Designing Experiences

Creating Experiences

Developing Experiences

02
What are the defining characteristics of a tourism experience?

It is globally unique

Certain product offerings are matched in many locations across the world. Such offerings, which may include for example, beaches, waterparks, shopping centres, cater to a mass market and do not offer specific standout or differentiation. Experience tourism is concerned with identifying the uniqueness of an area – what makes that area different to others – and packaging a range of offerings that can only be found in that specific location.
It is authentically local

While the best experience-based packages are globally unique and can be considered as ‘best in class’ it is often authentic local experiences that provide exceptional added value. Small-scale local experiences should be considered as important to the overall experience package as larger scale products that may have greater national recognition.

It is interactive

The world’s best experience-based tourism is interactive. Visitors want to enliven their senses and to smell, touch, hear and see something that they can’t experience elsewhere. This will make their visit truly memorable. The more memorable the experience, the greater potential there is for repeat business.

Aunt Sandra’s and her candy factory... couldn’t get the kids out!
The cycle tour had everything. Even a stop off at Bushmills!

Experiences must focus completely on the visitor and take a holistic approach to understanding and meeting visitor needs. They need to be unique and offer something different and special, something visitors can’t experience at home.
What should Northern Ireland tourism experiences look like?

In order to develop the experience model successfully, Northern Ireland must play to its strengths and convey a real “sense of place” to our visitors.
NITB Brand

We see ourselves as confidently moving on. This is the essence of Northern Ireland. We are moving on with confidence. Northern Ireland is changing fast, but we can still take great inspiration from our past, which will in turn create a confident future.

Visitors come to Northern Ireland for many reasons. We need to give them reasons to come back time and again. We can create new and improved experiences based around who we are as a people, our culture, environment and heritage.

By listening to visitors, and placing their needs at the heart of our every action, we will offer a truly unique experience. We want to give visitors excellence, innovation, and authenticity – by building on our established heritage and embracing the evolving nature of our culture.

We know who we are, what we stand for, and what we value. But we need to spread this message to visitors and ensure we meet and exceed their expectations.
Our Vision

Create the new Northern Ireland experience and get it on everyone’s wish list.

I'd never even heard of zorbing

Zorbing, The Jungle NI, Co. Londonderry
Our Strengths

Northern Ireland’s most precious assets are its unique identity and cultural character. A sense of place is the characteristic that most distinguishes one destination from another. It is the ingredient that makes a destination distinctive, authentic and memorable. We have a stunning natural package of coasts, beaches and mountains combined with a unique history. This is matched by ‘uniqueness in scale’ that enables the visitor to connect with many offerings within a short timeframe.
Our Stories

NI has a host of stories to celebrate that revolve around our beautiful scenery, our living history and a host of interesting characters, living, dead and imaginary. We want visitors to ‘uncover our stories’ through the design and delivery of tourism experiences.
## Introducing Our Core Experience Themes

Northern Ireland has a set of 5 core experience themes that are unique and authentic. They resonate and appeal to our best prospect visitors and have the potential to give us competitive edge. Four themes are strong and distinct and one theme underpins and cuts across all of the others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Hero Assets with potential to be best in class experiences</th>
<th>Supporting Assets with potential to be best in class experiences</th>
<th>Cross-Cutting</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living Legends</strong></td>
<td>Examples include Titanic and Maritime, Saints and Scholars (including St Patrick’s &amp; Christian Heritage), and the Walled City</td>
<td>Examples include NI Heroes, Industrial Heritage, Built Heritage (including landmark Buildings), Literary Greats, Museums and attractions, Genealogy events</td>
<td>Naturally NI – experiencing local culture through nature</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Coasts and Lakes</strong></td>
<td>Examples include Giant’s Causeway and Causeway Coastal Route, Mournes Coastal Route, Fermanagh Lakes</td>
<td>Examples include Lakes, Loughs and Waterways, Cruising, Angling, Hub Towns, Seaside Towns &amp; Villages/Coastal resorts, Beaches, Trails &amp; Paths (Coastal, Forestry, Mountainous or cross country), Hallmark water based/coastal events</td>
<td>Examples include living landscapes, wonderful wildlife, NI local food &amp; produce, cookery schools, speciality restaurants, distilleries, linen, gardens, wildlife, genealogy, open farms, rural arts and crafts, markets and fairs, uniquely NI Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unique Outdoors</strong></td>
<td>Examples include Links golf, National Park, Northern Ireland a compact adventure playground</td>
<td>Examples include Mountain biking, Canoe Trails, Adrenaline activity, Walking, Hiking, Cycling, Surfing, Hallmark outdoor activity events</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Culture and Creative Vibe</strong></td>
<td>Examples include The Belfast &amp; Derry~Londonderry City Experience</td>
<td>Examples include Theatre, Street entertainment, Music/film, Distinctive/Award Winning Pubs &amp; restaurants, Café culture, Tours, Shopping, Art galleries, City Quarters, Reconciliation tourism, Public realm, Nightlife, Hallmark events</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
To exploit these themes and stories fully we need to be ‘best in class’.

The design and delivery of tourism experiences will clearly be anchored within a destination i.e. the place where the tourist will go to discover our “Coasts and Lakes” e.g. cruising the lakes of Fermanagh or driving the Causway Coast. It is important that a critical mass of similar experiences is available within a single destination.

Our collective goal is to build iconic ‘best in class’ experiences across each theme and weave in the stories that surprise and delight the visitor along the way.

We need to build an inventory of visitor experiences that will best exemplify each theme as well as the NI tourism brand in order to capture the attention and imagination of consumers to entice them to visit NI now.
So as an individual tourism business, where do you fit?

Having acknowledged where an individual experience fits within a theme, it is important that we take this thinking further and look for interdependencies and alliances that will provide opportunities for innovation and increased revenue generation.

This thought process is guided by the individual market segments who are looking for a series of interlocking activities that, when combined, will ultimately enhance their overall NI experience.

Chapter 3 explores this thinking further.
Practical Tips
Generating Ideas

Choose a theme or story that celebrates your local place, tradition, people or culture through which the experience will be developed. Think about how it will appeal to the core visitor segments we have defined - what are the particular aspects that would interest them most? What types of ways might their motivations inform how the experience is played out?
We need to develop our own ‘best kept secrets’ about the things to see, do, explore and taste off the beaten track. Sharing this information will make your guests feel really special and will showcase the best that Northern Ireland has to offer. Finding someone who knows where the best fish rise or how to break the unbreakable 4th at Royal County Down will lift the visitor experience out of the ordinary.

A similar approach demands that we seek out the best possible local quality in terms of food, entertainment, travel and craftsmanship. For example, is your artwork supplied by local artists; craft by local artisans? Do you play local music? Are there parts of your buildings named after Northern Ireland’s scenic, literary and musical greats? Are the materials and fabrics used to build and decorate your place locally sourced?

Pay attention to the simple things.

Locally sourced jams with just-baked bread turn an ordinary breakfast into one to remember. Turn your menu into a storybook. Fill it with information on the traditional and unique methods that your local suppliers use. Team up with suppliers to create a menu sourced entirely from local produce.

The homemade jam class opened my eyes!
Help your visitors create their own stories.
Northern Ireland will be their treasured memory. Give your visitors the chance to create a memory every step of the way. Engage with visitors by creating Kodak moments. Whether you’re an attraction, accommodation provider, information centre or local authority; use every opportunity to tell your story in an engaging, fun way: use furniture, artwork, craft, interpretation to create another way to tell your story and get your visitors involved.

Show you care.
Take an interest. Keep up to date with what’s on and keep your visitors informed. From road bowls to oyster eating, your recommendations could become the highlights of someone’s visit. Use every chance you get to tell your story.

Share the myths and legends of your area.
And, if anyone asks, of course they’re true! It’s the little things that make lasting impressions. Paint a vivid picture of what’s on offer and share this with your visitors.

Create conversation pieces.
Room 21 will become much more memorable if named after someone famous. Sell the journey as well as the destination. Make it your mission to collect local stories and tall tales and share them with visitors – the fact and the folklore.
Planning.
It is a journey.
Plan for every part

So, you have the kernel of an idea about what your experience might be. Now it needs developed. This requires careful planning and a lot of groundwork to make sure that you can deliver the experience the way you imagine it to be.

This section examines how experiences are put together and the practicalities of collaboration.
What’s the Story?

Your experience needs to have a title and a distinct theme that sets it apart from more ordinary tourism experiences.

Establish the flow and itinerary of the experience.

- Think about your experience as a story – just like a book it will have a start, a middle and an end. How will it all weave together? Plan in as much detail as possible every step of the way. Plan time for interaction, conversation, reflection.

- Attention to detail at every step of the way and personalisation will give you competitive edge and add value to visitors experience. Remember your experience will only as good as its weakest part.

- You need to have clear goals about how you hope your guests will feel during and after their experience and to design experience elements in a way that contributes to meeting these goals. To generate this you need to know who you want to come.
What will they do, see and feel?

Look at familiar things from a different angle.

Planning and delivering exceptional visitor experiences requires considering the entire customer lifecycle form the visitor perspective, from the moment they think about travelling until they are sharing stories, photos and video’s at home or online – in other words the visitor experiential journey.

Experiences must be designed from the outside in, through the eyes of the visitor. So think about what will appeal most to that visitor – what motivates and excites them. What do they value in a holiday? Think about what that visitor will see, smell, feel & experience. What will be the emotion aroused? What will be the ‘bragging rights’ at the dinner table or the ‘cool factor’ they post on social media? What pictures will they capture that will translate what made it truly memorable?

How can your local knowledge of the area and the WOW moments/hidden gems help deliver truly memorable engaging and interactive experiences?
‘Put the visitor at the heart of planning your experience’

Be that visitor for the day – would this experience really appeal to them? Would it make them want to come just for that? Would it make them want to come to experience that as part of the wider destination?

I am a visitor, what appeals to me?
Cater for specific needs, interests and time. Think your audience through. Understand their needs and interests. Is it me or us? Who can take part? An individual visitor? Groups? What size of group? Will they participate in all or just parts?
I am a guest, I am special

Guests need to feel important. They have gone to a great deal of effort to be with you. Don’t let them down. Go the extra mile. What is that little bit extra that will add value (remember it doesn’t always cost – it may simply be the personal touch). Is there something different and/or exclusive that you could offer that will really set the experience aside such as a special guest speaker, an exclusive site visit or backstage access. Remember to match this with the motivations of the visitor for whom you are developing the experience.

I want to be engaged

Learn, do, be local. How will the experience be immersive? What will the visitors learn? What senses will be stimulated? How will they be engaged in the experience? Be imaginative about the types of activity you provide access to but also realistic about time and the amount of expertise required. Make sure that the physical engagement that you offer is suitable and will result in a positive memory rather than frustration!

I want something to remember

What will make my experience memorable? What memories will I have? What will be the story that I can take back? Is there a physical memento available, something unique to every visitor? Have you thought of a show-stopping moment when everything will fall into place and about which your guest will be talking for ever?

Remember – uncovering our stories sits at the heart of the NI tourism Brand – what stories will your visitors leave with? How did your experience help them become a part of that story?

Remember – authentic and unique experiences are not one dimensional but rather multi faceted – they engage and immerse the visitor at multiple levels.
How will it be organised?

Although having a great idea is essential working out what needs to be organised to deliver it is equally so. Tourists are fish out of water. They are not in a familiar environment and need exceptional amounts of care to ensure that their short visit is a happy one. It is amazing how small irritants can often dilute the overall feel good factor. This must not be allowed to happen. Visitors returning to their home should be extolling the virtues of the experience not using phrases such as “it was a pity that…”, “it was great except...” or “the trouble was...”. Avoiding practical failures is as important as getting the inspirational elements right.
Logistical planning is about paying attention to the glue that holds things together. Take a systematic approach to checking that everything is in place.

Transport: How will your guests arrive and leave? Who is picking them up? Taxi, coach or private car? Who will greet them and talk to them on any connecting journey? If they need to be transported to activities or events during their stay how is that being handled? Will they be made comfortable and be informed at every stage?

Accommodation: Where are your guests staying? Do you have a list of any special requirements? Are you equipped to deal with any urgent requests, especially medical ones? If you are not providing accommodation are you completely happy with where they are staying? Have you checked the rooms yourself?

Activities: Who will be responsible for organising and delivering the individual activities that make up the experience? Have you tested the way they operate? What will happen in event of sickness or anything else that prevents the activity form happening?

Hospitality: Where will your guests eat? Have you communicated any dietary needs?

Information: Do your guests have the information (phone numbers, addresses etc.) they might need in the event of an accident? Do they have your mobile number in case of emergencies?