

WHAT DOES COMMUNITY MEAN TO YOU?

After the 'Will They ...Won't They 'drama of my Scottish kinfolk, I turn to another significant date for our industry: Saturday, 27 September World Tourism Day and its focus on community development.

With the plethora of anniversary days we can be excused for feeling they are simply stunts dreamt up by PR's. But if anyone should pay attention to this particular day it's the travel and tourism industry. This year I believe the focus is particularly relevant to what is going on in our own backyards - as well as across the world.

The clue is in the words COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT. But what does that mean? How can the industry contribute to this? In any case, why is it so important?

The nature of humanity is that it actually thrives on community, starting with our families, our villages, our country and then our engagement with wider communities all structured in the same way, from grass roots upwards. We often disregard the significant individual contribution we can bring to our own communities, supporting our local schools and businesses, volunteering at football or scouts clubs, being mindful of our neighbours, helping improve local amenities, celebrating local customs, local cuisine. All these help protect and improve our cultural heritage and the place we call home, making them better places to live in and better places to visit.

Tourism is simply an extension of this community philosophy, reducing distances between people but at the same time enhancing cultural understanding across borders. Tourism is the most informal and interesting way to educate people both at home and away. The impact this has in terms of our global society cannot be underestimated.

Working in the tourism sector and third sector with the international water aid charity Just a Drop for many years, I've seen for myself the power of community engagement at grass roots level and the bottom line is that without it, things don't get done in a lasting, sustainable way.

As an industry we sit in a privileged position that gives us an insight into other people's lives that others do not experience at both a macro and micro level and my simple World Tourism Day message to you is to encourage the use of that knowledge, making it count.

By making a difference in destinations and communities we engage and empower our businesses and staff with a compelling vision of a better tomorrow.

I'm a very proud Scot, always have been, but I also respect and value the UK and what we collectively represent, regardless of our different cultures.

If ever we had a demonstration of the democratic strength of community feeling it's in the last four weeks. In a world which at times seems terrifyingly fractured, the value each of us can bring to the life of a community can be powerful both at home and away.

It surely gives us hope for the future.

Fiona Jeffery OBE

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