

The

Evolving TSP TravelServicesProvider ...

A fruitless trawl through the latest electronic travel media output leaves STAN contributor Matt Bates gazing out of the office/bedroom window on a bright Spring day, drinking a cappuccino and thinking 'there must be *something* useful I can write about, this week!' The view across Troon bay provides an answer.

Inspiration is stubbornly absent this morning, and currently, I'm lacking the usual 'bee in my bonnet' over some contentious travel sector issue. My desk in my little home office faces Arran, and the island looks spectacular today. Over to the left of my field of view, the P + O catamaran from Northern Ireland is approaching Troon harbour at the end of its morning run. It'll be back again tonight, having just re-started its daily service this week. Gradually, nostalgia sets in, filling the inspirational void ...

'MASTERCHEF' MASTERCLASS During my time as a travel agent in Glasgow, I was introduced to a Scots lady called Sue Lawrence – BBC Television's 'Masterchef' of the year in question, and now a successful author of cookery books. Having always been interested in good food and cooking (the latter as a spectator sport, mostly!) I was keen to make the most of the contact, and to cut a long story short we created a themed short break, centred on a well-known country house hotel, as part of which Sue would give a couple of cookery masterclasses. We would sell it through a national newspaper. It was a great project, and very profitable.

DETOX FOR THE SOUL On the Holy Isle, just to the east of Arran, is the Samye Ling Buddhist Centre, which offers weekend meditational retreats – perfect for the stressed-out and the world-weary. It strikes me to wonder, would it sell - as a short (respite) break - to busy professionals looking for a different experience in these more 'abstemious' times?

NOSTALGIA – STILL WHAT IT USED TO BE? Would your 'local-kid, made -good' clients go back to the 'doon-the-watter' holiday resorts of their childhood for a nostalgic weekend with a group of their current friends? Would a bunch of them go back to Arran for the weekend – not to camp as they did in their drunken teens, but maybe to Auchrannie Spa Resort, off-season? Would they hop on an (executive) coach and take the P + O Cat over to Belfast for dinner in Paul Rankin's uber-cool restaurant and a couple of days' sightseeing? I believe they just might, if it was packaged with care and marketed cleverly. Irony as a USP – why not?

You may not – as a well-travelled, dynamic and discerning evolving travel services provider – be remotely interested in my youthful forays into themed departures packaging. That's OK! If you're well-travelled, though, you're probably a bit jaded too. If you're dynamic, you're almost certainly open-minded; and if you're discerning, then quality and interest are going to be more important to you than location and

fashion. It may just be that this year, at the lower end of the ABC1 demographic, your regular clients will be less adventurous in their aspirations for, and spending on their second holiday. They may still want it to have an element of 'cool', nonetheless – so why not Arran, the Holy Isle and a weekend of meditation ... and why don't *you* package it?

There's something very alluring about a 12% margin, don't you think?