



## **Tourism in Brittany - Michael Dodds**

Jon Michael Dodds, you're an Englishman, and yet here you are in Brittany promoting one of the most important regions of France. How did that happen?

Michael Well I'd been running a small consultancy company in Paris for sixteen years before, and I'd worked a lot with French regions, French sites and businesses that want to improve their services for visitors, and I'd done some work in Normandy, and I remember I was actually advising Normandy Tourist Boards on who they should recruit as a future director for their tourism, and, and I had a sleepless night thinking, that would be a wonderful job, but no, I can't do that. And then, er, two years later the job for Brittany was announced, and I thought I'd just throw a C.V. in for fun, and to my surprise, the regional council were very enthused by my candidature and it all became very serious very quickly, and I ended up putting my business on standby to, to come to Brittany and defend their colours for a few years. And I don't regret it, it's been, it's very hard work, but extremely interesting.

Jon You say it's a very difficult job. What does your job entail?

Michael Well, it's, it's running a team of forty-five people, who are involved in promoting Brittany in various shapes and forms. But it's not just running a forty-five man team or woman team, it's, er, trying to encourage this whole myriad ... you know, whole range of different tourism professionals to tow the same line and, er, that's the difficult part of the job. The difficult part of the job is to ... the easiest part of the job in a way is, is trying to project a vision as to how tourism is to be promoted, um, persuading the regional council to provide you with funding to put that into place. And the most difficult part is 'La Federation des Acteurs', getting everyone to come on board, and promote tourism in the same way, and participate, and be alongside you, that's the toughest part. But we're making headway. There, there're two problems really. The first problem is that there is a huge distance between institutions like ours and local tourism professionals on the ground. You know what it's like running a small business in France, it's very, you can very quickly have the attitude that, er, local authorities, institutions are there to sort of inspect you rather than help you and support you, and unfortunately institutions like ours are sort of tarred with the same brush, as being not particularly supportive. Are they using tax-payers' money effectively? And so there's a lot of

negativity to get .. to unravel before you can actually persuade people that what you're doing is useful, providing excellent support or, hopefully, useful support for, for tourism businesses, so the traditional distance between institutions and the private sector is the first gap to be gulfed [ie bridged] and the second one is that we're here, some people think, in an ivory tower in Rennes, even though I do spend an awful lot of time on the ground talking with tourism professionals, and listening and trying to push things forward in a way that suits them. The problem is that there are so many institutions, in France every single level is interested in promoting tourism. But, I don't want to sound too negative, things are moving forward, and the local council have just voted a new tourism policy that is going to put into place a lot of the ideas that we've had over the last eighteen months in discussions with them, and we're very hopeful and confident that all that is going to change fairly shortly.

Jon Right. You said you have ... you've caught the Brittany bug, what do you find especially attractive about this region?

Michael Oh I think it's got everything other than the mountains, it's got absolutely everything. The diversity of Brittany is quite extraordinary. The coastal landscapes I find extraordinary. I'm discovering a new place every day, er, it's just that choice, haven't you, you know 2700 kilometres of coastline, and you've got everything from long sandy beaches to the creeks to the islands to Granite Rose Coast to ... phew ... every single type of coastal landscape on earth you've got the impression it's, it's here in Brittany, I think that's very, very strong. The interior as well, it's almost virgin landscape to some extent, you know, it's ... if you want to get away from it all and the Canal Nantes à Brest and the, and rivers, the chance for get away from it all type holidays, we can really do that, really offer that.

Jon You mention sustainable tourism, what is that?

Michael Well, I mean everyone talks politically about sustainable tourism and respecting the environment, ecology and the rest of it, but here in Brittany what was important was to try and install the sustainable tourism principles as our basic ethic and way of working, a philosophy of working, and that I think we've managed to do over the last three years. We want to promote ... we're not into, um, ... you could have a model of tourism development, say Centre Bretagne, you could say, 'hey we've got to defend jobs in the centre of Brittany, we've got to look after the economy, the centre of Brittany needs to have its fair share of the tourism cake, um but things aren't structured well enough, we need to have more activities, immediately accessible to visitors, I need to have it structured, um, let's go out and encourage Centre Parks or a major investor to come in and do a huge sort of inland resort, um, in the middle of Brittany.' Now, back in the 80s and 90s, there was probably a political trend that might've encouraged that to happen.

I think today, we're far more interested in the sort of organic growth in, in tourism, and tourism that's fully integrated in the local economy, and a tourism that thinks local people first. What is good for local people should be good for visitors, and what's good for visitors should be good for local people. The thing that has impressed me most about Brittany is the people here are ... they're committed aren't they, they're engaged, there are, they're people who love, and want to defend their region, and there's that sort of volunteer, 'benevole', attitude that they have in Brittany which I think is phenomenal.

Jon            Yeah.

Michael      And, um, that's what keeps me motivated and I'm sure it's what keeps many British residents motivated. There are a lot of people who are into defending their local area, and appreciate and are warm to outsiders who share the same values and are into the same things. And that's what keeps us all going, I think.

Jon            Michael Dodds, thank you very much.

