



the
**SOCIAL
TRAVEL
SUMMIT**

2017

**KITZBÜHEL, AUSTRIA
THINK TANK REPORT**

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ABOUT THE SOCIAL TRAVEL SUMMIT

The Social Travel Summit (STS) is an exclusive annual two-day gathering of travel & tourism professionals, leading travel bloggers & online influencers from around the world. Its purpose is to promote and curate high-level discussions about the future of online travel marketing.

The bloggers and influencers are specially selected based on the high quality of the content produced, online reach and track record in working with the tourism industry and the summit provides a unique opportunity for industry professionals to connect with them and build mutually beneficial relationships.

The first Social Travel Summit (114 delegates) was held in Leipzig, Germany in April 2014. The second (136 delegates) was held in Hamburg, Germany in April 2015. The third edition (111 delegates) was held in Inverness, UK in September 2016 and this 2017 edition (147 delegates) was held in Kitzbuehel, Tirol, Austria in September 2017.

The Social Travel Summit is an initiative of iambassador in collaboration with Travel Dudes and Reiseblogger Kollektiv.



'Exploring how we can improve the relationship between travel influencers and the global travel industry'

ABOUT THE THINK TANK

BACKGROUND

During the four years since its inception, the Social Travel Summit has become established as a leader in its field. Since the event attracts high-calibre attendees, it is essential that the Think Tank is used as a space where delegates are encouraged to think about the bigger issues in tourism beyond their immediate field of work.

The aim of the Think Tank is to explore a range of issues surrounding the relationship between travel influencers and their clients, notably destination marketing organisations (DMOs).

THE STS THINK TANK: HOW IT WORKS

This edition of the Think Tank followed a similar format to those of the previous three years. Prior to the event, all delegates were informed about the Think Tank contents via the event's Facebook page. A total of 30 participants were invited, composed of an equal mixture of travel influencers and DMOs.

The total number of participants was capped to ensure that the three groups would be kept to a reasonable size in order to ensure a productive discussion.

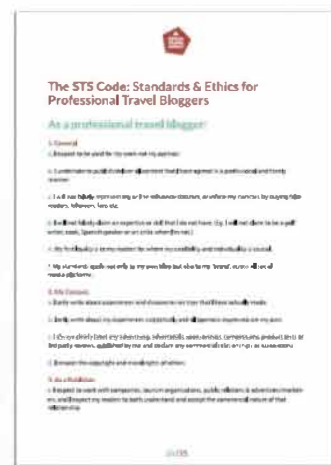
At the start of the session, the Think Tank facilitator Peter Jordan gave an opening presentation to introduce the three topics and provide some context for the discussions. Following this, the participants divided into three pre-defined, mixed groups and were allocated to a table.

A Topic Leader led the discussion at each table, and every 30 minutes the Topic Leaders switched table, briefed the delegates and steered the conversation.



THINK TANK REPORTS

The discussions from the Think Tank are captured in a report in the hope that they may benefit the wider travel industry.



We strongly recommend readers to consult the reports from previous editions of the Think Tank, as these have addressed and given useful recommendations on a wide variety of issues including:

- **HOW TO CHOOSE INFLUENCERS**
- **TRANSPARENCY AND ETHICS**
- **INTERNAL STRUCTURES OF DMOs**
- **TACKLING OVERTOURISM**
- **IMPROVING CLIENT-BLOGGER COMMUNICATION**
- **MONEY AND BUDGETS**
- **THE VALUE OF INFLUENCERS BEYOND STATISTICS**
- **WORKING WITH LOCAL BUSINESSES**
- **THE FUTURE OF TRAVEL INFLUENCING**
- **PLUS:
THE STS CODE OF STANDARDS & ETHICS FOR PROFESSIONAL TRAVEL BLOGGERS**

Download all STS Think Tank Reports free of charge at:
www.thesocialtravelsummit.com/think-tank

TOPIC 1

PUTTING TOGETHER THE PERFECT VISIT

BACKGROUND

A successful visit by the influencer to a destination is fundamental: for creating great content, for ensuring happy local partners (DMO management, local businesses), for ensuring great value from the money spent, and to setting up a long-term partnership between the influencer and their client.

Influencers have long argued that a visit by an influencer is not, and should not be 'just another press trip', but what is the difference? What magic ingredients are needed to ensure that an influencer visit goes smoothly and gets results?

In this edition of the Social Travel Summit Think Tank, we wanted to find out what, based on the collective experience of the travel influencers and DMOs in attendance, were the crucial lessons that they had learned about putting together the perfect visit.

TOPIC 1: PUTTING TOGETHER THE PERFECT VISIT

Destinations have long invited journalists and more recently, travel influencers to visit and sample what they have to offer. The visit (sometimes referred to as a 'fam trip' or 'press trip') is at the heart of the relationship between the influencer and his or her client. For this reason it has also featured as a topic in previous editions of the Social Travel Summit Think Tank. Conversations have previously centred on communication, planning the itinerary and content and ensuring that influencers meet the right people while on the visit. We recommend that you review the reports from previous Think Tanks to find out more.

The following list is not intended to be an exhaustive guide, but rather a quick list of 'lessons learned' by those who have many years of experience in planning and carrying out influencer visits.

PLANNING THE VISIT

"Influencers: if you complain about the itinerary during or after the visit, it's too late."

-Manuela Mörtenbäck, Tirol Werbung

Influencers can sometimes arrive at a destination for a visit to find that the accommodation or attractions don't match their audience, or are unlikely to offer the chance of a good story. They might find that the itinerary is too rigid, or doesn't offer enough spare time to produce or distribute their content. Sometimes it's not even clear why an itinerary was put together in a certain way, or what core objectives the DMO is hoping to achieve with it.

TIMING

"We're writing for travellers, but not travelling like travellers."

Influencer visits can often become a whirlwind tour, with a week's worth of tours, attractions and hotel stays compressed into two days. This type of 'drive-by shooting' (jumping out of the bus to take photos) can often lead to stressed influencers, cookie-cutter content and little room for creativity. When visits are paid according to a daily rate, DMOs are understandably reluctant to pay for 'free time', however it is more valuable to an influencer than they may realise.

RECOMMENDATIONS

COMMUNICATION IS KEY:

It is important for DMOs and influencers to speak in advance of the trip with a phone call before arrival, or meeting before the visit starts in order to understand each other's objectives, go through the itinerary and address any planning problems in advance.

DMOs: PLAN AHEAD:

An influencer will be much more effective if the itinerary matches their audience well. Try to reflect this in your itinerary planning, and provide the itinerary as early as possible to ensure that you can discuss it before the visit commences.

INFLUENCERS:

DO YOUR HOMEWORK! As soon as you receive the itinerary, research the destination, the places that you'll be visiting and highlight any potential problems in advance.

TIMING – RECOMMENDATIONS

FREE TIME IS ALSO AN ACTIVITY:

Periods of free time should be factored into an itinerary to allow influencers to explore freely, create, curate and share content, rest and freshen up. This should be indicated in the itinerary and if possible, discussed with the influencer in advance.

FREE TIME CAN BOOST CREATIVITY AND PRODUCTIVITY:

Time spent exploring, relaxing and reflecting allows influencers the time and space to do what they do best: get creative and show off the 'hidden corners' of a destination that they might not otherwise find. Time to rest and eat properly also helps the influencer to be healthy, happy and productive while on the road.

EXTRA TIME IS WELCOME:

Some influencers, for example family bloggers certainly need extra time to allow children to rest and play.

PROJECT FEE vs. DAY RATES:

Paying the influencer a fee for the whole project as opposed to a day rate may help avoid packing too much into a short space of time.

DIVIDING GROUPS:

When travelling with a large group of journalists/influencers/TV crews, consider dividing them into groups to allow each to move at their own pace.

FLEXIBLE MEAL TIMES:

Where the itinerary allows for this, meal vouchers instead of specific restaurant stops allow influencers to explore more freely and use their meal time effectively.

RESPONSIBLE TIMING:

Influencers must use their free time wisely and responsibly to allow for maximum productivity while on a visit.

MEETING THE LOCALS

Local people: historians, shop owners, celebrities, journalists, radio presenters, sports stars and of course bloggers can offer a rich source of insights, stories and local history. They can also help promote the work of the blogger and raise awareness of their work among their own local followers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

SCHEDULE TIME TO MEET LOCAL PEOPLE:

Which local person/people could the influencer meet who matches their audience well?

BRING ALONG LOCAL BLOGGERS:

They can offer valuable insights on the local area from an authentic local person's point of view. They can also help to create and share content.

BEING CLEAR ON CONTENT

Sometimes content is produced as a result of a visit without the DMO being aware. Expectations of what content should be produced and when may be too rigid.

RECOMMENDATIONS

DISCUSS CONTENT:

As well as the details of the itinerary, DMOs and influencers should establish clear guidelines about when content will be shared (during and after the visit).

KEEP DMOs IN THE LOOP:

It is the influencer, or the influencer's representative (eg. collective/agency)'s responsibility to inform DMOs of the content they are sharing that results from their visit.

“When on the road, influencers, TV crews and journalists all move at different speeds. Dividing them into groups gives each the time they need to do their job.”

-Michael Collins, Travel Media Ireland

TOPIC 2

GOING BEYOND CONTENT:

THE ROLE OF INFLUENCERS IN TRAINING & PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

BACKGROUND

As we explained in last year's Think Tank report, 'DMOs are gradually shifting from being creators and managers to being curators, facilitators and enablers'. In essence, as consumers inspire and inform each other on where to travel (by sharing their own content and that of influencers), DMOs are required to turn their focus more toward the management of their destination.

Among the many aspects of this management, we can count training (for example, helping local businesses to improve their marketing efforts), and product development (for example, creating a cluster of experiences for visitors to enjoy, or developing a series of experiences along a particular route). Well-travelled and highly-skilled in things such as content creation and distribution, influencers could help DMOs fulfil this role, while developing their own business.

This type of work moves beyond what influencers have traditionally done and is relatively new, so we wanted to find out to what extent it is occurring now, and how it could be further developed in the future.

TOPIC 2: GOING BEYOND CONTENT

As a result of this edition of the Think Tank, we discovered that in addition to producing and distributing content, some travel influencers are carrying out the following roles:

- Micro conferences / round tables
- Mystery customer, feedback to management
- Crowd sourcing advice on a product from their own followers
- Advice on creating and managing campaigns
- Social media tuition (there's always something new)
- Testing new products
- Creating their own concept or route and branding it
- Doing formal consulting
- Giving presentations or lectures at colleges / universities

Doing this kind of work is not for everyone. Many influencers prefer to stick to their blog alone, however engaging in this type of work can help influencers to diversify their business and improve industry awareness of what they do.

For DMOs, working with influencers in the first place may mean stepping out of their comfort zone, and they may not yet be ready to progress to this level of cooperation.

It is also worth considering that within DMOs, tasks such as marketing, training and product development are divided across various departments, and the budgetary procedures required to set up this type of work can be very restrictive.

In spite of this, it is clear from this Think Tank that this type of cooperation between influencers and DMOs is gradually becoming more common.

HOW TO MAKE IT WORK

We asked the Think Tank participants to identify the essential ingredients to making training and product development a success. They highlighted the following factors:

LONGEVITY AND EXPERIENCE:

Understandably, influencers who have been working the longest and have built up a reputation as being a great person to work with stand the best chance of winning the trust of DMOs.

TRUST:

Frequently, public money and institutional reputation is at stake here, so DMO representatives need to be sure that their investment is secure, and that the influencer will deliver solid results. Trust is most often built up over time, as a result of multiple visits by the influencer to a particular destination. An influencer's credentials such as meeting industry standards or having won awards are also useful for this.

UNDERSTANDING EACH OTHER'S LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES:

Influencers need to be aware of what a DMO is ultimately trying to achieve by, for example, setting up a training course, or seeking to cluster certain types of product together. Meanwhile, a DMO needs to understand that when an influencer offers to work in this way, it is part of the influencer's own professional development.

INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING:

Attitudes and approaches to giving professional advice can vary greatly between cultures, and influencers should be aware of this. Language skills and local knowledge are vital too.

AMBITION AND AN OPEN MIND:

Both sides need to have targets, and a willingness to try new things.

STARTING UP

We asked the Think Tank participants to consider the easiest route to setting up this type of cooperation between influencers and DMOs:

INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS AMONG LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS:

Often this type of work may spring from an informal gathering with local stakeholders, for example at a hosted dinner. However influencers were keen to point out that clear lines should be drawn between informal advice and paid training work.

DEMONSTRATING PAST SUCCESS:

Influencers can best show their credentials by creating a portfolio of their work, or demonstrating their experience from past campaigns.

SHARING CONTENT:

Local partners are more likely to be receptive to working with an influencer if they fully understand who they are and what they have produced. Thus, a basic understanding about the work of travel influencers is required. As with topic one, this highlights the value of introducing an influencer to a wide range of people during the visit.

FOR INFLUENCERS TO CONSIDER:

Before offering advisory or training services, influencers need to be aware of what this will require, and how they can ensure long-term success.

PROFESSIONALISM & PRESENTATION:

Working with a DMO on an advisory basis will require high standards of professionalism. It will also require an understanding of the DMO's long-term objectives, and skill in writing proposals and reporting results.

UNIQUENESS:

What is your unique selling point? What insights can you uniquely offer through training sessions with local businesses or to a DMO?

RECORD YOUR RESULTS:

Record and show your achievements in training and product development, for your current and potential future clients.

LONG-TERM GOALS:

Embarking on this type of work means considering about your long-term goals and your professional ambitions as a travel influencer.

“If we do a campaign that is unpaid, then we still think about how we can create value for influencers, for example by introducing them to local partners as potential business leads”

-Inna-Pirjetta Lahti, Nordic Bloggers Exchange

TOPIC 3

IN TIMES OF TROUBLE:

CRISIS & RECOVERY

BACKGROUND

In recent years, more and more destinations have had to deal with a crisis and then start the process of recovery. Barcelona, London, Paris, Manchester, Berlin, Stockholm and other smaller cities have seen terrorist attacks which have shaken the local population as well as confidence among potential visitors. Terrorist attacks are not the only crisis that can befall a destination. Natural disasters (eg. earthquakes, forest fires, floods and storms), health epidemics, wars, strikes, cyber-attacks, political revolutions and the media hype that accompanies all these, can all have serious consequences for destinations around the world.

During the first few hours and days following a crisis such as a terrorist attack, the priority for government authorities is to contain the situation, preserve life and ensure that panic does not spread. Later on, the focus moves to recovery and encouraging people to start visiting again. We know that influencer marketing is becoming better understood and more widespread. At the same time, unfortunately crises and recovery seem to be becoming 'the new normal'. So we wanted to know how the two might fit together. How can influencers help most effectively during a recovery? What can influencers and DMOs do to plan before a crisis hits?

TOPIC 3: IN TIMES OF TROUBLE: CRISIS & RECOVERY

DMOs of all types attend the Social Travel Summit; national tourism organisations, city marketing bureaux and regional tourism organisations representing rural or coastal destinations. A few have already had experience in having to manage communications during a crisis, or carrying out marketing activities to help their destination recover. Many influencers present had found themselves in a destination during some kind of crisis, or on a visit shortly after one had occurred.

There was agreement on all sides that destinations of all kinds need to start planning what they will do in the event of a crisis. The STS Think Tank Participants highlighted that in a crisis situation sensitivity is required, especially where there have been injuries or loss of life. Some crises may be political in nature and should be handled carefully, or avoided all together. Influencers highlighted that they always seek to share the type of messages that their audience will be receptive too, and that fit with their general output.

The group highlighted the following actions for consideration before, during and after a crisis has struck:

PLANNING AHEAD PUT TOGETHER YOUR 'RECOVERY COALITION'.

Talk to your colleagues and local business partners about different types of incident that could potentially occur in the destination and what steps you would take together during the hours and days that follow. Consider lines of communication and how you can help local businesses and their customers to stay updated with official advice during a crisis situation. Planning in advance will make the whole process more intuitive if you have to put the plans into action.

Influencers could also be part of your recovery coalition. If they have a close relationship with your destination, they may be willing to share updates during a time of crisis and recovery.

WHEN CRISIS HITS

“During a crisis situation, it is important to repeat official advice and stick to the facts”

-Emma Mead, VisitBritain

STICK TO THE FACTS:

During the hours following a crisis such as a terrorist attack or natural disaster, authorities need to preserve life, facilitate access for the emergency services and stop panic from spreading further. For this reason, the normal procedure is for authorities to stick to the facts, explaining exactly what has happened, and making it clear which areas are closed to the public (and also which areas continue to be open as normal).

It is important to avoid giving opinions or spreading rumours. During this time, DMOs such as VisitBritain have a policy of reverting to share advice from the police or other local authorities that are handling a crisis.

There is a role for influencers here of helping to share official advice. To ensure they get it, DMOs should consider including influencers that they know and trust on their crisis communications lists.

The STS Think Tank participants also suggested that if used with sensitivity, live sharing could help to reduce panic and show which areas are unaffected. This would entail a DMO building relationships with local influencers (who have expert status for that destination) during the crisis phase, and both local and foreign influencers for the recovery phase.

RECOVERY MODE

Once the immediate crisis period has passed, destinations usually turn their attention to recovery; attracting visitors to return and restore their confidence in visiting. Crisis communications is all about relaying the facts, while recovery communications is more about attracting visitors through giving opinion.

Of course, the length of the recovery period depends on the nature of the original crisis and how much damage to tourism infrastructure occurred. Sometimes this may take weeks, or possibly months. The greatest role for influencers is when destinations switch to recovery mode. The STS Think Tank participants made the following observations about this:

GOODWILL GOES A LONG WAY:

It's during tough times that DMOs turn to their closest friends in marketing, and their most loyal inbound markets. Sometimes they may be in a position to activate some budget for recovery marketing, but not always. In this case, DMOs may rely on influencers' goodwill to re-share or re-use previously un-published content from a prior visit to a destination.

TRUST IS AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT:

The issue of trust cuts both ways: DMOs need to be sure that at a time of need, the influencers that they work with will be able to work with professionalism and sensitivity. At the same time, influencers expect DMOs to be clear about their objectives, and to be sure that the recovery messaging that they are asked to give can be trusted by their audience.

AUTHENTICITY IS AS IMPORTANT AS EVER:

The fact that a crisis has occurred doesn't remove the need for influencers to give their honest account of what they see, as this is what their audience values most. This means that DMOs must still allow influencers the time and space for capturing the essence of the destination at the time, and being up front with their followers about what they see.

“Where an influencer has a good relationship with a particular DMO, and sees the opportunity for helping them through recovery, this can be a good time to create a pitch”

- Erik van Erp, Aroundtheglobe.nl

TO PAY OR NOT TO PAY?

There was general agreement among the STS Think Tank participants that if a DMO wished to re-post content, share owned content or content collected on a previous visit, influencers should allow this as a free 'favour' to a friend in need. However, where a DMO required new content, especially if a new visit was required, this should be paid.

VISITING DURING A TIME OF RECOVERY:

There was widespread agreement among all groups that visiting a destination during a time of recovery meant using tact and sensitivity, especially where there had been injury or loss of life. Any efforts to 'paper over the cracks' of a tragedy by an influencer could spark a backlash. With this in mind, all groups agreed that it was even more important than usual to engage the local community in contributing to stories that would become content, and where possible, to tell the story of recovery itself.

“The story of recovery is a fascinating story in itself”

-Matt Long, Landlopers.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to offer our sincere thanks to the following participants:

MODERATOR:

Peter Jordan, Founder, GenCTraveller

TOPIC LEADERS:

Becki Enright, Founder, Borders of Adventure

Elena Paschinger, Founder, Creativelena

Emma Mead, Head of Global PR, VisitBritain

PARTICIPANTS:

The organisers would like to thank all of the participants in the STS Think Tank 2017 for their insights offered during the session.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter Jordan is a consultant and researcher specialised in the curation and interpretation of travel trends, for diverse clients from inside and outside the tourism industry. With a background in industry education as well as marketing and communications at various tourism industry associations, he has gained a panoramic view of global travel, including the influence of consumer trends on travel behaviour. He started his career working for the United Nations World Tourism Organization in Madrid and has also worked for the World Youth Student and Educational Travel Confederation, as well as the Pacific Asia Travel Association.

In 2014 Peter founded the travel trends site GenCTraveller and also became an international associate of Toposophy, piloting the company's research. He has built a strong reputation for delivering insights on tourism, marketing and consumer trends that are trustworthy, thought-provoking and inspire people to take action.



SOCIAL TRAVEL SUMMIT 2017 PARTNERS

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the following partners of the Social Travel Summit 2017



CLOSING WORDS

The fourth edition of the Social Travel Summit was held in Kitzbühel, Tirol, Austria in September 2017. After eight months of preparations, it was great to see the influencers and industry delegates arriving in beautiful Kitzbühel, bringing with them an invaluable amount of skills, knowledge and experience. As the Organiser of the Summit, I see our role as a facilitator who creates the right framework and conditions in which all delegates feel like family and where they can be honest in their opinions and feel free to share.

This year, we created a new session before the start of the conference to introduce newcomers to STS and to kick-start the networking process. I guess we struck the right chord again this year as the excitement and eagerness among the delegates to learn from one another was palpable. It was an amazing experience for me to witness the thought-provoking discussions and insightful presentations, and see the issues and recommendations expertly summed up in this report.

Since its inception in 2014, the Social Travel Summit has established itself as the platform where professional travel influencers and industry gather to learn and help shape the future of digital marketing. This year, delegates scored the conference 4.6 out of a maximum of 5 points! I'm proud of this achievement and the excellent work of the STS Organising Team, the iambassador Management Team and our partner networks.

A special thank you goes to the STS Team: Janice Waugh, Tracey Nesbitt, Melvin Boecher, Nicholas Montemaggi and Angelika Schwaff. I would also like to thank our supporters, Austrian National Tourist Office, Tirol Werbung, Kitzbühel Tourism, Lufthansa Group (specifically Austrian Airlines), and Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau - STS Kitzbühel would not have been possible without you! Another special thank you goes to Peter Jordan for doing a brilliant job in moderating the Think Tank and compiling this report. Last but not least, I would like to thank all the influencers and delegates for helping to make STS Kitzbühel a great success!

See you in 2018!

Keith Jenkins
CEO, iambassador
Head of the STS Organising Team



FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE SOCIAL TRAVEL SUMMIT:

Leipzig 2014: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQch_6zXIH8

Hamburg 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRt39AZ9A4c>

Inverness 2016: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0Mhqa6qFLg>

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