

Highly respected Scottish Blue Badge tourist guide Brian Hay has died at the age of 69 after a long illness.

Brian, who was a very popular mentor to many trainee guides over the past 13 years, was a veteran of the travel industry working all over the globe including Russia, China and India. Born in Edinburgh in 1954, he went to Edinburgh Academy and spent a year at St Andrews University studying Modern History, French and History of the English language before deciding the academic life was not for him.

His first job in tourism was with Bennett Travel in Edinburgh in 1975.

“The travel industry just interested me,” he said.

Two years later he moved to London joining Thomson Holidays and stayed with the company until 1989.

His first job was working in the passenger relations department dealing with complaints and helping passengers who got ill.

“I enjoyed it. There was a buzz to it and always something happening.”

Later Brian decided he would like to go and work overseas as a rep and applied for a job in Austria where he spent two years.

“I would meet guests and do excursions and all the rest of it,” he said.

When Thomson was looking for representatives in Russia Brian volunteered.

“It was a volunteering thing and there weren’t exactly a huge number of volunteers,” he said.

“It fascinated me – communism and all the austerity that went with it. Thomson only did a winter programme. I was based in St Petersburg. I did the first season in Moscow.”

Intourist was the state organisation for tourism and the only company it would allow to bring people in was Thomson.

“It was fascinating but hard work. It was a huge programme. We had something like eight flights a week coming in and everybody doing different things. I tried to learn Russian but we just didn’t have time to do it.

“I was staying in hotels. Lots of cabbage soup, lots of indescribable food. But I just didn’t complain because I knew what we were getting was the best there was. I left Russia long before glasnost and all of that came in.”

Brian was based in Russia in the winter and the USA in the summer.

He did three seasons working in Los Angeles and Miami.

Then everything came to a grinding halt with the onset of recession in the 1980s and an unfavourable dollar exchange rate,

He returned to Thomson’s London head office where he worked on international coach tours and hotel accommodation until leaving in 1989 to pursue an idea to set up kennels for quarantined animals. The project didn’t work out and Brian joined Saga as a tour manager. Although he lived in the UK he did tours in fast developing countries like India, Sri Lanka, China and Jordan.

Meanwhile he went into business with a close friend Liz Laurie (check spelling) running a guest house between Tyndrum and Crianlarich which was on the West Highland way long distance footpath.

He worked for Saga in the winter and at the guest house during the summer.

Later they sold that business and bought another guest house near Perth.

In 2004 he decided he would do the Scottish Blue Badge guide course with the Scottish Tourist Guides Association.

“That is when everything changed really,” he said.

“I think because I had already done a little bit in Edinburgh on the open top buses I decided it would be fun to do your own country where you can guide properly. I suppose I didn’t really appreciate how beautiful the country was. So I put my name down for the Blue Badge course and got on it.

“I enjoyed the practical side of the course but not the academic. I am not an academic. As to what geology was all about I still haven’t got a clue!”

Brian gained a great reputation of being a relaxed and chilled guide who was very popular with passengers but also the coach drivers.

So what was his philosophy for a successful tour?

“I think it is the old proverbial of the swan swimming and going along very serenely but underneath all hell let loose!” he said.

“That is what it was for me. I realised early on in my guiding career there was no point in showing I was anxious or whatever because you would just get the people uptight. More often than not the people were on my side anyway.

“I just remember thinking Oh God I have got to sort that out and that has gone wrong and that has gone wrong but I just carried on externally very, very peacefully.”

Brian’s work as a trainer and mentor to guides in Scotland was universally praised by members of the STGA.

Former World Federation of Tourist Guides Associations president Ros Newlands said: “He was a wonderful guide, mentor and friend.”

BBG Merial Limb said he was “kind, a great teacher and also had a great sense of humour.”

Fellow BBG Karen MacCormick said: “He was such a lovely friend and colleague. It was a great pleasure to work alongside him on the training team and tours.”

STGA chair Lyn Brown said: “Brian was a lovely, kind person and a true gentleman. He brought these qualities and a wonderful sense of humour to both his guiding and training work, and working with him was a pleasure. Brian will be sadly missed by all who knew him.”

Brian leaves behind a sister, Anne and brother, Ian.

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