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northernireland



Embrace a Giant Taste

Northern
Ireland
Embrace
a Giant
Taste





Contents

Embracing a Giant Taste	4
Why embrace a Giant Taste?	6
Who can offer a Giant Taste?	7
Our Visitors	8
Tourism NI Visitor Attitude Survey	8
Our Giant Place	12
Why love local?	12
Getting started	12
Our Giant Identity	14
Enhancing your menu and developing your signature dish	14
Local food menu inspiration	15
Top 10 questions	16
Being unforgettable: telling your food story	18
Pairing local food & drink	20
Giant Inspiration	22
Menu ideas	24
Collaborating for success	26
Taste Causeway	27
Social media tips for food & drink businesses	28

Embracing a Giant Taste

Research tells us that a perception gap exists between the pre-visit expectations and the actual delivery of our food & drink experiences in Northern Ireland. Post-visit, visitors tell us that their culinary experience exceeded their expectations. Whilst this is a positive barometer, it identifies the need to raise the profile of our local food & drink and to evaluate how we portray ourselves to visitors.

A Giant Taste is about offering an unforgettable food & drink experience. It focuses on offering a real taste of place through the wonderful flavours and combinations that our local suppliers and producers provide us with. By celebrating and elevating the quality of our food & drink, it forges a deeper connection to the people, culture and landscape of Northern Ireland.

Giant Taste experiences should focus on:

Our visitors - How we give them our big-hearted welcome, what they are looking for when they come and how we can meet and exceed their expectations

Our giant place - How we bring our legends and stories, land, water and sea to life through our food & drink

Our quality and identity - Those aspects which make us distinctively Northern Irish and original

A giant experience - How we combine sourcing, preparing and serving our food & drink to create unforgettable experiences for every visitor



Why Embrace a Giant Taste?

Northern Ireland boasts a short supply chain and by sourcing local, your ingredients and plates will be fresher and tastier. Buying locally sourced produce allows you to offer seasonal surprises on your menu that truly evoke a sense of place and highlight honest and traceable Northern Irish food.

Supporting the local food chain keeps the local food industry more sustainable and helps to minimise your carbon footprint, which brings wider benefits to the environment and will appeal to diners who are climate conscious.

Embracing a Giant Taste is an opportunity for your business to:

- Develop & strengthen your relationship with local producers. A win/win dynamic evolves. You buy from them and they become your advocates. Supporting your local farmers, producers, growers and bakers can help support the local communities and wider economy
- Increase your margins by cutting out the middle-man in supply chains
- Enhancing the quality of your food & drink can increase dwell time and visitor footfall
- Identify opportunities to reduce your food miles and carbon footprint - environmental sustainability should be a part of everyone's business
- Attract more customers - local is more important than ever



Who can offer a Giant Taste?

A giant taste can be offered by any business that is providing food & drink to visitors. This includes:

- Pubs and restaurants
- Hotels and accommodation
- Visitor attractions and experiences
- Coffee shops and retail
- Food tours, trails and networks

You may be championing food & drink already, if so, make sure your visitors are aware of your commitment in supporting local producers and businesses. Bring the food & drink journey to life by telling your visitors where your produce comes from, who the growers are, what makes them special and why you are working with them.



Our visitors

What are visitors telling us about their food & drink experience in Northern Ireland and what would they like to see more of?

Understanding the needs and attitudes of visitors to Northern Ireland can play a vital role in helping to create an exceptional visitor experience. Insights into visitor attitudes also helps us to better position Northern Ireland to compete in a global marketplace.

Tourism NI commissioned a **Visitor Attitude Survey (2018)** to gain an insight into leisure visitors' overall Northern Ireland experience, as well as their attitude towards each stage

of their visitor journey which included results from their eating out experiences.

The following snapshot provides an insight into how consumers feel about their eating out experience in Northern Ireland.

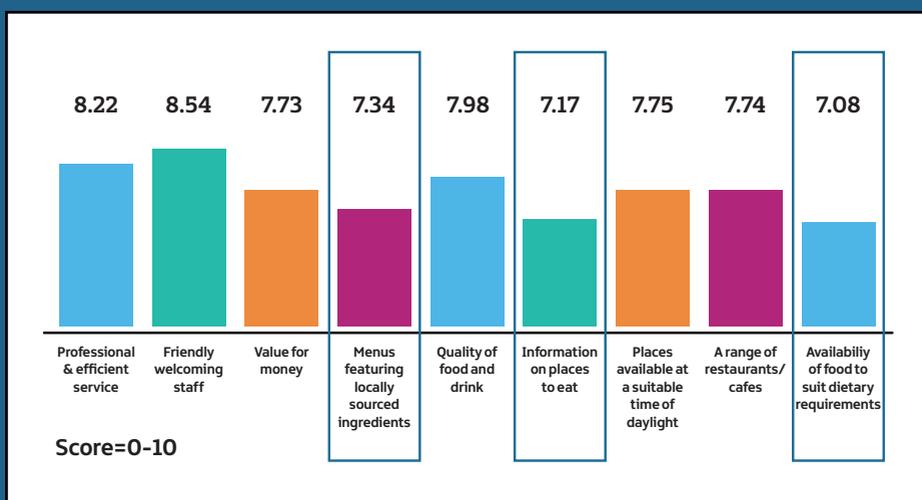
The complete NI Visitor Attitude Survey Fact Card can be accessed here <https://tourismni.com/facts-and-figures/visitor-attitude-surveys/>

Tourism NI Visitor Attitude Survey 2018

The dining experience in Northern Ireland is the area where there has been some of the largest increases in visitor ratings compared to an equivalent 2014 survey.

Key findings indicate that:

- Visitors, particularly those visiting outside Belfast, were more inclined to eat in the less formal establishments such as cafes/coffee shops (57%) and pubs/bars (48%)
- The staff at Northern Ireland eateries were rated very favourable, with almost nine in ten scoring them positively in terms of friendliness and welcome (88%) and professionalism and efficiency (85%)
- More than four in five (81%) visitors rated the quality of the food & drink positively, with almost two in five (38%) providing a rating of excellent
- Value for money was rated positively by almost four-fifths (78%) of visitors



Potential aspects for improvement include:

- Menus featuring locally sourced ingredients – food provenance is becoming increasingly important to local residents and visitors alike
- Information on places to eat out in the area
- Availability of menus which cater for those with dietary requirements - Each of these was rated excellent by relatively few respondents (25%, 22% and 18% respectively)
- The availability of eateries at suitable times and the range of eateries on offer are facets of the tourism offering that could be improved – only a third of visitors rating these aspects of the eating out experience as excellent



Our giant Place

Why love local?

Food & drink is an important element of the overall tourism experience. Visitors are keen to seek out and enjoy local specialities that are unique to Northern Ireland. They are also more discerning and interested in where ingredients and produce originate and what is involved in the journey to their plates.

The promotion of local food & drink has the potential to raise visitor satisfaction and helps us to deliver on our visitor promise that Northern Ireland is a world-class foodie destination.

Some food & drink businesses may need to re-evaluate their offer and position it in a way that is compelling to help give them a competitive edge. Others may need to review and refine how they are telling their food story to ensure it resonates with their visitors.

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Research has shown that both local and international visitors wish to experience the taste of a place, as well as the culture, heritage and activities on offer. This is what a Giant Taste aims to promote!

Getting started

Northern Ireland is well poised to champion local food & drink and to push it further up the visitor agenda. Not only do we have a rich natural larder, we have a passionate sector of artisan producers who can help improve the experience for your visitors.

Start simple with one dish and build on developing your menu over time. Listen to your customers and monitor sales and feedback to give you an indication of what is working.



Our giant identity

Enhancing your menu and developing your signature dish

As a starting point, develop your key signature dish using locally sourced ingredients. Small tweaks in the descriptions can unlock richer stories of local and community support. Below are some ideas as to how you can describe a dish in order to enhance your visitors' dining experience. **Menu ideas provided for illustration only.**

Inspiration

- Free to roam **Glenarm Estate** organic lamb moussaka with seasonal vegetables from our community allotments
- Wood fired sourdough pizza with **Corndale Farm** chorizo and drunken Armagh Bramley apples
- North Coast Smokehouse fish stew with **Whitewater Belfast Black Beer** wheaten bread
- Glastery Farm ice cream with **Peninsula Kelp** dulse

Northern Ireland has a fantastic network of food & drink producers. Get in touch with the experts at Food NI or visit the producer section of the website for a list of producers, suppliers and artisans in your area.

www.nigoodfood.com/producers/

M E N U

LOCAL FOOD MENU INSPIRATION

BROUGHGAMMON FARM ROSE VEAL SALAMI & RED PEPPER PORTAVOGIE PRAWNS

Grilled focaccia

CARAMELISED SHALLOT & DART MOUNTAIN GOATS CHEESE TART

Salt baked beetroot, pickled carrot salad

PHEASANTS HILL FARM CRISPY PORK & GRACEHILL BLACK PUDDING FRITTER

Armagh apple & mustard sauce, bitter leaf salad

STRANGFORD LOUGH SEAFOOD CHOWDER

Smoked bacon, potatoes & leeks, home baked wheaten bread with Abernethy butter

MILLBAY OYSTER PLATTER, OYSTER EMULSION

Lacada brewery stout pickled onions

As ambassadors for Northern Ireland, we are proud to be able to work with some of the best local food producers to bring you the freshest ingredients and seasonal delights. All our herbs and vegetables are grown on our family farm and menus are updated to reflect the seasons. Our desserts, scones and homemade breads are made in-house using local organic eggs and the highest quality dairy and grain products.

We only use the highest quality meat and fish from Northern Ireland and have been supporting our local fishermen, butchers and growers for generations. Details on our suppliers can be found on the food map at the back of the menu.

TOP 10 QUESTIONS

1. Are you aware of the local food & drink producers and unique ingredients in your region?
2. How well do you describe the dishes on your menu to reflect local sourcing and your relationships with suppliers?
3. Does your food & drink offer reflect an authentic Northern Irish experience?
4. Do you actively pair dishes with local spirits, craft brews and ciders?
5. Do you use the seasons to offer variety on your menu? Being aware of seasonality allows you to offer distinctive dishes made with ingredients at their best
6. Are you using ingredients that are foraged, or herbs and vegetables grown from your gardens? If so, ensure this is exploited. This can add value to your dish and can help drive profit
7. Are you using any family or generational recipes? Put you and your family on the menu
8. Are you championing traceability and sustainability? This is an ideal opportunity to differentiate your business
9. Do you hold food & drink pairing opportunities or meet the producer events? Boost interest by combining established products with new and local produce
10. Have you considered a “love local food & drink” event in your restaurant or food establishment?



Being unforgettable: telling Your food story

The power of storytelling, if told correctly, will linger in your customer's minds long after they have finished their meals. All stories have a beginning, middle and an end. No one knows your food story better than you do!

What connects your delicious produce, attentive service and ambiance into a memorable story or experience? Getting this right can drive brand loyalty, repeat business and revenue.

Make it personal; tell stories of people, not products. Engage your customers on an emotional level and bring life to your chef, staff and suppliers.

Customers want to know more about your establishment, why and how it started, what your values are and what makes you unique. In a crowded marketplace, be proud to stand out. Celebrate what is distinctively yours or unique to Northern Ireland - what are you offering customers that they will not get anywhere else?

Use the power of social media to connect with a wider consumer base. Continue your food story online and get creative in posting consistent brand messages through cookery demonstrations, supplier showcases, recipes, and images to encourage more followers.

Customers want to know more about your establishment, why and how it started, what your values are and what makes you unique.



Pairing local food & drink

There has been a movement away from wines being the main drink of choice to accompany food in restaurants. Pre-dinner cocktails created with local spirits, craft beers and after dinner, coffee-based drinks all have a role to play in the creation of an enhanced dining experience.

Food pairing, with a well-considered menu choice of drinks will appeal to the increasingly sophisticated palate of the growing youthful

customer base. It also appeals to the broad inter-generational consumer base who are looking to enhance their dining experiences.

For the business owner **pairing local food with local craft beers, ciders & spirits can help create a more profitable beverage menu.** It presents several opportunities to up-sell and boost sales. It is a win-win scenario for both customers and business owners alike.

Inspirations

- Artisan gins have become a new and exciting team player with “oyster shots” making an impression on the adventurous millennials. Gin-based cocktails are the perfect partner with seafood platters and prawns, as are locally crafted stouts
- If you are on the hunt for alcoholic beverages that would go well with flavourful and spicy dishes such as curry, go for those that have a lower alcohol content
- Beer can also make a great choice when paired with contrasting food combinations. Enjoy a glass of strong beer with sweet desserts and it will enhance the flavours of your sweet treat. Contrary to this, you can also pair a salty snack such as a pretzel with beer, to elevate the flavours of each
- Whiskey can step into the shoes of a cabernet sauvignon with steak and beef dishes



Giant inspiration

New Food Trends & Menu Ideas

Responding to the modern food trends will allow your business to remain relevant and appealing.

- As consumers seek to lower their carbon footprint, hyperlocal celebrates ingredients that are grown or brewed on site. This gives them a key USP (Unique Selling Point) that can help with their marketing and social media presence
- The demand for plant-based meals and the 'no chicken kiev' is rapidly rising. Be bold with your offerings and consider cauliflower steaks and wings, mushroom tacos, corn fritters or a charred onion burger on an artisan bun
- "Box friendly" could be the way to go. Offering your diners, the option to take home their leftover food is not just a nice gesture but serves as a tool to reduce your food waste charges. Just remember to be mindful of your use of single use plastics when offering box friendly services
- A dog is a man's best friend - visitors are in search of establishments that are pet friendly. Have you considered going dog friendly to attract this market?
- Single person households and busy schedules have removed the stigma around solo dining. The empty space of a large table can make a single guest feel more aware of their solidarity



Menu ideas

- Drop the seafood chowder for a one fish chowder e.g. North Atlantic smoked haddock & sweetcorn chowder & warm bread made with Whitewater Brewery beer. This can increase margins as it cuts down on fish purchasing
- Seasonal produce sees translation onto menus with terminology like “dug to-day spuds” & “picked today berries”. “Salad leaves straight from our walled garden or allotments”
- The rise of small plates sees low-cost produce yielding high gross profit for the astute chef. Lamb belly is a cheap but delicious local dish waiting for exploitation
- Trusting your gut is not only a hunch but also a new trend driven by the movement in food and wellness. Kefir & Kombucha drinks may sound foreign but are totally doable in a creative journey into fermenting in house
- “Seacuterie” is a worthwhile investigation for any chef wishing to stand out from the crowd. Smoking with tea or hay, can give smoked salmon a run for its money. Using either fresh from the lake, eel or trout, and a more wide range like brill, turbot and hake
- The great sandwich comeback makes its mark with freshly baked sourdoughs served warm with melted local cheese & crispy bacon or charcuterie
- Chicken has 239 calories per 100g while goat meat comes in at 143 calories per 100g. Explore goat burgers in an Ulster floury bap!
- Menus with more dietary options. Due to the rise in eating habits and varied diets, food outlets will have to cater for consumers seeking high quality gluten-free, dairy-free, vegetarian, vegan, and keto options
- Sophistication of children's menus. Discerning parents want to expose children to different kinds of ingredients and flavors



collaborating for success

For towns, villages and regions that want to achieve standout success, some collaborative groups are looking towards the creation of local food hubs and networks. These like-minded businesses want to maximise their efforts to enhance the attractiveness of their destination through food & drink.

Benefits

- Establishing a recognised local food destination brand which can be embraced by all those involved in the local food & drink sector when promoting their products and experiences
- A level of quality assurance can be achieved by ensuring that all participants meet a required standard, therefore giving credibility to all involved. This will also instil a sense of pride in what is being achieved. A rising tide lifts all boats!
- All businesses can support each other by collaborating and promoting each other's offerings both within and outside the area. This will be economically beneficial to all
- Marketing can be amplified when the group shares the cost so they will be in a better position to spend money on a much more targeted approach to marketing campaigns. There are also more opportunities to work in partnership with local Councils to support the wider destination marketing message and with Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland on local food & drink campaigns. Social media can also be used more efficiently, with better reach and consumer engagement achieved
- It may be easier to secure funding when working as a group for specific food & drink tourism projects
- Clusters can enter national awards, and if successful, receive huge recognition for their area. This will encourage visitors to stay longer and spend more

Taste Causeway is the unifying vision for the wide array of food & drink producers, artisans, food tourism and hospitality businesses in the stunning Causeway Coast & Glens.

Whether rearing cattle in the lush fields, hauling fish from the stormy seas, plating fine cuisine in award-winning restaurants, or serving street food in the bustling markets, they are committed to offering fresh, flavourful food, warm hospitality and an immersive experience that showcases this special place.

Their members strive to create exceptional food & drink produce and experiences through collaboration, imagination and innovation, developing fresh takes on old traditions. There are over 90 active members who have signed up to the local food criteria and Collaboration Agreement. Taste Causeway is an Invest NI Collaborative Growth Network and is set up as a Community Interest Company.

Committee members include Brighter Gold, Broughgammon Farm, The Bushmills Inn, Lacada Brewery, Causeway Coast Foodie Tours, Bushmills Distillery, Glens of Antrim Potatoes, Corndale Farm, Glenballyeamon Eggs, Islander Kelp, Lacada Brewery, Morelli's Ice Cream, Northcoast Smokehouse, Ocho Tapas Bistro, Tartine at the Distillers Arms, Blackrock House B&B and The Chocolate Manor.

Local events and festivals the network is involved in include the Salmon and Whiskey Festival, Portrush Beer Fest and in October 2019, the members put together a month-long programme of Taste Causeway events as part of the Taste the Island initiative.

Taste Causeway were runners up in the Foodie Destination Awards 2019 and were awarded Slow Food Destination status in May 2020.



Social media tips for food & drink businesses



Using social media platforms including Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and LinkedIn can help to amplify your food & drink story to the world. Beautifully presented plates of food, brunches that look too good to eat and pictures of fabulous local produce are guaranteed to whet the appetite.

Do not be afraid to show a little personality behind the business and have fun with your accounts, but do have a well-considered and intentional digital strategy that effectively promotes and reflects your business.

Here are some of our top tips for maximising the power of your digital efforts:

- If you are just getting started on your social media journey, ensure pertinent information including your opening hours and contact information is easily accessed on your profile. The less clicks it takes to find out about you, the better
- Include links to your social media accounts on your website and email signatures – make it easy for people to follow or 'like' your business
- Post regularly, at least twice daily and have a well-considered schedule to keep content fresh and engaging. Use high quality images and videos to animate your posts or recipes to try at home
- Use hashtags to attract more attention. A hashtag is a word or phrase, which starts with #. When you click it, you can see other posts which include that word or phrase. Other users may set up searches for the phrase so they can retweet. #EmbraceAGiantSpirit is used by Discover Northern Ireland to promote all things Northern Ireland. Use it and tag us @DiscoverNI
- Use social media to promote and link to special offers on your website
- Add a 'Book Now' button if you accept reservations and upload your menu to your social media accounts
- Respond to comments and tags and acknowledge and try to resolve any negative comments or feedback
- A strategy that includes user-generated content isn't only fresh and authentic, but it also helps turn your customers into ambassadors
- Be active and engaging- showcase your wonderful staff, suppliers and producers
- Use tools to schedule posts to help you organise social media planning and activity

Embrace a Giant Taste

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Embrace a
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