

Tintagel Castle, Cornwall – All in a Day’s Work

In looking at what makes a ‘top destination’ it is best to consider this from the perspective of the staff who present these iconic places to visitors from near and far on a daily basis, so a typical day in the summer season starts.



It is 7 am and the start of another glorious summer’s day at Tintagel Castle on the North Cornish coast. The blue skies, castle ruins, rocky cove beneath the island and the craggy cliffs still belong to the seabirds as they perform aerial acrobatics, noisily jostle for position on their favorite perches or chase the Atlantic waves washing in on the shoreline below.

A lone figure steps into this idyllic natural setting to prepare the castle for the visitors who will compete with the gulls for vantage points, sunny spots or shade as they explore the castle remains.

It is a weekday in late August and everything must be “spick and span” for the visitors lured by the many Arthurian legends, by the site’s ancient history or simply by the power of its extraordinary beauty.

Tintagel Castle is English Heritage’s 4th most popular attraction, with over 200,000 visitors a year, including many tour or coach groups a day as well as school groups and individual visitors.

Staff clean floors in the shop, exhibition, toilets and café, empty bins, pick litter and tidy up until they are joined by the rest of the Tintagel team when they arrive at 09.30.

On an average day, around half of the 20 plus staff based at Tintagel will be on duty. After a quick catch-up they will run through any items of interest for the day from group bookings or special promotions to deliveries and other operational issues. “Then everyone picks up cash bags and radios and we open up,”

10.00, every member of the team has a designated point to look after, which changes from day to day from duty at the top kiosk in the courtyard or on the landward side, to welcome visitors. Others staff the bridge kiosk as visitors cross to the island and another has the island itself to look after. More smiling staff open the shop and busy themselves replenishing stock on the shelves until customers start coming in to buy. The recruiters are of course ready to sell English Heritage membership and Overseas Visitor Passes to individual visitors.



10.30 On the island, the first of the 20-minute introductory talks of the day is being given, providing an overview of the history of the 13th-century castle ruin and its legends. There is an – almost as good – introductory video to watch instead.

11.00 Over in the café, they have been making sandwiches and cooking Cornish pasties since they arrived on site at 09.30 and are now busily serving morning coffee and teas. “We source as much as possible locally, so it is no surprise that from the moment the site opens until we close the team are on the go non-stop. The café is very popular – it has a beach café feel – people can sit on the terrace and enjoy the views, or take their food down onto the beach if they prefer.”

12.00 More staff arrive to spend four hours on site apiece to cover the strategic visitor points while staff take their lunch or tea break.

15.00 While supervisors are busy doing the site’s accounts, taking group bookings and checking the eight tills, the manager gets down to some staff performance development reviews and answering e-mails.

16.00 Coming towards the end of a busy day but there is still the checking and re-checking toilets, edging and weeding around some of the 100-plus steps leading to the island.



17.00 With the visitors leaving, the kiosks are locked up; the ‘island’ is searched to make sure no one has been left behind. “The island is 7 hectares and so it is a two person job – they go in opposite directions and meet in the middle to make sure it is clear of people. Some people try to hide so that they can stay on – Tintagel has an air of magic about it and the sunsets are so superb, people simply don’t want to leave.”

18.00 It has been an exhausting day – with over 1,500 visitors to look after. As the sun lowers across the shimmering sea, the manager who counts himself lucky to have “the best job in Cornwall,” takes one

last look around before locking up and leaving Tintagel to the peace of tranquility of nature.

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