

# HOLIVANS



Recently awarded the Destination Lincolnshire Tourism Award for Camping, Glamping and Holiday Park of the Year 2022, Holivans has successfully established a family atmosphere that not only sees guests return year-on-year, but also delivers an impressive staff retention rate.

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**Holivans** is a multi-award winning caravan park on the Lincolnshire coast generating 90% repeat business and appeal to both budget and high-end visitors. However, investment in its staff has been one of the hallmarks of its success.

This best practice guide has been commissioned as a series as part of the "Coastal Sustainability through careers and business skills in Greater Lincolnshire" Coastal Communities Fund project.







# SETTING THE SCENE

Situated close to the resort of Mablethorpe in Lincolnshire, established in 1951, and now operated by its fourth generation owner. The park spreads over more than 10 acres with 153 privately owned caravans, 5 twin unit lodges, each with their own outdoor hot tub, patio, and garden as well as 6 caravans for hire, 8 touring caravan / motorhome pitches and a glamping pod.

Proud to call itself a multi-generational park, Holivans caters for holidays for children, parents, and grandparents. With up to 90% of bookings repeat business, the park attracts holidaymakers who remember spending their own childhood there and are now returning with their families. As a result, staff and customers know each other by name, creating a relaxed and friendly environment.

*“We are not corporate, and we think that is to our advantage - we create a family feel, everyone knows everyone”*

The business has evolved in recent years to offer both affordable accommodation and high-end luxury units to appeal to a wider audience, as it always looks to adapt and stay ahead of its competition. Dog-friendly holidays have proved particularly successful, with the park now providing free doggy welcome packs on arrival and a new heated outdoor dog shower.

Holivans employs a team of 15 during peak season, most staff are seasonal, however the business successfully fosters a supportive and rewarding workplace which, combined with a willingness to invest in skills and training, has developed a committed workforce that returns each year.



# APPROACH

## **DELIVERING THE BEST FOR HOLIDAYMAKERS**

Holivans' main motivation for upskilling and training its team members is to ensure that guests have an amazing holiday and choose to return. To facilitate this, the business recognises that the park must be friendly, welcoming, clean, in a good state of repair and offer a range of activities.

With a strong focus on customer service, Holivans is determined to go the extra mile to maintain its competitive edge, whether that be investing in fully furnished kitchens or added touches, such as towel swans on beds. The business regularly consults its reviews, and any negative comments are followed up to establish where improvements can be made.

## **TAKING ADVANTAGE OF EXISTING TRAINING COURSES**

In most instances, Holivans enrolls its staff on external short courses for which it qualifies for funding, such as marketing, sales and customer service. The business also has a good relationship with Community Learning in Partnership (CLIP), a local college which offers training in food safety, first aid at work and mental health first aid. Most of the team has attended these courses and seen value in the life skills they provide, together with the chance to learn from other businesses and share ideas.

Holivans stays up to date with the latest training opportunities by registering for news from its local growth hub.



### **TARGETTED ADVICE AND BESPOKE TRAINING**

In 2021, the business grew to the extent that it decided to appoint departmental managers who, although existing members of staff, were all new to managerial positions. Holivans acknowledged this skills gap and engaged with Lantern, a consultancy that supports and enables the development of people. During its winter downtime, the team took part in management training, together with customer service and stress and resilience training. These sessions gave the business a valuable external viewpoint which was targeted to its specific requirements, and by engaging with a local consultancy, the benefit of regular input and follow ups.

### **ENGAGING WITH AND ACKNOWLEDGING STAFF**

In striving to always deliver the best, Holivans recognises the importance of talking to its staff, finding out how they want to develop and giving them the confidence to apply themselves. Although in the past it has tried to introduce Performance and Development Reviews (PDRs), the business concludes that, as a small, close-knit team, which already communicates daily, a more formal approach is not necessary.

Holivans values its staff as individuals and views them as part of the family, any suggestions are listened to and implemented where possible, giving the team the confidence to try new things and generate ideas. Crucially the business acknowledges the hard work of its staff and ensures they are recognised as a valued member of the team, be that by simply saying 'well done' or 'good job,' to organising a team building day.

*'It's a great place to work, it's nice and friendly, and I look forward to coming to work'*

### **CREATING A POSITIVE REPUTATION**

Holivans is proud to have developed a positive reputation as a local employer and its staff are its best advocates. In return, the business is always looking at new ways to involve the community in its success, opening for events, such as dog shows and a Jubilee party.





# RESULTS

- **44% increase in per night bookings in 2022 compared to 2021**
- **Approximately 90% of bookings are repeat business**
- **High staff retention ratio, over 70% of the park's staff are seasonal, but they return to work year-on-year**
- **Customer reviews are a big indicator of success, with the park scoring 4.6 out of 5 in the last 12 months from reviews on CampStead, the camp and caravan booking site**
- **Proud to have a positive reputation in the local area because its staff are advocates**
- **Destination Lincolnshire Tourism Awards winner 2022 Camping, Glamping, and Holiday Park of the Year**
- **Achieved gold in the David Bellamy Conversation Awards for over 13 years, investing in solar heat pumps, solar thermal energy, rainwater harvesting and most recently storing wastewater from hot tubs to use on the gardens**
- **Committed to reinvesting in the park's facilities with long term plans to focus on well-being, including building a gym and offering yoga on the beach**
- **Attracts a mix of advanced bookings and last-minute guests, for which the business has responded by reducing its minimum stay to two nights, allowing greater flexibility**

# CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNT

## RECRUITING STAFF

Staff recruitment is a huge challenge to the business, with recent examples of numerous applicants not turning up when invited to interview for cleaning and bar work. It's been suggested that the Coronavirus pandemic has shown potential employees they can live more frugally and therefore re-evaluate how they spend their time, with a greater emphasis on family and an unwillingness to be flexible. As an employer, Holivans recognises that it needs to adapt, finding compromise between its business requirements and staff requests.

*"Our team appreciates the flexibility we offer them"*

Last minute recruitment is no longer successful, instead the business must plan and be proactive using word of mouth, social media and networking within the local community to find suitable applicants. In the past, Holivans has tried using Indeed and Job Centre Plus, but found these channels less successful as they filter out applicants without the business meeting them face-to-face. Now, without a formal screening process in place, Holivans interviews more people, with the hope of getting to know them better, accessing their suitability and offering a month's trial.

## ACCESSING FUNDING FOR STAFF TRAINING

Like so many tourism and hospitality businesses, Holivans relies on seasonal workers who are employed for up to 9 months in a year. Current government policy on apprenticeships does not recognise these seasonal roles and instead requires an applicant to be in a full-time position. For Holivans, this closes doors when trying to access training and funding for staff development.

*"We would like to enrol some of our housekeeping staff on an apprenticeship, but they do not qualify because they are seasonal workers"*

## GAINING JOB SPECIFIC SKILLS

Holivans recognises that as schools appear to become more results driven and university focused, there is a lack of vocational training amongst young people, to the detriment of businesses offering manual roles. In response, it is suggested that school career days should incorporate talks by entrepreneurs and those with practical experience in the local job market.

## COMMUNICATING THE BENEFITS OF TRAINING

Initially, when introducing new skills and training some team members were hesitant or reluctant to make changes as they didn't appreciate the value of doing so. In response, the business spent time communicating the benefits of staff development and the impact it would have not just on the team, but on holidaymakers and the broader community.

*"We have seen an increase in staff positive mental attitude through training - we have given them the tools to perform in their roles"*





# TOP TIPS

1. Allow staff to take ownership of their role rather than micromanaging, this gives them self-satisfaction and helps them feel valued
2. Encourage high performance from your team by looking after their well-being, as well as their family and friends - they will go the extra mile as a result
3. Your staff are your best advocates, use their positive word of mouth when advertising new positions
4. Don't procrastinate, devise a clear plan of action with the help of your team
5. Keep close tabs on variable expenses and educate your staff and guests on how they can help, for example by reducing water and electricity consumption



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