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CASE STUDY

Moonshadow Cruises, Port Stephens

Engaging with Korea

Port Stephens, New South Wales

Moonshadow Cruises is a small-to-medium family owned business in Port Stephens that has been operating for 32 years. The company specialises in dolphin and whale watching cruises, private charters, education cruises, and lunch and dinner cruises. Janene Rees, Sales and Business Development Manager, explains that Moonshadow has been working with various overseas markets and has been active within Asia for over 20 years including the markets of Japan, South Korea and Singapore.

Moonshadow welcomed its first group from South Korea in 1990 through a Korean Inbound Tour Operator (ITO). The company directors embraced the opportunity to assist the ITO with itinerary development and to this day Moonshadow is still receiving business from this ITO.

'This demonstrates the long-term nature of business relationships with the Korean market and the importance of building strong relationships with agents', Janene says.

The company has had two agents booking for Korea and Japan for over 23 years.

Compared with groups from other Asian countries, Janene has found that until recently it was common for groups from South Korea to be non-English speaking. These groups are usually accompanied by their own bilingual guide. However, there

has been a change in the Korean market and Moonshadow is seeing an increase in younger visitors who have a higher level of proficiency in English. There is also an increase in FIT travellers to Port Stephens who join a day tour operator – there are three companies based in Sydney who operate trips to Port Stephens.

In terms of changes in product delivery, Janene explains that their core product of a dolphin watch and lunch remains largely the same, however the company has modified the menu as it has done for other Asian markets. In addition to the standard buffet offering, there is an inclusion of rice, noodles and vegetable dishes. Moonshadow has also had its collateral translated into Korean, and is continuing to engage with the market through social media. Through programs such as Kakao, Janene has been able to communicate with existing relationships, and is looking at adapting even more ways to engage online.

'Koreans are active mobile users who book, research, and use social media on their handsets.'



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When going to Korea to meet with agents, Janene has continued to learn more about the market with each trip she makes. Entertainment such as karaoke and drinking together is highly valued, as is friendship and showing respect to people who are older or in senior positions.

‘You need to be very clear and concise on the product that you are delivering and selling to agents.

‘The agents often tend to be very black and white with limited room for flexibility’.

She believes that this could be attributed to culture, as agents have made a promise to their customers and there is an expectation that you will deliver.

For tourism operators who are considering the Korean market, Janene recommends starting out by conducting research on what you can offer.

‘Think about what your product is, what would be appealing to the Korean market, and how you could tailor it to this market.’

Janene emphasises that it is crucial to do your research and try to understand how the market works as it will make life easier for you. It is also important to be passionate about engaging the market and to have the desire to learn and understand about their expectations and culture.

Top tips

- Do your homework – research as much as possible about the market and whether your product is suitable
- Build and maintain your relationships with agents
- Going to South Korea to meet with agents is a good way to build relationships and experience the culture firsthand
- When working with Asian markets, understand that each one is different and be prepared for change