The Business Comment

A year of rapid change and a positive view of the future

Ana and Marcus Calvani, the chief executives of Jersey Hospitality Association, explain why the industry is one of the cornerstones of the Island



■ **Ana and Marcus Calvani** Picture: ROB CURRIE

IN a funny sort of way, we do look forward to writing these pieces about the year just gone and thinking about what's coming up in 2025.

This year has been a pivotal one for the Jersey Hospitality Association. Back in March, we elected new members to our board and Malcolm Lewis took on the role of chair. It's more than a quarter of a century since Malcolm was at the helm and since he took over again last year, the JHA has felt the new re-invigorated direction on which he's steering it.

It's also meant a substantial change to how we manage the association and, for the first time, we feel that every member, whether they are from a hotel or from an attraction, has a real voice. A couple of years ago we set about restructuring the JHA by splitting it up into sub-sector categories that accurately reflected the types of business involved in hospitality. This has allowed the JHA to grow this year, and it has given a renewed sense of purpose and involvement for our members, led by the sub-sector chairs, each of whom sit on our committee.

Of course, with change comes expectations and our members are rightly looking to us to make a difference to the industry here, so, guiding everything we are doing is the Visitor Economy Strategy, which was published a year ago. It's our job to make sure that it delivers what the Island needs and, increasingly, hospitality is being seen as the second pillar to our economy and not the neglected industry so many like to characterise us as.

The strategy, the first to deal solely with the visitor economy in 20 years, is a breath of fresh air. It supports economic growth, so vital to a community like ours because we cannot simply assume that the economy will carry on growing without hard work, investment and vision.

Why do we say that the visitor economy is one of the cornerstones of our Island? Simply because, without hospitality, the rest of Jersey's economy will just melt away. There will be no reason for the finance industry to come here and to stay here and, as so many have said, Islanders need places to go and experiences to enjoy. We are pleased to say that hospitality's place at the heart of the wider economic ecosystem is beginning to be understood, and the Visitor Economy Strategy really was a vote of confidence in the industry.



■ **The "reboot of Bergerac has sparked interest in the UK and around the world"**
Picture: SUPPLIED BY VISIT JERSEY

Something that we are both passionate about is the potential careers that people can have in hospitality. We have long been advocates of the many exciting life and career paths that are open to people even when they have little training or experience. There are so many transferable skills that can be honed and perfected in the hospitality industry, and it can be a perfect stepping stone into so many other careers.

We would, of course, like to see people stay in hospitality and while the transition to a Living Wage will be tough for many businesses, one effect will be to push wages up across the whole sector, not just affecting the relatively few on, or near, the minimum wage. Perhaps that's because we have been poor at projecting the career potential of our sector, but it's something we are getting better at.

We haven't really touched on the year that we've had. The number of visitors coming here has continued to rise to a point where we are nearly equal to pre-pandemic levels again. That's an amazing testament to the resilience and hard work by businesses that were facing annihilation in 2020 and an uncertain future post-Covid.

> **"Let's have a planning system that works. Let's remove the barriers to business that are tripping us up. Let's support economic growth**

The uncertainty over whether Bergerac would be filmed here was something that had many of us shaking our heads in disbelief. The backlash from picking questionable film projects in the past has left our government reluctant to press the go button even when it's a no-brainer. Are we now so frightened of making decisions that when a clear and obvious winning idea came along, we were prepared to sit on our hands?

The reboot of Bergerac has sparked interest in the UK and around the world. It was picked up by BBC Breakfast and beamed into the nation's living rooms just after filming in the Island was completed and we cannot wait for the interest to ramp up even more when it's broadcast early this year.

But it so nearly didn't happen, and we should all thank the small group of people who pushed and pushed to make sure that sense prevailed.

Going by our daily inbox, the engagement and work that we are doing with the government and the interaction with our members is increasing. If we look at the work we have been doing on behalf of our members, it generally falls into planning and immigration applications, industry conferences and meetings with ministers and officials. We also try to spread the word about our industry during school visits, which we're happy to say are a highlight in our busy schedule.

The ongoing challenges we met when we started in this job seem to have reached a critical point this year. We've been in a constant battle to make changes to the Work Permit Policy, arguing that a system that sends people away if they've worked here for more than 12 months for the same amount of time helps nobody and frustrates the business community. Little by little, and after nearly two years of fighting, we seem to be getting closer to solutions that meet international obligations and work for businesses. But this does take daily engagement to move the dial even a little, because while there are some in the government who get it, and we are really fortunate that we have a minister who does, most do not and seem not to care.

That is one of the real frustrations with this job. We know that there are hundreds of hard-working successful businesses in Jersey, but as more of those admit defeat in the face of a system that doesn't work and doesn't care, the tragedy is that we will lose the things that make Jersey special more quickly than any of us can imagine.

In 2025, you will see a newly invigorated JHA working with our business colleagues to fight for Jersey and the way of life that we all love. We see a fantastic future for this island with plenty of opportunities just waiting to be seized. We just ask for a few simple things. Let's have a planning system that works. Let's remove the barriers to business that are tripping us up. Let's support economic growth. Let's fall in love with our Island and be positive about the future.