

PRESS RELEASE
TKC5012
17th February 2005

ANOTHER CAPITAL IDEA FROM JACOBITE

Award-winning Jacobite Cruises has taken its staff on a mystery tour of over 1,000 miles for a capital learning experience.

Ten members of the top team were cruising the Thames and keeping an Eye on London on a surprise trip organised by their boss last week.

The company won Tourism Business of the Year at the Highlands and Islands Business Awards last year, and managing director Freda Rapson decided the prize money should benefit her staff.

She took the chance to “wow” her workers with a trip to sample an example of top-class customer service in London.

The wide-eyed employees were whisked south and enjoyed a packed two days of experiences on a surprise itinerary. Highlights of the visit included a lunch trip on the spectacular London Eye and an evening jaunt to the West End to see Abba musical Mama Mia.

The group also got the chance to be mystery shoppers in Harrods, met Highland MP Charles Kennedy for a tour of the Houses of Parliament, and took a tour round the waxworks at Madame Tussaud's.

On Day Two, after a comfortable night in the central Westminster Hotel, the tourists went on their own version of a busman's holiday – a boatman's cruise.

The team headed for the Thames and boarded the luxury boat the Silver Sturgeon – the largest ever passenger vessel to operate through the central London bridges. The Sturgeon is the Silver Fleet's flagship vessel, and took its passengers between Westminster and Greenwich to view some of London's best-known landmarks. The Jacobite group was also treated to a champagne reception and three-course meal on the 61m vessel.

Later on Friday, the travellers returned to Inverness, full of new experiences after their whistle stop learning experience.

After a successful trip, Rapson said: "We tried to include as many surprises and experiences as possible in the trip – it's important to "wow" staff as well as customers.

"The trip was a reward to staff for all their hard work and contribution to Jacobite's continued success in providing a 4 star service as well as winning numerous awards.

"We have already achieved Hospitality Assured status, but we don't want to rest on our laurels – we're continually striving to improve customer service and satisfaction. Staff were able to experience excellence for themselves so that they can build on the quality service they already provide."

Lisa Boyce, a crewmember with Jacobite, said the trip was an amazing experience: "We were all kept in the dark about the places we would be visiting. It was one surprise after another. I found it really interesting to see how other successful businesses operate and the level and type of service they provide. The trip has emphasised the importance of looking after our customers, and making sure they have the very best of experiences when they take a Jacobite cruise."

The Tourism Business of the Year 2004 award was sponsored by Highlands and Islands Airports (HIAL) and the prize money contributed to the trip.

Alex Johnson, commercial and marketing manager at HIAL said: "More than 60% of the passengers using our airports are travelling for leisure and air services bring thousands of people into the region every year. We are delighted that Jacobite, one of the region's premiere leisure businesses, have been able to put their award to such good use."

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Further media information from Karen Laird at theKeithconsultancy on 01463 811000 or Karen@thekeithconsultancy.co.uk

- Jacobite – Experience Loch Ness has been accredited with numerous accolades over the past year, including Tourism Business of the Year at the National Business Awards 2004, Tourism Business of the Year at the Highlands & Islands Business Awards 2004, Investors in People, the Hospitality Assured Award for achieving the highest standards of service, VisitScotland's Green Tourism Business Scheme bronze rating for adopting environmentally friendly practices and the Association of Visitor Attractions' (ASVA) Best Leaflet Award 2003 for its brochure 'Jacobite Summer Cruises – Sail the Loch, Live the Legend'. The company was also presented with the Best Visitor and Marketing Initiative at the Inverness Tourism Awards. Freda Rapson was awarded the Self-employed Business Woman of the Year 2004 by the Highland Business Women's Club.