

Growing coach trip firm has a new look

BW by business editor
Bev Hawes

A CHELTENHAM-based coach holiday company, which is now one of the biggest in the sector, underwent a brand transformation at the weekend. The Coach Holiday.com, which employs 65 people, has been renamed Just Go and launched its new look at Cheltenham racecourse.

The company's striking new logo will go on 55 coaches initially, with the livery emblazoned on all the company's 100 coaches by the end of 2011.

Just Go has been providing value breaks by coach for the past 15 years and operates in 750 locations all over the country.

In 2008 it took 56,000 bookings but by 2010 the number had reached in excess of 200,000, placing Just Go as the second largest coach holiday company in the country.

It was founded in 1996 by Mike Merron and began life as The Coach Holiday Warehouse. With the steady growth of the company it changed its name to The Coach Holiday.com and now Just Go with the company moving to its current offices at Pate Court, Cheltenham, in 2005. The growth in turnover has been significant. In 2008 the company achieved £10.4 million turnover, rising to £19.1 million in 2009 and £29.5 million last year. Spanish-born Luis Arteaga joined the company in 2002 as financial director from a large Spanish multinational company.

Mr Arteaga became managing director of The Coach Holiday.com in 2005 and then bought out the business at the beginning of 2009, becoming both chairman and CEO. Originally from Madrid, he now lives in Cheltenham with his wife and two children.

Mr Arteaga said the size of the company workforce had grown



■ **LOGO LAUNCH:** Luis Arteaga, CEO and Chairman of Just Go coach holiday company

from 19 two years ago to 65 now. Despite the effects of the recession, coach holidays are more popular than ever, especially in the 60-plus age range.

"We provide an easy, affordable and social way of enjoying the country," he said. "The coach is also the most environmentally friendly way of taking a holiday."

"The social aspect of coach holidays is absolutely fundamental. People share interests and feel comfortable. They also like having everything done for them."

Although 95 per cent of Just Go holidays are in the UK it also takes people to such destinations as Spain, Belgium and Italy. The most popular destination in this

country is the Isle of Wight.

Mr Arteaga was kept waiting six days as he attempted to fly out of the weather-hit UK to get back to his Spanish homeland at Christmas. But he is proud that all 21 of his company's coaches going out to Spain on the 19th of December reached their destination on time.

"The flying experience is getting worse and worse," he said. "We offer a great hassle-free service."

The coach drivers can make or break a holiday, which is why Just Go has established its own academy for drivers. This covers everything from customer safety on board to disability awareness. Mr Arteaga said in hard times

value for money was more important than ever, which is why he believes his company has continued to grow during the recession. Just Go has recently linked up with the RSPB to offer excursion to some of the UK's finest nature reserves.

"People have worked hard and feel they have earned these breaks," he said. "My goal is to have a million customers by 2014 and the rebranding is the first step."

"We had to find a name that represents who we are and what our vision is. We want to transform this industry."

"In hard times companies that have a belief in the future invest. It is the perfect opportunity."

Coffee shop chain to expand with new stores

COSTA Coffee is expanding its operation in Gloucestershire in 2011.

The coffee shop chain has announced it is hoping to open two new outlets in Brockworth and Montpellier, Cheltenham. It will also be investing and redesigning the interiors of its existing outlets in Cheltenham and Gloucester.

Costa says the new locations will create 20 new jobs. It already employs 95 people in 10 stores across the county. Sales are up this year by 10 per cent.

Marcus Iggulden, Costa's regional manager for Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, said: "Our existing stores in Gloucestershire are performing very well and we feel there is a strong market for more sites in the county."

"We hope to be able to confirm



■ **GROWTH:** One of Costa Coffee's existing Cheltenham outlets

plans soon. Our rise in sales growth is also due to recruiting talented people and offering them ongoing training."

Costa was founded by Italian brothers Sergio and Bruno Costa in 1971. It is part of the Whitbread family of brands.

Gloucestershire already has its own successful coffee shop chain, the Cheltenham based SOHO Coffee run by Chris Copner and Penny Manuel.

The company is also rapidly expanding its business, having recently moved into a new headquarters with a full production kitchen on Ashfield Trading Estate, Cheltenham.

SOHO Coffee now includes 21 outlets – nine owned and operated by the company and 12 franchised.

The UK shops are between Manchester and Bristol with operations at two Spanish airports. Shopping complexes, airports and motorway services are the main target areas.

Turnover is now approaching £4 million and the company has 100 people on the payroll. Each new outlet that opens creates ten jobs.

Employment Law

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Law extends right to request flexible working

LEGISLATION has extended the right to request flexible working to parents of children under the age of 18, and is due to come into force in April 2011.

The right to request flexible working at present is available to parents of children aged under 17, aged under 18 if the child is disabled and to parents with caring responsibilities for dependant adults.

Flexible working regulations set out that eligible employees can have the right to formally apply in writing to their employer to request a change in hours, times or location of work. The only way an employer may refuse such an application is on one or more specified business grounds. These could include the burden of additional costs, detrimental effect on the ability to meet customer demand, inability to reorganise work among existing staff, detrimental effect on quality or planned structural changes.

The reason behind this new approach is the Government's vision to create a fairer, family-friendly society.

Up until April 2009, this right was only available to parents with children aged under six, aged under 18 if the child was disabled, and parents with caring responsibilities for dependant adults (introduced in April 2007). It was then extended in April 2009 to cover parents of children aged under 17. This effectively meant approximately 10.5 million employees had the right to request flexible working.

According to the Department for Business Innovation & Skills, the number of additional employees that will now benefit is estimated at 288,000. This may therefore further increase the number of employees in your business eligible for the right.

Once the extended rights come into force in April, employees with children under 18, whether disabled or not, who wish to make a request to work flexibly will be required to follow the current procedure. The same applies to employers when responding to a request.

Proposals on extending the right to request flexible working to all employees is also to be introduced, with consultation starting soon and a likely implementation date of April 2012. This is part of the Government's ongoing employment law review. As the consultation process is yet to begin, it is not clear whether there will be other substantial changes to requirements, but there may well be changes to the thresholds used to consider requests based on business and operational reasons, so watch this space.

There are three key areas that employers should consider before April 2011:

- They should change all eligibility criteria in their flexible working policy.
- They should contemplate whether other policies are affected by the change in flexible working.
- They should provide additional training to all individuals responsible for dealing with requests for flexible working.



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