Understanding Experiences
“A tourism product is what you buy; a tourism experience is what you remember”

Canadian Tourism Commission

I loved it when I had to put on my wellies and find the tadpoles.
Experiential tourism shows rather than describes. The tourist becomes an active participant in the experience. In experiential tourism, people value their visit because of direct experience. Experiential tourism encourages visitors to participate and promotes activities that draw people into cultures, communities, and the outdoors. Different visitors will want various levels from toe-dipping to total immersion but the principles remain the same.

For the visitor this might mean learning a new skill or meeting and engaging with people who are interested in sharing our local culture, but whatever the experience the visitor becomes a hands-on participant not a passive observer.

Experiential tourists seek diverse experiences that match their interests and provide a sense of personal accomplishment. Most importantly, these experiences allow visitors to create distinct memories.

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To create such tourism experiences we must take a new look at the goods and services that have traditionally been part of our tourist industry and redesign them to allow opportunities for visitors to learn about our region and enjoy its character in a completely new way.

Ideas for these experiences can be stimulated by nature, heritage, art, sport or whatever a local region has in its cultural locker. The important thing is that they are designed with the individual user in mind and that the activities involved are enhanced through direct contact with the place, its people and way of life.

If we are to capture the imagination of our visitor there is a real need to maintain a global perspective and make our offering ‘stand-out’. Even if you are selling locally you are still competing globally as people can choose a location anywhere in the world to visit.

"Once a King in Narnia, always a King in Narnia."

"But don’t try to use the same route twice."

Rectory where CS Lewis’ grandfather lived
For the tourism provider, it integrates all aspects of the visitor experience including pre-departure trip planning, basic and enhanced services and programs, post-trip follow-up and much more.

Quality, memorable visitor experiences are a shared outcome between the visitor and the provider. The visitor invests their personal time and money while the provider gains an understanding of the visitor’s interests and provides what is required to facilitate the opportunity for a memorable experience.

The best experiences connect a region’s physical assets with the emotional interactions that travellers want to experience.

To remain relevant in this new reality it is essential to focus on the visitor experience. Those who deliver memorable customer experiences consistently create superior value and competitive advantages.

"The rope bridge was amazing but having Peter there with binoculars to show us the Fulmars, Kittywakes and Razorbills really made the children’s day."
Increase Revenue Generation Potential

Experiential travel represents a new layer of opportunity beyond delivering traditional tourism products based on goods and services.

The Canadian Tourism Commission refer to this as “The Progression of Economic Value”. Whilst each individual level of commerce has value, as your product progresses, so too does your ability to differentiate yourself in the marketplace and ultimately charge a premium.

Experiential travel represents a real opportunity to drive more profitability into businesses.

Source: Nancy Arsenault, Celes Davar and Todd Lucier (2011)
Thinking About Delivering a City Experience

Writing Belfast

Niamh and her two friends Michelle and Sarah have arrived from Dublin to take part in Writing Belfast a 4 day experience exploring creative writing, literary history and contemporary culture.
Arriving in style straight from the station...liftd and laid the whole time.

Terry the taxi man even read a poem about Belfast to welcome us...he said he wants to be an actor when he grows up. We took his number - might need him again.

That's my room up there!
Checking in

What a place - lap of luxury!

Looking at the itinerary - all so well organised.

Looking forward to tomorrow, but for now time to celebrate being in Belfast... for the first time!
Portrait of Hugh Odling-Smee - what a brilliant name, what a brilliant guide - I learnt so many things - even remembered some of them.

The personal touch

On the hoof with Hugh...cobled streets, tucked away pubs, story after story...

Michelle bids farewell to our faithful guide.

Creating Experiences

01/Understanding Experiences

Commercial Court & City Hall Belfast, Co. Antrim
The best of local food & drink

Creating Experiences

A chance to meet some of the others in the group. Robbie here got on well with Sarah...but he’s from the Republic of Cork - couldn’t understand a word!

Bobby the Barman - what a guy, what a smile, what a lunch - great atmosphere in this place - real people - a real place.

The John Hewitt Pub - named in honour of the famous poet...beautiful bar, great local beers...
Don’t just stand there, do something!

Our place of work! Back to school for a few hours...

Glenn says writing is easy; it’s the thinking that’s the hard part.

It’s not like school at all...we actually wanted to be here.
Added extras


In the props room. Loved this place - could have stayed here for hours fiddling about...

Backstage. Born to act eh?
Creating Experiences

Magic moments

Snugs are the business - we could have stayed here all day - hidden away from the world - laughing.

Took some time out to think about my poem - no better place to write about Belfast.

I loved all the little details in this bar - amazingly ornate - just beautiful.

The Crown Bar, Belfast, Co. Antrim
I read the Narnia books as a child...adored them - the idea of going through a wardrobe into another world - magical genius!

Ah the peace, the quiet.

When I go back to Dublin I’m going to read them all again...and watch the movies!
VIP treatment

We get to see everything on this trip - total VIPs! This is the Ulster Orchestra setting up...

Glenn's great. Lovely host and fantastic tutor.

Our tutor, Belfast writer Glenn Patterson, showed us round the Ulster Hall and its famous organ!
So many books, so little time.

We all got a little time in the Linenhall to plan our own attempts at poetry.

When you spend time in this library you don’t really want to leave.
Making memories

Declan takes us through the printing process - he makes it look easy.

Do you want to see my etchings?

Turning the wheel on the press...totally loved this part - sense of achievement and excitement - want to do more...NOW!
Creating Experiences

The last night, pre-dinner drinks at the Spaniard. Budding poets and new buddies Liam and Stephen are planning their next piece of work...

If we look nervous it’s because we have to read our poems after dinner!

So proud. Nerves totally shredded but felt brilliant - look applause!

The last night, pre-dinner drinks at the Spaniard. Budding poets and new buddies Liam and Stephen are planning their next drink piece of work...
Taking something home

David Torrens the owner presents me with my framed print!

I wrote it, I printed it and now I’m taking it home. I love you Belfast!

This is the bookshop for booklovers - books, cups of tea, biscuits, loads of chat and no reason to leave...