

## **USING 'PERSONALITIES' AS A VIABLE OPTION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF NICHE TOURISM**

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The aims of this research were

- To explore the opportunities to develop tourism based on famous personalities
- To ascertain whether there is sufficient demand in Japan to sustain a Thomas Blake Glover heritage destination in Northeast Scotland
- To identify long-term strategies to optimise the Glover connection as a resource for NE Scotland

The rationale for this study centers around the very real issues of rural unemployment and decline associated with peripheral regions. The region of Northeast Scotland is peripheral from a Scottish, as well as a British and European perspective. Tourism has been suggested as one means of redressing the problems of peripheral unemployment and decline. This is true in relation to Northeast Scotland because it is as a result of the economic down turn associated with the primary sector industries of agriculture and farming that policy makers in Aberdeen and Edinburgh have identified tourism as a means of economic regeneration.

Since the early 1990s and the publication of Alexander McKay's book "Scottish Samurai: Thomas Blake Glover 1838-1911" various commentators and groups in Scotland have shown an interest in developing the historic link to Japan into a modern tourism attraction in Northeast Scotland. These have included the Thomas Blake Glover Foundation in Fraserburgh, as well as a proposed screenplay, or book by a local academic on Glover's life. There have also been some successes with the involvement of Mitsubishi Corporation in purchasing and restoring the Glover family home in Aberdeen for £300, 000, as well as several exchange visits between Aberdeen/Fraserburgh and Nagasaki.

Dalgic and Leeuw (1994) describe the niche market in terms of the product life cycle and suggest that most products and markets start out as a niche market. If the original niche market is successful, and it prospers, then over time, it will in fact evolve into a larger (possible mass) market. Some tourism examples include adventure and activity niches, the grey market, the Pink Pound, and specifically in Scotland, the Malt Whisky trail has proved to be a very successful example of niche tourism. Examples of niches focusing on specific personalities in the UK would include William Wallace and Stirling, Beatrix Potter and the Lake District, James Herriott and The

Yorkshire Dales, Robert Owen and New Lanark, Robert Burns and Ayr (as well as other destinations). The work undertaken by tourism providers to showcase their destinations through these characters has resulted in the development and consolidation of a niche tourism identity. The purpose of niche markets is to reach a new market segment and ensure an acceptable return on investment, and niche tourism has been identified as being extremely important for the Scottish tourism industry

In order to build up a picture of what information was available in Japan, on Scotland as a tourism destination, secondary data was collected. In terms of primary data, this research used a two stage process. The first stage involved qualitative techniques and the sample chosen for interview were selected purposively and not by formal statistical sampling. During the respondent selection a list was drawn up using key informants. The snowball technique was utilised in this research and this involved identifying multiple informants, which goes some way to negate the criticism levelled at single key informants.

The method of data collection during this stage was face-to-face semi-structured interviews. This was because the standardisation of the questions facilitated analysis (although it was recognised that the analysis of open ended responses can be difficult) and also the ability of the interviewer to follow up any points of interest. Semi-structured interviews with tourism professionals, academics, the Director of Glover Garden and members of the Nagasaki City Tourism Department were conducted in Tokyo and Nagasaki. It was felt that a level of personal contact would be essential for this research, because of the nature of the data being collected and because the Japanese respondents would be more receptive to a personal approach. This qualitative data was then analysed using pattern matching where key themes and issues were highlighted.

The second stage of the research involved quantitative data collection using administered questionnaires. The questionnaires used were developed from secondary data and informal discussions with members of the Blake Glover Trust in Fraserburgh. The questionnaires were translated into Japanese and were used to collect data from visitors to the Glover Garden in Nagasaki (The Glover Garden is an extensive site spread over a steep hillside in Nagasaki. The site lies near the mouth of Nagasaki Harbour and has stunning views over the harbour area). A total of 265 valid questionnaire responses were collected. These were analysed using SPSS and the results and discussion are reported below.

VisitScotland, as the Organisation responsible for marketing tourism in Scotland were interviewed to obtain their views on the potential development opportunities associated with Blake Glover. This was an important stage in the research, because VisitScotland who would be responsible for the marketing of any such development related to Glover.