# Part 4: Local Distinctiveness



Image courtesy of Visit Kent

## Rural Tourism Business Toolkit

# About this toolkit

This .pdf is the fourth part of a fully featured resource packed full with useful information and advice for new and existing rural tourism businesses. It is designed to help with business evaluation, market identification, development of effective communication and marketing strategies, and is intended to encourage initiatives that offer great visitor experiences whilst nurturing the environments that create them.

This toolkit has been created  as part of the COOL Tourism Project by the COOL Partnership and tourism development charity Hidden Britain.

# The COOL Tourism Project

The COOL Tourism Project is a European partnership of 11 local authorities and organisations, based in the east and south of England and in the north of France, who are working together to help each other compete effectively in the global tourism market.

COOL Tourism aims to address the need for market research, product development and business support in the partners' areas, and to encourage rural tourism businesses to make use of the rural areas' environmental assets and local distinctiveness to attract visitors.

The project is being delivered with the support of the European cross-border co-operation Programme INTERREG IV A, France (Channel) – England, co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund.

The project partners include; Norfolk County Council, Essex County Council (Visit Essex), Kent County Council (Explore Kent), Visit Kent, Somerset County Council, West Somerset Council, Sedgemoor District Council,  Exmoor National Park Authority, Pas-de-Calais Tourisme, Somme Tourisme, and Pas-de-Calais Gîtes de France.

# Contents

## How to use this Toolkit

This toolkit has been designed to allow you to dip in and select the tools you need.

You'll find navigation buttons on every page to help move back and forward between the tools and you can easily return here to the contents page by clicking the **"home"** button at any time.

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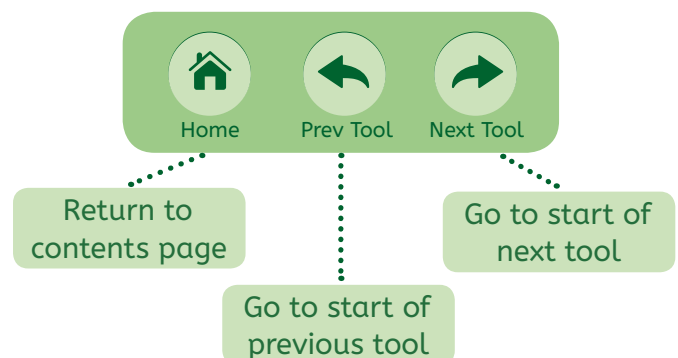
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## Local Distinctiveness?

Local distinctiveness is what makes one place different from another.  It's the composite of a place's assets;  the landmarks and sights, the landscape, wildlife, built heritage,  traditions, food, festivals, myths and language.

## Why local distinctiveness matters to visitors

Visitors increasingly want the 'local' experience, to really experience places,  meet 'real' people, 'do' as well as 'see' and not just be 'tourists'. They want to understand and appreciate the essential character of a place, learn something and, importantly have something to share  with others when they return home.

## How local distinctiveness can benefit your business

→ Longer stays & increased local spend
   *Forcing visitors to slow down and do more, bringing increased income into  the local area*

→ A more memorable experience
   *Providing something with real character makes  visitors more likely to recommend and return.*

For more on the concept of local distinctiveness, see: http://commonground.org.uk/about/

## Where you should be before you begin

Before you use any of the information and tools in this section, we would suggest you have an understanding  of the following:

→ Clear objectives for your business
   *What you need and are looking to achieve*

→ A clear understanding of your target audiences
   *Who they are, where they are and what they want*

→ A clear understanding of your offer
   *What you have to give them that will make them spend time and money with you.*

If you're unsure on any of the above, check out  **Part one of the Toolkit – Getting Started**. It may also help to have worked through **Part Three - Working Together**, so you have some idea of what and who else is within your locality.

### Disclaimer

This toolkit is an in-depth resource but it cannot address every specific need. Therefore feel free to tailor the guidance or use it as a starting point to research further for your own business.

Also remember - things change, websites disappear and new trends arrive, use this toolkit alongside your own research to ensure you are right up to date...

## What you should be looking for...

It goes without saying you should work with what is within you local area. However, you should be focusing on what you can effectively use as part of your business.  It's also important to view the assets through the perspective of a visitor. What may seem everyday and humdrum to you could be the trigger that makes them visit, stay longer or return.

Use the checklists below to evaluate the experiences, places and businesses you find. They are split into core and additional criteria.

## The Core Criteria:

If you answer 'no' to any of these then it's not something you should be looking for.

| | |
|---|---|
| Is it (or could it be) relevant or interesting to my customers? | ☐ |
| Is it complementary to my business offer? | ☐ |
| Does it epitomise some of the special qualities of the local area? | ☐ |
| Is it /can it be made into an actual experience people can undertake? | ☐ |

## Additional/Useful Criteria:

These are optional but help frame your thinking and identify elements and experiences that will be really effective in inspiring visitors...

| | |
|---|---|
| Is it exclusive or hard to access if you aren't in the know? | ☐ |
| Is it quirky, weird or perhaps unexpected  for this area? | ☐ |
| Can it be done outside of the main visitor season? | ☐ |
| Can visitors get 'hands-on' and involved with the experience? | ☐ |
| Is it something currently trending or that taps into current cultural 'coolness'? | ☐ |
| Does it give visitors the chance to learn something? | ☐ |
| Does it align with existing or well-known brands or personas of the area? | ☐ |

**Keep these criteria in mind as you undertake research into your area to make sure you are including things you can use effectively.**

# Researching your local area

Too often we overlook what's right on our doorstep or focus on the obvious. For businesses this is missing a trick, as knowing your place intimately is vital to be able to understand local distinctiveness and use it effectively as a tool.

## Getting Started

Make life easy for yourself by setting parameters in at least two key areas before diving into gathering data.

### 1. Define your 'area'

Define the extent of the area you intend to focus on. You are looking for a boundary that will make sense to your visitor, but it does not necessarily have to have any hard rules. It could include:

→ Administrative - county / district / parish / town boundary

→ Landscape distinction - National Park / AONB

→ Geography - specific portion of coastline, range of hills etc

→ Distance - everything within 10 miles for example

Using these criteria (or any subdivision of them) as a base can help but remember its likely these 'lines' will mean little to your visitors, so be fluid in including/excluding things on either side.

### 2. Define your parameters

It's entirely possible at this stage that you simply investigate everything of relevance in that area. However, to keep things focused, it's best to define some parameters as to what you are looking for. You should include:

| Tourism Provision | Vital Information | Other Elements |
|---|---|---|
| Accommodation & places to stay | Transport information | Pre-booked courses and learning experiences |
| Places to eat & drink | Local information points | History, traditions, culture, legends (the more ephemeral things) |
| Activities (both organised and self guided) | Key local websites or publications | Local products & producers (including food & drink) |
| Attractions & places of interest (paying and free) | | Local or independent retailers |
| Events & Festivities | | |

## Plan your research

Essentially you can undertake three forms of research to help understand your place:

## Third-party research

Before you do lots of original work it's always worth contacting local organisations and reviewing what they have already compiled:



**Somerset Specialities**

*Image courtesy of Ian Brodie & Somerset County Council*

→ Local authorities, Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) and Protected Landscapes (National Parks & AONB's) will all have information relevant to your area. They may also have itineraries or themed packages outlining experiences, as well as being a fantastic point of contact for advice and networking guidance.

→ Trade bodies or sector-specific promotional or awareness-raising groups e.g. CAMRA - The Campaign for Real Ale or Sustrans. These organisations can put you in touch with members in a given area and may have specific guidance and information.

→ Specific interest groups or organisations like The Ramblers, local historical societies, Wildlife Trusts, cycling groups, community partnerships etc. These are all experts in their fields.

## Desk research

It's always worth undertaking some desk research of your own: you will come at things from your own angle and may pick up facts others have missed. Try:

→ Start with the Wikipedia page for your local area

→ Check out the reviews and tips for your local area on TripAdvisor or Virtual Tourist

→ Google is your friend: make the most of search (great tips here) and Google maps

→ Browse sites like Flickr and Youtube to see what others are sharing

→ Find local guidebooks and look for the extra titbits beyond the norm that they mention

→ For more in-depth digging head to the local studies section of your nearest library

## Field research

Nothing beats actual first-hand experience of somewhere, and you'll be able to use your local assets more successfully if you can talk from experience of being there or doing it yourself. Try:

→ Arranging visits to other businesses to see 'behind the scenes'

→ Organise to meet 'experts' at attractions, sites of interest or activities

→ Have a discussion (or book a local tour) with a blue badge or other local guide

→ Make a point of visiting other businesses as a 'visitor' (that includes public transport!)

→ Take photos / videos & pick up leaflets/ flyers wherever you go - all aides to memory...

# Compiling a Product Audit

Researching local distinctiveness can produce an awful lot of interesting and useful information. For future use it's helpful to keep it all in one place and catalogued effectively.

This tool provides a framework for compiling information and is simplest kept on a dedicated spreadsheet, with the different types of product on different worksheets to make things easy:

→ Accommodation & Food and Drink

→ Sites of interest & Attractions

→ Shops & Local Producers

→ Events & Festivities

→ Pre-booked activities & courses

→ Promoted Routes (walking & cycling)

→ Visitor information (points and sources)

→ Transport information & businesses

**Finchingfield, Essex...**

*Image courtesy of Visit Essex*

Suggested basic  structure for business entries.:

| Company | Type | Address | Phone | Website | Contact | Notes |
|---------|------|---------|-------|---------|---------|-------|
| Oakcroft | B&B | 1 Village St Ruralplace | 01234 567891 | www... | Mr Smith | 4* thatched cottage offers cooking courses |

If you record walking & cycling routes  you will need a different format e.g.

| Route Name | Start | Finish | Distance | Type | Website | Notes |
|------------|-------|--------|----------|------|---------|-------|
| Rural Walk | village car park | village car park | 4 miles | Circular | www... | Great views and passes nature reserve |

For transport record the relevant info on each type

| Station | Operator | Line | Service Days | Website | Notes |
|---------|----------|------|--------------|---------|-------|
| Village station | Traincompany | London to local town | Mon-Sun | www... | 1 train per hour on Sundays |

| Bus Route | Operator | Local Stops | Terminus | Service Days | Website | Notes |
|-----------|----------|-------------|----------|--------------|---------|-------|
| 23x | Buscompany | village green opp pub | Local town | Mon-Sat | www... | No Sunday service |

Don't feel you need to fill in every single box or add every business in your given area. Focus on the things you think are most useful - but do make a note of why they are useful in the 'notes' section.

# Defining what's special

## Bringing it to life for visitors

Making local distinctiveness relevant for visitors is no easy challenge. They need to be able to grasp and understand the key ideas and headlines, which need to presented in a succinct and easy-to-digest manner for it to resonate with and entice them.

## Don't reinvent the wheel!

The challenge of making sense of a place is one faced by plenty of organisations bigger than you. Therefore, before starting look and see what is already available, National Parks, DMO's, local authorities and other tourism management organisations will likely have guidance on what is special about a place and how this should be communicated and developed for the visitor audience. Look for:

→ Sense of Place or shared identity toolkits

→ Destination marketing or brand toolkits or guides

→ Tourism strategies or Destination Management Plans

## Doing it the hard way...

It may be that no work of this kind has been undertaken for your area, or that you are focusing very locally, or perhaps you overlap several areas and need to make sense of it. If so there are actually quite simple steps to take:

**1**   **Bring your evidence base together**
You will need to have a solid picture of what's available and important to your local area before starting. (see the previous tool - Understanding your place).

**2**   **Think from a visitor perspective**
Set out the important attributes and assets your place has on the following framework:

| Tangible Assets | Intangible Assets |
|---|---|
| *Physical things your place has e.g.* | *Emotional or non-physical things e.g.* |
| *Built heritage* | *Welcome & helpfulness* |
| *Retail offer* | *Safety* |
| *Landscape & wildlife* | *Ease & lack of stress* |
| *Events & Festivals* | *Providing inspiration* |
| *Food & Produce* | *Peace & tranquillity* |
| *Visitor Attractions* | *Sense of community* |
| *Activities* | *Sense of discovery and exploration* |

Be as specific as you can and apply the following criteria before you put them down:

→ Would/could our key audience be interested in this?

→ Is it something visitors can actually experience?

→ Is it realistic and practical to utilise for visitors?

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**3**  **Focus on the key elements**
Once you have laid these out then go back over them and mark those that are most important to get across and group together the assets that are similar

By doing so you should start to see certain key themes emerging. These will be generic e.g. 'opportunities for outdoor activities', or 'delicious local food and drink', but that's the point.

Ideally aim for no more than four or five to keep things manageable.

**4**  **Pull the structure together**
At this point you have almost all the ingredients so it's a case of putting them together in a structured format under each theme. The simple format is:

| Element | Theme | Detail and story of the overall experience | Businesses where experience takes place |
|---|---|---|---|
| What it includes | Digestible and distilled overview | Annotation and evidence that makes the theme relevant to this place | Specific examples of how the theme can be experienced |
| example | *Delicious local food & drink* | *23 local cheeses*<br>*Some of the best orchards in the country* | *The White Horse Pub*<br>*Marsh Farm Cidery*<br>*The Cottage Dairy* |
| example | *Great outdoor activities for those of all abilities* | *150 miles of footpaths*<br>*Extreme sport options*<br>*Accessible beach breaks* | *Northcoast Way Trail*<br>*Dirtrax Mountain biking*<br>*Riptide surf school* |
| example | *Accessible history and heritage for all* | *Visible Roman remains*<br>*Traditional dishes always on the menu* | *Vinordunum Villa*<br>*Village Musuem*<br>*The White Horse Pub* |

**Once you have this, write it down clearly and keep it to hand. This is the ultimate framework of what makes your place special and should be kept in mind as you work through how to use it.**

# Using local distinctiveness

## Choosing how best to use it...

If you already know why your area is special and have the evidence base of experiences and assets to back that up, the big question becomes 'how do I use this for **MY** business?'

## 1. Informational or promotional use

The simplest use of this information is as context in your communications activity: by tying your business to the surrounding offer, you give more impact to your existing communications and potentially open doors to a wider audience of interest. Consider:



**Walking Norfolk**

*Image courtesy of Norfolk County Council*

→ Including this information in your offer (see **Part 1 of the Toolkit**) and core marketing messages.

→ Looking for marketing opportunities around the theme for your business

→ Using it as contextual copy or inspiration on your website

→ Using it as inspiration or subject matter for social media posts

→ Using it to form the basis of articles on e-newsletters and updates

→ Using it for PR hooks to gain attention or as leverage for articles into new publications

→ Featuring information and images in print or in-situ for your visitors once they arrive

For any usage, make sure you follow the checklist below:

| | |
|---|---|
| Is the link between your business and wider information clearly defined? | ☐ |
| Have you included a clear Call to Action that involves your business? | ☐ |
| Have you provided details about how to access any wider experiences? | ☐ |

## 2. As the basis for working with others in the locality

Another way of utilising this information is proactively making connections with others to either:

→ Consistently promote the wider offer, thereby shouting with a louder voice
*e.g. develop a consistent bank of copy or image library to use*

→ Develop joint services to make it easier for visitors to experience the special qualities
*e.g. transfer services, staggered opening times etc*

→ Develop specific joint promotions between you
*e.g. discounts for referrals or 2-for-1 incentives*

For more information on planning any of these see **Part 3 of the Toolkit - Working Together.**

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# 3. Becoming a local champion

Armed with local knowledge and expertise many businesses choose to become local ambassadors, volunteering themselves to be the voice for an area and rallying others. You could consider:

→ Becoming an area expert online on tools such as TripAdvisor or Virtual Tourist

→ Literally become an ambassador with customers and the general public . Visit Kent run the Kent Greeters scheme (www.visitkent. co.uk/kent-greeters) but you could arrange something less formal for your area.

→ Organise training and familiarisation trips for other businesses on distinctive elements

→ Take the lead to maintain the area, e.g. litter picks or campaigning for conservation, etc.

**Kent Greeters..**

**Remember - a single bad experience can colour a visitors experience of the whole area. Therefore do what you can to maintain the quality of the experience and encourage others to do the same.**

# 4. Extending what you already do as a business

The final way of using local distinctiveness is to make active changes or extensions to your business. By doing so you align yourself with the values and assets that make your wider context special.

For more information on developing new products and services please view the following tool - Introducing new ideas to your business

**Old Rectory Hotel**

**Case Study**

## Old Rectory Hotel

In addition to their green policy and guest charter, reflecting the importance of green and sustainable activity locally, the Old Rectory runs a visitor gifting scheme in conjunction with a local wildlife safari operator. By doing so they directly support local causes relevant to the locally distinct qualities of the area.

Find out more

# Introducing new ideas

## Extending what you do as a business

One of the very best ways of utilising local distinctiveness is to incorporate the qualities and assets of the locality into what you do as a business. However, implementing a new service or product into your business is a big investment of time, effort and possibly money. It's therefore sensible to evaluate any idea before leaping into it.

## The Criteria

Use the checklist below to evaluate potential viability of ideas as products for your business.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Does it reflect an important aspect of your local area?** <br> *If it doesn't, could the idea be amended so it does? Great ideas shouldn't be ignored.* | ☐ |
| **Will the activity significantly impact on the asset in your locality?** <br> *If yes, then do not pursue this idea.* | ☐ |
| **Does it complement your existing business?** <br> *If not, remember you will have to work harder to help customers associate it with you* | ☐ |
| **Do you know if your current customers will see it as valuable?** <br> *If no, you will potentially need to target a new audience or develop taster/pilot ideas first* | ☐ |
| **Do you have the resources currently to put this into action?** <br> *If no, then tread carefully and consider working with others or piloting first* | ☐ |
| **Can you sustain it once implemented?** <br> *If not, think carefully if it's worthwhile or make sure you manage customer expectations* | ☐ |
| **Have you got the necessary channels / expertise to promote it?** <br> *If this is a new area, factor in time/cost and a dedicated plan to raise awareness of it* | ☐ |
| **Can you easily track how effective/useful it will be?** <br> *Knowing the impact it has made is vital in future planning* | ☐ |



The Old Cider House

**Case Study**

### The Old Cider House

A B&B like no other! Starting with just a micro-brewery the team behind the Old Cider House have expanded and extended their offer to include hands-on brewery breaks, ale trails and workshops where you can brew your own!

[Find out more](#)

# Wildlife

## Making the most of flora & fauna

Wildlife can be a big draw for visitors, particularly with the interest generated by television programmes and the wider awareness of conservation. However, viewing wildlife generally requires specific guidance on where to look and indeed how to recognise what you are looking at. It is also one of the most fragile elements of any landscape and therefore requires careful handling and education of the visitor audience.

## Getting Started

It always pays to get in touch with experts in the field before starting, try reaching:

→ National Park Teams - www.nationalparks.gov.uk

→ Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Teams - www.landscapesforlife.org.uk

→ The Wildlife Trusts  - www.wildlifetrusts.org

→ RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) - www.rspb.org.uk

## Ideas to consider

→ Providing spotters / identification guides on site for your guests

→ Creating or providing dedicated on-site observation areas (could be simple or complex)

→ Habitat building on site

→ Providing conservation or educational information for visitors

→ Providing wildlife web-cams or spotter updates through your website

→ Incorporating wildlife spotter updates into e-newsletters or updates to previous customers

→ Train yourself or your staff to be experts in the local wildlife

→ Provide guided walks, safaris or experiences from your business  (make the most of seasonal opportunities and experiences at different times of day for greater impact e.g. bat walks)

→ Provide signposting to local experts providing experiences (e.g. guided walks, photography courses, talks, etc)

→ A visitor giving scheme to support wildlife projects on site or to support local causes

→ Sponsor or get involved with local wildlife causes to showcase your credibility on the subject



**Porlock Rutting Weekends**

*Image courtesy of Arturo de Frias Marques*

**Case Study**

### Porlock Rutting Weekends

The Porlock visitors centre organises an annual dedicated weekend package for the Red Deer rut on Exmoor. The package includes spotting trips with  expert guides, dawn safaris, accommodation and oodles of local produce.

Find out more

# Landscape

## Making the most of your surroundings

Landscape and scenery generally provides the backbone of the special qualities of your local area, and for visitors, will form the base of almost all the activities they undertake. However landscape is also sensitive and can be prone to degradation from unchecked visitor contact. It is also generally not particularly well understood so presents a significant opportunity for education.

## Getting Started

It always pays to get in touch with experts in the field before starting, try reaching:

→ National Park Teams - www.nationalparks.gov.uk
→ Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Teams - www.landscapesforlife.org.uk
→ Local Authority countryside management teams

## Ideas to consider

→ Providing on-site interpretation of landscape and flora

→ Providing conservation or educational information for visitors

→ Creating viewpoints and lookouts (views from windows as well as dedicated spots)

→ Providing information on self-guided walks and activities from your business

→ Developing dark-sky activities (telescopes for guest use, talks and expert tuition)

→ Providing volunteer opportunities to maintain landscape on site

→ Train yourself or your staff to be experts in the local landscape

→ Provide guided walks, talks & experiences (make the most of seasonal changes)

→ Opportunities for creative activities (photography workshops, art courses, etc)

→ Hands-on learning and courses in landscape maintenance

→ Bushcraft and wild living/camping experiences

→ Utilise local building materials and provide interpretation

→ Signposting to local experts providing experiences (e.g. guided walks, courses, talks, etc)

→ Visitor giving scheme to support environmental projects on site or to support local causes

→ Sponsor local environmental causes to showcase your credibility on the subject



**D'une Ile à l'autre**

**Case Study**

### D'une Ile à l'autre

Already operating a successful B&B in Amiens, the new eco-cabins at D'une Ile à l'autre provide an extension to the business into the Amiens marshes. Each offers access to the water and a chance to get back to nature in the Somme.

Find out more

# Local Products

## Helping visitors uncover specialities

Local products, in particular local food, have seen a massively increased prominence in recent times, so much so that they can be the sole draw for a visit by themselves. Seasonal food, with the attributes of low food miles, bring freshly picked and grown traditionally, will attract visitors and enhance a business's offer.

But think wider than just food & drink: there are plenty of great examples of other local products, including arts and crafts, that can also contribute to the character of an area.

## Getting Started

It always pay to get in touch with experts in the field before starting, try reaching:

→ Localfoods.org.uk– www.localfoods.org.uk
→ Local Farmers Markets – www.local-farmers-markets.co.uk

## Ideas to consider

→ Leading by example by sourcing and buying local within your business and promoting the usage of products to your customers

→ Offering products from the local area for sale to your visitors

→ Providing local directories of producers and outlets

→ Listing local markets and offering dedicated trips to visit them

→ Offering tasting and try-before-you buy evenings, events or festivals

→ Using local materials on site and providing interpretation

→ Growing or cultivating your own products

→ Showcasing local crafts

→ Creating self-guided food trails for the local area

→ Organising guided tours, walks and experiences for your customers

→ Volunteer opportunities to help grow and cultivate produce on site

→ Courses and learning experiences (e.g. bee-keeping, brewing, coppicing or scything)

→ Bringing in experts for demonstrations (e.g. green wood working, traditional cookery)

→ Offering bushcraft and foraging courses

→ Considering local loyalty schemes to promote purchases of local produce



Cromer Crab Festival

**Case Study**

### Cromer Crab Festival

Since the closure of the Cromer Crab Company, the twin towns of Cromer & Sheringham have pulled together an annual festival in May to celebrate the humble crustacean and extend the visitor season.

Find out more

# Local Heritage

## Sharing and preserving the past

Understanding, learning and interacting with the past, and seeing how it influences the present is a core part of any local identity. However, although it forms a key part of almost every experience a visitor will have in your area, heritage is a broad church that can encompass many different things, depending on your locality.

## Getting Started

Do bear in mind that heritage may by fragile and could be impacted by excessive interest from visitors. If in doubt seek expert help in your locality for advice before embarking on any idea.

→ English Heritage – www.english-heritage.org.uk/about/
→ Local Authority planning, conservation or environment teams

## Ideas to consider

→ Providing information on or interpretation to heritage features within the local area

→ Organising guided, walks, talks and experiences form your business

→ Arranging expert talks and visits

→ Providing advice and information for genealogical research

→ Document and collect local information and stories on particular subjects and present to your customers (or encourage them to contribute)

→ Visitor giving scheme to support heritage conservation locally

→ Sponsor local heritage causes to showcase your credibility on the subject

→ Volunteer opportunities for conservation or preservation activities

→ Signposting to local experts and interest groups

→ Opportunities to try traditional crafts, techniques or activities at events on site

→ Performance based events (poetry / dance / song /plays etc).

→ Utilise digital tools to provide heritage experiences (e.g. geo-locating old photos on Flickr)

→ Arrange traditional or historical meals

→ Provide sales of gifts / products / cookery books / how-to-guides that reflect the heritage

→ Support local events and festivals (help your visitors to attend as well)



**The Five Bells Inn**

### Case Study

### The Five Bells Inn

The Five Bells in Brabourne takes heritage seriously, focussing on events that showcase local culture. They run regular craft fairs, acoustic music nights and ensure all their artisans and performers are from less than 25 miles away.

Find out more

# Car-free visits

## Enjoying the countryside responsibly

The vast majority of guests to rural locations will travel by car. By doing so they are contributing to congestion, pollution, noise and parking issues in areas that often cannot support. or are sensitive to. them. Actions we can take to mitigate these impacts, promote education and make it easier for visitors to make a choice of non-car transport will all help maintain the qualities and assets of our local areas.

Make sure to get in touch and coordinate with local organisations and groups before you embark on these initiatives as there may well be existing schemes you can support or join rather than starting from scratch.

## Ideas to consider:

→ Providing local transport information both before visit and in situ

→ Offering discounts or incentives to public transport users

→ Offering pick-ups or drop-offs at stations, ports or airports for your customers

→ Providing information on key walking and cycling routes

→ Offering secure parking areas whilst customers are with you

→ Offering secure bike parking & facilities such as showers

→ Running or facilitating cycle hire or other equipment to promote non-car use

→ Offer car-free itineraries for popular activities in the local area

→ Facilitate access to local travelcard schemes or vouchers and discounts

→ Provide an on-site carbon calculator and other educational material

→ Provide free access to travel websites for in-situ guests

→ Support local sustainable transport schemes (e.g. electric bikes or cars)

→ Work with other businesses to provide transfers between you (e.g. between accommodation and local pubs/ restaurants)


The Cake Escape

### Case Study

### The Cake Escape

22 cafés throughout Essex participated in a scheme to get more people cycling. Participants download a passport, cycle to any of the cafés signed up to the project and earn a reward stamp, four of which net them a free slice of cake!

[Find out more](#)

# Time-bound itineraries

## Showcasing the best of your area in a day

Although we might be familiar with the qualities and assets of our local area, we cannot assume our visitors have the same knowledge. However with a little thought we can easily provide inspiration and information, structure a suggested experience and provide 'chef's recommendations' of what to do and where to go.

Given that most visitor stays in a destination will be bound by a time frame, using a chronological model is a sensible place to start. Using this method allows you to offer 'a great day out in' or '24 hours in' for your local area.

## Building an experience

**1**   **Gather the evidence**
Collect a bank of experiences, businesses and activities visitors can experience. These are the options you will use the itinerary to connect. You may not use all of them but it helps to have a pool to mix and match from. See the first section on Understanding your local area.

**2**   **Define the canvas**
It is recommended to start with a full day, a manageable time for a visitor to review and absorb. It's also an easy period to balance in terms of content and you can always append extra days to make longer itineraries.

Itineraries work more effectively when they have a theme or focus beyond just time. This will also help you decide what to include. Consider the key themes of your area (see section 2 ) and your likely visitors, but you could consider any of the following:

→ Heritage & history
→ The great outdoors (landscape & low impact activity)
→ Active (high impact or adventurous activities)
→ Families (experiences catering for younger children)
→ Romantic (for couples)
→ Food & drink

**3**   **Layout the day**
To start planning the itinerary - layout a day as blank canvas:

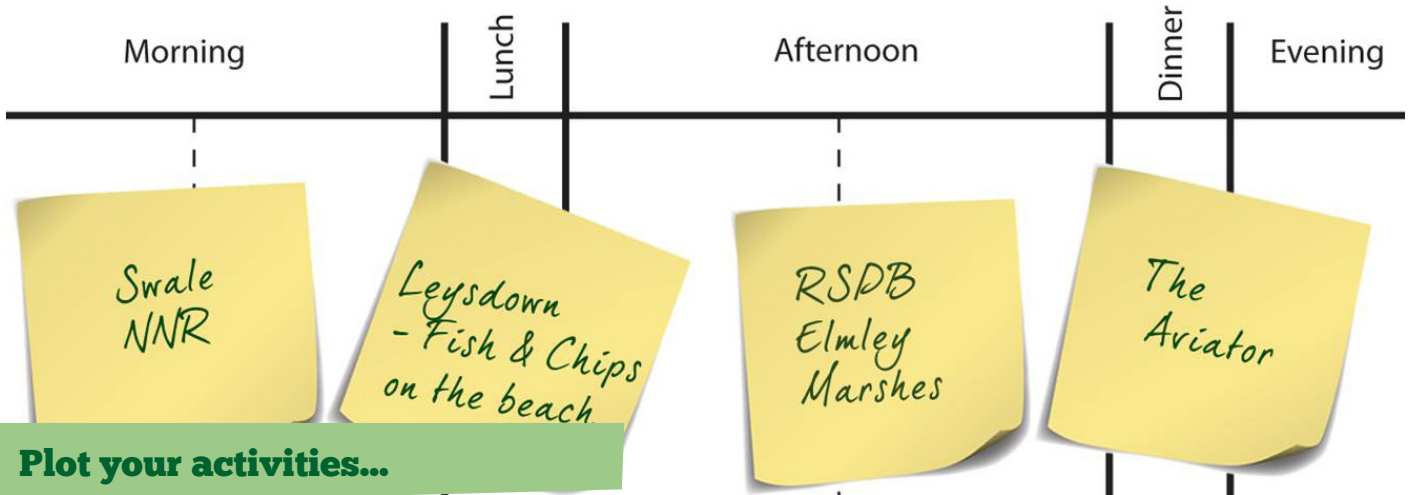| Early AM | B'fast | AM | Lunch | PM | Dinner | Eve |
|----------|--------|-----|-------|-----|--------|-----|
|          |        |     |       |     |        |     |

**4**   **Plot activities**

Then simply start filling in the blanks and plotting activities relevant to the theme on the timeline (this can be effective if done if laid out on a large piece of paper with activities on individual post-it notes).

Morning | Lunch | Afternoon | Dinner | Evening

Swale NNR

Leysdown – Fish & Chips on the beach

RSPB Elmley Marshes

The Aviator

**Plot your activities...**

# Useful things to consider

→ Check opening hours / seasonality and make sure it's possible to undertake the experiences in that order

→ Do think about constructing itineraries for different seasons as experiences will differ

→ Don't be afraid to include pre-booking only experiences, but make sure to make this clear

→ Try and balance the day (e.g. active AM and an easier PM)

→ Don't neglect meal times, as these can be key to the experience too!

→ Early morning or evening activities often have a distinct pull visitors may not expect

→ Don't just focus on in-depth activities -a quick stop at a view point or a browse in a specific shop can be a valuable addition not to be missed.

→ Focus on hands-on, different, exclusive and quirky experiences, not just the obvious

→ Put yourself in the visitor's shoes - what would inspire you?

**East Kent Country Breaks**

*Image courtesy of Explore Kent*

**Case Study**

## East Kent Country Breaks

Visit Kent led the work to develop a series of themed itineraries for 8 rural areas in East Kent. Each Country Break provided over 20 in-depth itineraries developed in conjunction with local experts to showcase their areas.

Find out more

# Time-bound itineraries

**5**   **Write up the itinerary**

Once you are happy with the content and order then it's a case of writing up the final version. There are no hard-and-fast rules but do consider the following:

| | |
|---|---|
| Have you written for your audience (look at style and tone of voice especially)? | ☐ |
| Have you written to the chosen theme and been an enthusiastic expert about it? | ☐ |
| Have you put a fun & knowledgeable personality into your writing? | ☐ |
| Have you kept it succinct and brief (an absolute maximum limit of 350 words)? | ☐ |
| Have you provided links and details for all the experiences & businesses mentioned? | ☐ |
| Have you offered ideas to extend or customise the itinerary? | ☐ |
| Have you included basic information (start point and directions as a minimum)? | ☐ |

**6**   **Presenting & using**

You can just use the text you've created, but itineraries work well as a self-contained entity, which means putting some thought into how to present them.

## Ideas to consider

→ Images matter: they will bring your itinerary to life, so look for high-quality ones

→ Itineraries work well as pdf files, allowing them to be downloaded and printed off

→ If using on the web consider a teaser page allowing download rather than simply placing all the content as a web page in its own right

→ If you include them on a website, clearly position them in a separate section and make a feature of it

→ Using them online allows effective use of video to support the content

→ If using a pdf make sure to include your web address and a clear call-to-action

→ Use social media to promote and tease

→ Consider placing printed copies at visitor touch points at your business (in rooms, at reception, etc)

→ Tell others you have done it and get it shared around

**This is only one suggested method of creating an itinerary so feel free to tailor and customise to fit your needs and the strengths of your area. Alternatively take a look at the next tool for a different method...**

# Experience Led Itineraries

## Focussing on the highlights

Rather than using a defined time unit as the base framework for a structured experience, an alternative option is to craft an itinerary around a series of highlights and then fit the timeframe to it. This has the advantage of including all the essentials but requires different presentation so that visitors can digest it.

## Building the Experience

**1**  **Gather the evidence**
As with the time-bound itineraries you need to start with a bank of experiences, businesses and activities dedicated to visitors that the itinerary will connect together. See the first section on Understanding your local area.

**2**  **Define the highlights**
The first step in creating an experience-led itinerary is to define the key highlights to be included. It's recommended to pick no more than five as this is a manageable number for visitors to relate to and could be fitted into day or weekend.

Itineraries work more effectively when they have a theme or focus beyond just what's interesting. This will also help you decide what to include. Consider the key themes of your area and your likely visitors, but also consider those mentioned in the time-bound model.

**Highlight 1.**

**Highlight 2.**

**Highlight 3.**

**Highlight 4.**

**Highlight 5.**



OxTrails

*Image courtesy of South Oxfordshire District Council*

**Case Study**

### OxTrails

During the creation of the dedicated smartphone app for Southern Oxfordshire, highlight itineraries were created for each of the major towns and villages, each showcasing and threading together the highlights in the surrounding area.

Find out more

**3**

### Join the dots...

Write a short overview of the highlight itself and how it's relevant to the audience or theme.

The final step is to compile a narrative to order and link the highlights together over a visit. Aim to keep this as short and succinct as possible,  as the 'stars' are the highlights themselves.

Consider the  following in writing these sections:

→  Keep the highlight descriptions down to around 25 words absolute maximum.

→  The narrative can be longer but should still be relatively short at about 100 words or so

→  All the tips from the time-bound model on writing the itinerary apply here, too.

**4**

### Presenting & using

As with time-bound itineraries you can just use the text you've created, but itineraries work well as a self-contained entity which requires some thought on how to present them.

## Ideas to consider

→  Images matter, they will bring your itinerary to life - look for high quality ones

→  Make sure to provide at least one image of each of the highlights and make sure to link the images to the descriptive text for that highlight

→  Consider adding a map to show representative locations from each other

→  Itineraries work well as pdf files, allowing them to be downloaded and printed off

→  If using on the web consider a teaser page allowing download rather than simply placing all the content as a web page in its own right

→  If you include them on a website, clearly position them in a separate section and make a feature of it

→  Using them online allows effective use of video to support the content

→  If using a pdf make sure to include your web address and a clear call-to-action

→  Use social media to promote and tease

→  Consider placing printed copies at visitor touch points at your business (in rooms, at reception, etc)

→  Tell others you have done it and get it shared around



**Chapeldown Vineyards**

*Image courtesy of Visit  Kent*

# FAQs

## 1. Am I in a protected landscape?

18% of the UK Countryside is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and a further 6% is designated as a National Park. You can find comprehensive maps at:

www.landscapesforlife.org.uk

www.nationalparks.gov.uk

## 2. What is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a landscape which is considered so precious that it is protected for the nation. Designation seeks to protect and enhance natural beauty whilst recognising the needs of the local community and economy. This includes the protection of flora, fauna and geological as well as landscape features. The conservation of archaeological, architectural and vernacular features in the landscape is also important. They have the same legal protection for their landscapes as National Parks, but don't have their own authorities for planning control and other services.

## 3. What is a National Park?

National Parks are protected areas of countryside that include villages and towns. They are protected because of their beautiful countryside, wildlife and cultural heritage. People live and work in the National Parks and the farms, villages and towns are protected along with the landscape and wildlife. National Parks welcome visitors and provide opportunities for everyone to experience enjoy and learn about their special qualities. They have an authority to help look after them, including planning controls.

## 4. How do I get to know and work with other tourism businesses in my area?

Essentially, do your research! Start with local business groups such as; Chambers of Commerce, ask other like-minded businesses which groups they participate in or do some online searches in places like LinkedIn or Facebook for groups meeting near you.

## 5. Who do I need to consult before implementing a new idea or service in my business?

If you intend to undertake any action that represents an investment of time and especially money, or could have an impact on the business you need to gain agreement from those with a stake. This means any other directors, your shareholders and any investors you have. If the investment or risk is significant you may need a written agreement in order to proceed.

## 6. Will working in a local partnership help me access grant funding?

It will depend on the specific fund you are trying to access. However working in collaboration with others, sharing the risk and benefit is generally looked upon more favourably than an application that only benefits a single business. More specifically undertaking activities that preserve, enhance or promote locally distinct assets may well be more appealing to funders too.

## 7. What's the difference between sense of place and local distinctiveness?

Local distinctiveness sums up the assets and qualities that make a place special, Sense of Place is your feelings for the place and is therefore much more personal and individual. For now focus on understanding, getting across and utilising the distinct qualities of your area, you'll form your own Sense of Place as you do and so will your visitors.

## 8. How can I find out if someone has already developed a locally distinct offer for my place?

Look through the B2B sections of websites for any local Protected Landscapes, DMO's, local authorities and other tourism management organisations, they will likely have guidance on what is special about a place and how this should be communicated and developed for the visitor audience. Look for; Sense of Place or shared identity toolkits, Destination marketing or brand toolkits, Tourism strategies or Destination Management Plans.

## 9. How can I contribute to my place's Tripadvisor page?

Essentially you can only post directly to a destination page if you are the owner. Therefore you can either contact the owner of the destination section, it will likely be someone at your DMO or local tourism group, or there will be a contact on the page. Alternatively post comments on the page and wait for the owner to get in touch.  If there seems to be no owner, get in touch with TripAdvisor to claim the page yourself, or finally visit the page as a visitor and share photos, reviews and local information of benefit to you (but remember to be transparent about who you are and don't oversell your own business).

## 10.  Where can I find out about Visitor Giving Schemes?

VisitEngland have created a comprehensive toolkit on Visitor Giving, including advice on the business model, tax, using technology and plenty of case studies. See:
www.visitengland.org/england-tourism-industry/DestinationManagersResources/visitor_giving.aspx

# Rural Tourism Business Toolkit

## About this toolkit

This .pdf is the fourth part of a fully featured resource packed full with useful information and advice for new and existing rural tourism businesses.

This toolkit has been created as part of the COOL Tourism Project by the COOL Partnership and tourism development charity Hidden Britain.

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