of the experience this is the key time to give them a positive conclusion and a reason to return.

Critical in building the customer data base will be data capture on exit. This will be best achieved with an incentive. The aim being to get customers to leave their email addresses. The incentive being the potential to win a case of wine / beer in a draw. It can be strengthened if reinforced by a verbal request from staff.

Existing customers have the greatest potential to become repeat users and the relationship has to be built. This is initially via an e-newsletter / e-brochure with discounted and new offers to return.

## **5.10. Café and Retail: the Centrality of Staff**

Any attempt to drive up revenues and performance of Café and Retail sales will ultimately be dependent upon staff. Staff are critical to maximising sales and investment in training and developing of people is strongly recommended as a major element of the way forward.

The Telemark Canal is a unique and appealing attraction that does have real potential to grow customers if marketing is increased.

Other marketing efforts should be focused on:

- On board marketing for in-bound passenger ships and at departure ports (via brochure and poster display)
- Accommodation marketing aimed at bed and breakfast, self catering and hotel operators (via brochure distribution, electronic links and customer discounts)

## **6 CONCLUSION**

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The potential here is great but the product merits significant investment in content, image, staff development and market awareness. It would be a great honour to assist in such a development for this iconic attraction.