ni2012 has changed global perceptions and created a legacy for tourism in Northern Ireland. But where do we go from here? What is the next step in our journey? Best practice points towards experiential tourism. By focusing on our strengths and natural assets, we can create truly authentic experiences and unlock stories to surprise and delight visitors. We believe in this approach and its ability to create opportunities to drive increased revenue in tourism. This publication has been designed to deliver the ideas and inspiration that can help us all to continue bringing to life the experiences we offer to our visitors. Collaboration will be the key to success – we are all unique but together we can deliver more rounded, more exciting and more inspiring experiences that visitors will spread the word about and return for more. The future success of the industry is in our hands.

Alan Clarke
Chief Executive of Northern Ireland Tourist Board

The Intelligent Perspective Series

- Intelligent Perspective overview report
  This report provides a deeper understanding of Experiential Tourism and how to do it in Northern Ireland (NI).

- The Intelligent Perspective Series
  Five practical guides covering five themes - to help you to grow your business through making use of our best assets. These guides will help you to better understand who our visitors are, what they are looking for and how to give them more of what they want.

1. Coasts and Lakes 4. Living Legends
2. Unique Outdoors 5. Naturally NI
3. Creative Vibe
In this fast-moving consumer marketplace we know that our tourism industry must adapt and develop to keep up with growing competition. Across the world, everyone is ‘doing tourism’ and the demands from consumers is ever rising and changing. The more you know about your customers, the better you can look after them, the more satisfied they will be, the more they will recommend you and the more money they are likely to spend with you. It really is just that simple.

Traditionally many tourism destinations and NI too, have developed and marketed tourism as a series of products and services – a hotel room, a beach, a museum, a beautiful landscape, and so on. But we know that to truly engage with our visitors today we must shift our thinking and connect with them on a deeper, more emotional, more personal level. Visitors want to feel something from the places they visit, they want to be touched by the stories of the people and actively participate in culture and community. They want to have genuine interactions on a personal level and everyone in the tourism industry must open their hearts to be able to do this. We are no longer merely selling visitors a ‘product’ – we are selling them experiences of our country and we, its people, are an essential part of this product.

We need to now be more in the business of ‘giving memories and connections’ to visitors to take home – not any more just postcards and souvenirs.

This is a great opportunity for NI to really rise up and grow our tourism industry. We have everything we need – wonderful landscapes, a unique and distinctive culture, friendly and genuine people, and a depth of stories, heritage and legends that other destinations can only dream of.

Our time is now. This series of guides has been developed to show you how to do it.

What are the benefits of this approach?

• You can develop a deeper understanding of who is likely to be attracted and what else you can offer them to grow your business
• It is a way to work more closely with other providers and to grow the market share for everyone
• It can encourage you to become better at what you do and to be more appreciated for your commitment and passion
• Opportunities to learn from other businesses success
• Opportunities for you to become more profitable and for NI to become a stronger tourism destination in the future
• It will encourage a greater spread of visitors into the rural areas of NI

The Intelligent Perspective Series has been developed to inspire and help everyone to start to offer our visitors better joined-up experiences, as this is what they are now looking for. Our own experiential tourism journey was kicked off with the launch of the ‘Creating Experiences Toolkit’ in March 2013 and this series of guides is the next step along that road.

There are six guides in the series and they are designed to be a practical resource, full of tips, insights and sharing others’ experiences to support and learn from. There are five themed reports which show you how to do it and one ‘Overview Report’ that can tell you why. However, these individual reports don’t sit on their own. To be effective, you will need to refer to all of them and mix the ideas from each, according to your particular business, geographic location and type of visitor you attract.

Many others have embarked down this path before us and so there is best practice out there and experience that we can learn from. We hope that you enjoy the opportunities that this approach will give you and also make good use of the insights and information within these resources.
What is Experiential Tourism?

The global tourism industry has seen a distinct move away from Mass Tourism, which sold generic packages with low levels of personal involvement. Now people want bespoke offerings that tap into their hearts and minds, giving them once-in-a-lifetime experiences that are just right for them. They care deeply how they will spend their precious time away and they want to find an experience that closely matches their needs. Moreover, with such a powerful looking and booking tool as the internet and travel review sites, potential visitors are armed with all the tools to design a tailored trip that reflects their aspirations and expectations. This is why we must shift our focus away from marketing standalone products into creating and marketing experiences. This is Experiential Tourism.

What does Experiential Tourism mean for NI?

NI is comparatively, a very small country and so it is to be expected that we have fewer signature standalone experiences to rely on for our tourism attractors. But NI is literally brimming with smaller experiences that when ‘clustered’ together can pack a punch all on their own – if we choose to look at how we deliver tourism in a different way. It’s all about collaborating, not competing with each other.

Why is our Living Legends theme so important?

NI is steeped in stories, myths and legends from a rich and diverse heritage. From every corner of our country, we have many stories to tell. Whether our stories are about our industries, our history, our spiritual and religious core or our wonderful monuments, castles and grand houses – they are all linked and collectively make us who we are today. NI is a rich and fascinating destination for a visitor to explore and connect with.

But visitors need our stories to be brought to life to help make these connections. They need each of us to play our part in doing this both formally and informally. A building is just a building without knowing its role in history or the people who lived there. It is interesting to see how linen is made and to explore the tools of the trade in museums but how much more interesting is it to also visit the house where the linen mill owner lived with his family and sleep the night on real linen sheets, sampling the hearty traditional food of the era?

We need to use our knowledge, creativity and imagination to find ways to link our stories together and working in partnership with others who share the story to make an experience for visitors that is really special and utterly uniquely NI. This is how we tap into Living Legends as a theme for experiential tourism.
Spotlight on this theme – Living Legends

There is no one theme that will on its own appeal to one particular visitor type. Visitors want to pick and mix their experiences across all themes according to their needs. It is this individual selection that will create memorable and unique tourism experiences for every visitor. The focus of this report is to help businesses that are influenced in some way by the Living Legends theme (through proximity or otherwise) to improve their offering and ultimately to get more visitors through the door. Individual businesses will be able to use this guide to learn how to become more experience-led in nature.

We need to become:
➤ more authentic
➤ more engaging
➤ more personalised

We don’t necessarily need a big signature experience as the only way to attract our visitors. For NI, the real opportunity lies in developing a critical mass of experience-led businesses across all the themes that can link together and cross sell. We need to align our efforts by joining up our products and turn them into experiences so they make more sense to a visitor. In short, we need to view our current offering from THEIR perspective.

Then we can join up experiences for them around particular themes that we know they would like. Very often these sorts of experiences are right under our nose – it seems so obvious we don’t know why we didn’t think of it before!

**Signature Assets:**
Examples include Titanic Belfast, St Patrick’s and the Walled City of Derry

**Supporting Assets:**
Our people past & present, Industrial Heritage, Built Heritage, Christian Heritage, Literary Greats, Genealogy, Big House Tradition, Myths and Legends
The bits we are getting right...

We have a huge array of mature attractors for this theme – our Christian/celtic heritage and myths for example are legendary and just waiting to be fully experienced. So too are the cities and towns that surround them.

Our success will be how we can work together using our imagination and flair to animate our stories. The world is waiting and it only us that can do it!

Consider the following key strengths of our Living Legends and how they relate to your business:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living Legend USPs</th>
<th>How to tap into this strength</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Titanic Belfast and the Walled City of Derry are internationally renowned and attract visitors from far afield.</td>
<td>Make sure you know when special events are taking place. They might be an added attractor to visitors. If your visitors come to see these major attractions, can you be knowledgeable on the history to engage them further? This could become a highlight to their visit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. We have a deep and rich heritage that is unique and of interest to many potential visitors. We need to bring this to life for them.</td>
<td>People love stories – it makes the difference between a pile of grey stones and a fabulous fortress. Have up-to-date information on what heritage sites and museums are nearby and encourage them to visit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Every tourism business has an opportunity to tap into the Living Legends theme through our rich local history, heritage and traditions.</td>
<td>Can you start to link up with other businesses in your area to make the most of your local heritage? How can you bring the stories alive? Perhaps you have a regional food tradition and can link up with a local restaurant to offer a cookery lesson or sampling opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The stories of our past, both recent and long ago, have links across the world – Spanish Armada on the Causeway Coast, emigration to the New World and connections to several American Presidents, extensive European influence of our Saints and Scholars such as Colmcille and Columbanus. It is how we tell these stories that will appeal to visitors.</td>
<td>Visitors love to find something that has a connection with their own culture. How can you make their experience more personal? Take an interest where your visitors are from and try to make connections to enhance their stay. Perhaps they have NI roots and would like to explore their family tree or visit an attraction that has links to their home country?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. NI has produced a considerable number of renowned men and women who have distinguished themselves in the arts, literature, academia, science, industry and other callings. Visitors are interested in these famous names.</td>
<td>What can you do to expand on the stories of our people past and present? Look out for blue plaques across the country. Are any of these near or relevant to your business? How can you bring the stories alive for your visitors?</td>
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### SWOT analysis for Living Legends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>STRENGTHS</strong></th>
<th><strong>WEAKNESSES</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Wide appeal - overseas visitors are a huge market for Living Legends.</td>
<td>• Some of our key products are similar to those in ROI and Scotland. We need to make the differences stronger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• This theme benefits from having Giant’s Causeway and Titanic as international demand generators.</td>
<td>• Many of our products are standalone and could be better brought alive through linkages through the stories and animation (e.g. re-enactments).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• NI has a rich history in industrial heritage. Shipbuilding, Linen, Tobacco, Tea. There was no country that produced as much of these as we did.</td>
<td>• Lack of integrated interpretation and signage on heritage sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There is a considerable ‘big house’ tradition in Northern Ireland. Most properties have good stories to tell that can link with other places/people.</td>
<td>• Fragmented product.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Museums are a key offering with a rich array of exhibits, effectively brought to life.</td>
<td>• Better integration of core strengths across all aspects of Living Legend theme.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>OPPORTUNITIES</strong></th>
<th><strong>THREATS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Opportunities for business to link in with and develop experiences along St Patrick’s Trail, especially in Armagh and Downpatrick.</td>
<td>• Businesses are reluctant to collaborating with others as they seem them as competition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sperrins Mountains is an untapped opportunity – lots of pre-historic sites.</td>
<td>• NI not being known for some of its unique and authentic assets (instead Scotland and ROI taking credit).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Good opportunity to tap into events/anniversaries of key moments in our history or heritage.</td>
<td>• Stories and legends not being well known by tourism industry and so not passed on to visitors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Opportunities to expand stories to link in many more products. Businesses need to collaborate and use imagination to create and develop the product.</td>
<td>• Lack of overseas visitors travelling north from Dublin due to access issues / visa restrictions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focus on Sacred Ireland’s heritage and myths as a particular missed opportunity.</td>
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### Did You Know?

The 400 year old Walled City of Derry–Londonderry is the last walled settlement to be built in Europe and is the only remaining intact walled city on the island of Ireland?
Our whole culture is deeply meshed into a rich tapestry that makes us who we are today and it is this that our visitors are eager to explore. If we as tourism providers can join these dots together, connect these stories – it will considerably enrichen the experience of visiting NI.

The big opportunity for NI is to start to make the links. As an example, Glenarm Castle and Dunluce Castle share their history with the McDonnell family – building on this theme, what more can we tell a visitor? Could a local restaurant of pub link into this theme - for example creating a signature dish inspired by Sorley Boy McDonnell, made from local produce from the Glens of Antrim? How could this story be enlivened to really engage visitors and involve them in learning more, staying longer and spending more? Perhaps through a story telling session in a traditional pub? Each story or theme needs us to make the links and bring the story to life for our visitors through festivals and events, living history or developing trails and tours.

The 3 themes of Living Legends

1. Industrial Heritage
2. Built Heritage
3. Christian Heritage
1. Why our Industrial Heritage is important

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries nowhere in the world could match NI for its major production of ships or linen. We were also known for our industrial engineering to manufacture rope, tea drying and other machinery. Our industrial heritage is legendary and Victorian Belfast was an opulent and grand city with great halls, statuesque public buildings, theatres and banks – all fuelled by this very successful industrial economy. And it is on this heritage that another layer of our stories are founded.

Shipbuilding

The golden age of shipbuilding on which Belfast built its reputation began in the 1800’s until after the First World War. Harland and Wolff, founded in 1853 was quickly established as the world’s leading shipbuilder and produced many vessels for the White Star Line and others, the most famous being Titanic. There were many other smaller yards too and so the industry had a huge influence on the lives of the local communities and their social history.

Linen

The island of Ireland has been producing linen since early Christian times, but by the start of the 20th century the industry had grown to the point where it employed some 70,000 people in over 200 mills across NI.

A complicated manufacturing process required workers with a high level of expertise. Many of these employees were women, who laboured for long hours in extremely harsh conditions. As a result, the factory became an all-consuming part of the lives of workers and their families, and this in turn gave rise to the heartfelt, poignant and sometimes tragic stories that have been passed down through generations of families.

For the relatives of those who worked in the industry, it can therefore be an extremely emotional journey as they step back in time to gain a sense of what life was like for those who toiled in the dark and dusty confines of those mills.

Did You Know?

Belfast was fondly known as ‘Linenopolis’ due to its thriving linen industry. The emblem of the flax flower represents the Northern Ireland Assembly.

I just found a photo and on the back it says “Uncle Robert and Nellie McDowell, all our lovely Irish linens come from their mill in Belfast.” So I guess I should be looking for a McDowell Linen Mill. Where do I start?

Jess
Legends within the Landscape

Another opportunity for NI is to tell its story through its unique landscape. Martin Carey from Mournes Heritage Trust explains how this is possible in the Mournes...

The Mournes has much to offer visitors in relation to Living Legends experiences. Our themes are as diverse as the role of the Mournes in inspiring the magical world of Narnia created by C S Lewis and the very real achievements of the hardy Mourne people in industrial heritage - whether through the construction of the Silent Valley Dams or building the Mourne Wall or the quarrying of granite for use in some of the most important cities and monuments in these islands.

A key step in our approach is the development of tangible focal points for interpretation and celebration of these Living Legends. This will include restoring Annalong Cornmill - a listed historic building - and extension of the Granite Trail near Newcastle as places to share the granite story. It will also incorporate the creation of a themed Narnia trail at Rostrevor Forest, the reinstatement of a ‘Watertown’ workers’ house at Silent Valley and renovation and interpretation of the wonderful gothic architecture of the ornate gates, bridges and follies at Tollymore Forest Park. We will be encouraging businesses and stakeholders in the area to engage with these focal points for experiential tourism and help us develop a range of activities around them to bring out the ‘legends within the landscape’.

Martin Carey, Mournes Heritage Trust

Did You Know?

Slieve Donard in the Mournes has had great significance in history – as a sacred place for ancient burial grounds, Christian pilgrimages, as a navigation point. Slieve Gullion is often referred to the most mystic of Irish mountains.

Did You Know?

Mourne Granite has been used across the world including the Princess Diana Memorial Fountain, the Hans Christian Andersen statue in New York and the cobbled streets of Liverpool. The top stone on the Empire State Building is said to have been put in place by a mason from the Mournes.
2. **Why our Built Heritage is important**

From the Walls and the Guildhall of Derry~Londonderry to the Parliament buildings of Belfast, from all of our rich tapestry of museums, iconic historic houses and beautiful gardens – NI has an enviable selection of unique and important built heritage that visitors flock to, as they form the backbone and context to experiencing our landscapes, stories and people.

A key attraction for visitors is the Walled City of Derry – one of its kind and the last walled city to be built in Europe. Recently a huge investment has been made to transform this into one of our Signature Assets with a number of projects; restoration of six key buildings around the walls to bring them back to former glory - The Apprentice Boys Memorial Hall, The First Derry Presbyterian Church, St. Columb’s Cathedral, Aras Cholmcille -The St. Columba Heritage Centre, The Playhouse Theatre, and The Guildhall. Additionally an ambitious Walled City Lighting Strategy has transformed the Walls after dark and given the city a wonderful backdrop to improve the evening economy.

Another big attraction is our historic houses and gardens which tell the stories of our families and their lives in a previous era. Going further back, our castles, that are dotted along the coastal landscapes, tell other stories of conflicts and military action throughout the centuries. And all of this rich heritage is backed up through our museums which give further fascinating insights into Northern Ireland life through the ages where we can explore artefacts, traditions – often at first hand.

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1. **Fort Henry, Canada**

At Fort Henry, a 19th century British military fortress in Ontario, visitors are transported back to British garrison life during the year of Canada’s confederation.

Once inside the wooden gates of what is one of Canada’s premiere historic attractions, visitors can take guided tours, enjoy musical performances and precision military demonstrations by the Fort Henry Guard, and interact with living history characters portraying the civilian population of the Fort, such as schoolteachers and soldiers’ wives.

The Fort also plays host to numerous special ceremonies and events each year, including Fort Henry’s Beer & Food Truck Festival, and Sunset Ceremonies featuring the interpretive story of 1860s military music, drill and big-bang artillery manoeuvres, plus a mock battle – all brought to life with the aid of a state-of-the-art projection system.

[www.forthenry.com](http://www.forthenry.com)

2. **The Guildhall, Derry~Londonderry**

The Guildhall - one of Derry~Londonderry’s most recognisable landmarks - has been at the heart of city life since 1890 and is now the hub point of the visitor experience, linking the Walls, Peace Bridge and Waterside. The building was named in honour of its connection to the City of London and its guilds. It was officially opened as the administrative centre for Londonderry Corporation. Over 120 years later, it still retains its civic function and is the only guildhall still in civic use on the island of Ireland.

Following a recent £9.5 million restoration project, the Guildhall now boasts a new multifaceted tourism experience providing a central hub for visitors exploring the city. As well as having a revamped council chamber and mayor’s parlour, the Guildhall is now home to an interactive Tourist Information Point; a new dedicated exhibition exploring how the Ulster Plantation has shaped the history of the city; a new cafe area; and interpretation panels installed throughout the building to bring its many special features to life.

This is an interesting example of how to broaden the use of a significant building into more than just its civic uses for the benefit of the visitor experience.
3. Why our Christian Heritage is important

Whether the purpose of the visit is for leisure or something more aligned to a modern pilgrimage, visitors to NI have a huge array of churches, monuments and sacred sites (Christian and pre-Christian) to immerse themselves in.

The island of Ireland has been a centre of Christian learning and training for priests and monks since the 5th Century largely initiated through the work of Saint Patrick (circa 444 AD). It was Saint Patrick’s apostles who initially spread the Christian faith to Europe and for 1500 years following, Armagh has been the Ecclesiastical Capital of Ireland and the seat of both the Church of Ireland and the Catholic Archbishops.

With such strong links to Saint Patrick coupled with its celtic myths, legends and stories, Northern Ireland is a strong destination for people with a wide range of interests - spiritual and otherwise - to embrace our unique history.

Saint Patrick, as the Patron Saint of Ireland has become almost synonymous worldwide with all things Irish and so Saint Patrick’s Day on the 17th March is celebrated throughout the world by the many people of Irish descent - not just those with a Christian connection. There is estimated to be around 80 million people across the world with Irish roots (many in North America) and it is this group of potential visitors, our diaspora, who have a strong propensity to return to NI, discover their fore-fathers and to make a connection with their heritage. This is our opportunity and why Christian Heritage as indeed all our Living Legends themes, are so important.

In 2011 The Saint Patrick’s trail was developed as a Signature Project to link key Christian heritage sites from Downpatrick to Armagh and onwards to Bangor. This 92 mile drive route presents a framework for innovative experience development, perhaps choral chanting or music and re-enactments at some of the sites at the key times.

Who comes to visit?

According to a NITB survey, fewer people visit St Patrick’s Trail than our other signature projects. Of those who do visit, they are primarily from North American and then Europe or GB. A significantly smaller proportion were from NI or ROI. These visitors tend to be older (55+) and are interested in opportunities to learn more, explore the stories and follow a common theme. They also like to visit other historic properties, museums, art galleries and enjoy good food and drink

In this survey the following strengths and weaknesses in relation to our Christian heritage product were reported by visitors:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUR STRENGTHS</th>
<th>COULD BE IMPROVED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Variety of places to visit that are linked by a common theme .</td>
<td>• Access to product in rural locations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Information on the story of the people and the place.</td>
<td>• A need for more information - particularly around the smaller sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A unique heritage that interests millions of people worldwide through our diaspora.</td>
<td>• A broadening out of the theme to include celtic myths legends, local food etc .</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Opportunity to collaborate on cross-border / cross-country experiences to encourage an expansion of routes.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

If people have never been to NI before, it is more important than ever to offer good information and make sure visitors are getting the most out of their trip. Remember it is you they want to interact with – not just the stones of the relic – however beautiful!

Visitors come with all sorts of expectations and so to give a great experience, you have to ask visitors what they want and help them to find it.
“I don’t have any real preference as to particular sites to visit - I’m in it more for the experience and an inexplicable desire to go to Ireland (I’m not Irish!) My ideal tour would be going to religious/spiritual sites during the day and pub crawl at night, but I understand that on a canned tour what you see is what you get (but my guess is that all of Ireland is spiritual....)” Daisy

“The Cathedral is beautiful, and the mosaics are an unusual feature. Fabulous stained glass windows as well – overall, a peaceful and attractive place to visit. Can’t help thinking that if it was in another city, there would be tour buses queuing outside the door, but instead it feels completely undiscovered!” Susan

“We stumbled upon Inch Abbey which is now in ruins. It is steeped in history and we give top marks to the guide (dressed as a monk) who seemed to know his ‘stuff’. Beware that if visiting there are no facilities in the form of shelter, toilet or shop, simply a few information boards and a few park benches. Interesting Religious Site, but essential that the excellent ‘Monk’ Guide is on duty or it could have been a disaster” Shelley

Pilgrims or Tourists?

In the past, pilgrims would leave their homes, families, and comforts to walk for hundreds of miles with nothing but what they could carry on their backs. It was a real adventure - a leap into the unknown! However, advances in technology mean that the modern day tourist arrives at a destination with a wealth of pre-researched information to hand - they know everything there is to know! What can we learn from the ‘pilgrim experience’ of the past to add an element of the unknown into our Christian heritage product and broader NI visitor experience?

Case Studies

3. Durham’s Christian Heritage

The City of Durham, birthplace of the great Anglo-Saxon theologian St Bede, has made a real selling point of its strong Christian heritage which can be traced back over 1,300 years. Durham Cathedral, which was built to provide a monumental shrine for St Cuthbert as well as a place of worship, now provides a focal point for both religious pilgrims and leisure visitors from across the globe. Nearly one thousand years after the cathedral was built, the Cathedral Chapter resolved to establish an ‘Academic Institution or College or University’, and their benevolence enabled the foundation of Durham University.

Each year thousands of visitors come to explore the cathedral and university, discover the places and sites connected with St Bede and walk in the footsteps of St Cuthbert on the Saints’ trail.

Going on a pilgrimage... is not about getting to a destination

Pilgrims would say that the difference between a tourist and a pilgrim is that a tourist heads for a destination where a pilgrimage is more interested in the journey. Pilgrims would also say that there are three golden tips to getting the most out of the journey and having more rewarding encounters:

➢ Look out for the people you meet along the way
➢ See what you can learn from the places you visit on the journey
➢ Share something with a fellow traveller, whether they are a pilgrim or a tourist

So whether your visitor is a pilgrim, a tourist or a traveller or something in-between – the same rules apply. People are looking for the experience of an activity, not purely the activity alone and so this involves engagement from the locals, good information, an integrated product along a theme and integrated tourism communities.
The Stories of Northern Ireland

Each of the 3 themes; Industrial Heritage, Built Heritage and Christian Heritage is underpinned and brought to life for visitors by our own stories. Whether they are personal stories, myths, legends or our connections with famous NI heroes – each story that is told can create long lasting memories for a visitor and a real flavour and sense of our country and our people. It is these stories that bring our landscapes, buildings, monuments and history alive in a very unique way.

Our people past and present

We have many heroes in NI across many different cultures; sport, literary, industry, politics. Each one of these with a story that touches many local areas across the country. CS Lewis for instance with his inspiration for Narnia being around Rostrevor; George Best, one of the greatest footballers the world has known, Harry Ferguson and his aviation and tractor links – the list goes on. Who came from your area and what stories can you tell about their life and work? Can you think of a way to celebrate their life and who would you encourage joining you to do this? Would it be around an anniversary or a great achievement? The Beckett Festival in Enniskillen is a great example of how the local businesses pulled together to host a multi arts festival over five days to celebrate his work (see Series 3- Culture and Creative Vibe p 14 for the case study ). What could you do?

Myths and Legends

Fact and fantasy in Northern Ireland can often be hard to separate. The ancient stories that are woven around our monuments, castles, icons and landscapes are beguiling and a real pull for visitors. Will they see the vanishing lake near Ballycastle, or fairies in the Glens of Antrim? Did Finn McCool really build steps to Scotland at the Giants Causeway? Through our poems, songs, folklore, stories and our craic - we are known to be romantic and spiritual people. In fact it is often the very reason why people come to visit us NI. So what stories do you know about your locality? What can you share with visitors? You might just make their day!

Our own personal stories

Visitor are looking to have an authentic experience and to be engaged. They want to immerse themselves in our culture and our lives. If they can relate to places they can visit and landscapes that they can stand in, the smallest detail of your own family history and personal story will truly delight and bring magic to the trip. It will bring the whole experience alive. For the more passionate genealogist, a significant amount of work may have been done prior to the trip and they may want the engagement of professional genealogists while they are in NI.

So what did your grandfather do in the 19th century? Where did your family come from, what stories have passed down your family that you can share with visitors over a nip of whiskey? Better still if your stories relate to exactly what your visitor is trying to learn about - this is how you can give a unique and world class experience. It is YOU that can make the difference!

Did You Know?

Northern Ireland has a strong connection with the Second World War – various locations across the whole of Northern Ireland were vast training camps for both British and American troops and the country was littered with airfields. For example, did you know that Grey Point Fort in Helen’s Bay is one of the best preserved early 20th century coastal forts anywhere in the British Isles?
Sharing really makes the difference

“The Black Taxi Tour was the highlight of our time in Belfast... Ireland for that matter! Bobby was a wealth of information and has a way of telling the history of the Murals that kept us all informed and captivated. His historical information is made even more interesting by his sense of humor.” Suzy, Minnesota

“Wonderful warm Irish welcome from Margaret and Ronnie and a really great house in a wonderful setting very near the shores of Strangford Lough. If you have even a passing interest in mechanical engineering and agricultural machinery Ronnie’s knowledge and experience is quite incredible! The house can be powered by an ancient but very effective generator in the event of a power cut! If he offers to show you his collection don’t hesitate to say yes! You will be in for a real treat from a true enthusiast with a mine of information and knowledge.” Jim, Toronto

“The Causeway Coast and Glens has a rich human history which thrives with myths and legends and showcases a rich diversity of heritage features – all of which provide opportunities for visitors to stay longer and have an enhanced experience. According to a recent study, a key motivator for choosing to take a holiday or a day trip in Northern Ireland is to meet the locals, experience local history and to learn stories about people and places. There are many existing opportunities and more will arise over the next few years. For example The Gobbins Path in Islandmagee is presently being redeveloped and will offer unique opportunities to experience both the area’s natural heritage but also the history of tourism during Victorian times.”
Maxime Sizaret, Chief Executive, Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust

Top tips for businesses

- Can you work with others to develop a food experience on the Saint Patrick Trail? What would be on the menu? Where can it be sourced? Who could help to make this happen?
- What more could be offered along the Saint Patrick’s Trail route to appeal to a wider range of interests e.g. retail, craft, food, markets, events?
- Are there enough opportunities to buy local crafts, gifts and souvenirs? How accessible to buy are quality linen tablecloths and bed linen? How can you help to involve the local arts and crafts community to create opportunities to sell to visitors?
- How can you work with local heritage providers and tour operators in your area to offer a themed experience? Can you jointly propose an itinerary to pitch to a tour operator? Can you work with others to develop a trail to link to some of these themes?
- Does your business have a history or heritage? Do you have a story to tell? Who in your locality shares your story too?
- If your accommodation has links with the linen industry for instance - can you make links for visitors with other businesses in the story? Museums, attractions, street names? Can you provide a ‘linen experience’? And of course ensure your guests sleep between the finest authentic NI linen sheets!
There are some key visitor types or segments that we need to focus our attention on in NI as these are the types of visitor who are best matched to what we have to offer. There is one main profile for GB visitors, two for ROI and two for NI. For more information on the target segments look at the Creating Experiences Toolkit and the Intelligent Perspective Series - Overview report.

The segments that most are attracted to this theme, Living Legends, are Mature Cosmopolitan from NI and ROI and Culturally Curious from GB. There are also two other groups that we need to focus on as a secondary segment. These are Family Fun and also a very sizeable market from North America.

When using these different visitor profiles – it is important to understand that they don’t represent an individual person or personality but rather a typical ‘visitor type’ which we call a ‘segment’. It is a useful guide for us when thinking about the sorts of products and services we can offer and which types of people might be attracted to them. Once we know this – we can be better informed about who best to market to.

Did You Know?

Slemish Mountain in County Antrim is the legendary first known Irish home of Saint Patrick. According to legend, following his capture and being brought as a slave to Ireland, Patrick worked as a shepherd at Slemish Mountain for about six years, and it was during this time he is said to have found God.

Did You Know?

With such an exposed coastline there have been many shipwrecks on the Causeway Coast including the Girona. Part of the Spanish Armada, the Girona sank in 1588 following a severe storm at Lacada Point with only five of the thirteen hundred men on board surviving.
Can you recognise your own types of visitors? Do they fall into a couple or more of these categories?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>What they like</th>
<th>Examples of how you could attract them</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRIMARY SEGMENT</strong></td>
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</table>
| Mature Cosmopolitan | NI, ROI               | • Relaxation  
• Good quality food and drink  
• Scenic drives  
• Going to the theatre  
• Authentic Irish pubs  
• Good deals  
• The big local attractions | • Give first-hand recommendations for day out trips to visit local culture and heritage sites. Don’t forget the lunch recommendation too!  
• What can you offer to add value, without compromising price? A welcome drink? Complimentary toiletries?  
• Printed marketing materials are the preferred holiday planning tool. Consider doing a printed ‘what’s on’ for your area to encourage visits to special events at heritage sites  
• Can you organise your own story/themed event that link with local legends? Can you develop a Living Legends offer with other tourism providers in your area? |
| Culturally Curious | GB, Overseas (inc. North America) | • Authenticity  
• Insight  
• Independence  
• Immersion in culture  
• Off the beaten track  
• Cultural links  
• Genealogy  
• Discovering their roots and links to the ‘old country’  
• Names, people and places | • Carry brochures for local historic and cultural spots of interest. Why not also invest in extra reading material?  
• Offer itinerary suggestions to encompass a range of sights with a theme  
• Ask visitors what they are interested in and find ways to delight them  
• Tell visitors about your local ‘hidden gems’ that will make them feel like they’ve seen something unique  
• Can you link your business to a particular NI strength? Myths? Christian? Neolithic times? Linen making? Shipbuilding? What stories can you tell about it to visitors? How can you link what your business offers?  
• Ancestral tourism is a great way of generating business in quieter months – can you offer any specific deals or any assistance?  
• Know what these visitors look for in your area. Can you become better informed? What more do you need to really impress them?  
• Can you develop a themed offer packaged with accommodation that will resonate with this segment? |
| Family Fun        | NI, ROI               | • Things to keep kids entertained  
• Value for money  
• To see the kids happy  
• Assurance of safety  
• Cafés  
• Offers | • Kids treasure hunts and puzzles  
• Consider developing a kid’s itinerary to visit several local heritage sites. Can you extend the story into your own business? Who could you link up with?  
• Do you offer a kids menu? Consider making more of this with a themed storytelling tea?  
• Can you offer a dressing up box and photographs to bring stories alive? |
It is also important to understand that no-one visits for just one thing. Even if visitors arrive especially to see The Walled City of Derry or Titanic Belfast for example – they still eat, sleep, interact with locals and do a myriad of different activities that gives them a full experience. It is for this reason that we need to understand the different characteristics of visitors and then match these to our five themes.

Also, with this theme – there can often be a varying interest level within the visitor group. A man may very well be an enthusiast of celtic mythology where his wife may have little or no interest and instead be much more drawn to hearing stories of Victorian Belfast.

Therefore, more than any other of the themes, to really exceed expectations for Living Legend visitors, we need to ask what they want to know and gauge the level of information that is wanted. The vast majority of visitors will tend to fall into the Dabbler or Passively Interested category and so it is these people that we should focus our energies on engaging with our stories and enthusiasm. That is not to say that the other categories are left out, but you may need to offer them a more professional service of interpretation, guide or ancestral tourism expert.

How to engage visitors appropriately without boring them

- Younger families
  - Visiting for other reasons
  - You can help to engage

- More mature couples
  - Specialists
  - Tends to want specialist help

Dabbler
- Tell me quick
- Give me a flavour
- Then let’s do something else

Passively interested
- Less interested in detail
- Engaged with stories
- Wants to know what it feels like

Very interested
- Asks lots of questions
- Deepening interest in the subject
- Wants to learn

Passionate enthusiast
- Detail very important
- Spends considerable time
- Asks detailed and specific questions

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Dorothy and Stephen (Mature Cosmopolitan visitor segment) have come to NI for a short break from Cork. Now retired, they are both keen to take the time to discover more about their celtic heritage and as Christians, they are particularly drawn to Armagh as the Ecclesiastical Capital with St Patrick connections (LIVING LEGENDS). So this is where they base their trip. Dorothy is interested in experiencing peoples’ lives and social history, whereas Stephen is something of a passionate enthusiast and wants to immerse himself in everything to do with celtic myths and legends – a passion he has had for many years. As they are also celebrating Dorothy’s birthday, the couple also want to spend a night in Belfast to be able to go to the Grand Opera House to see Fiddler on the Roof and have a quick supper at Deanes Deli (CREATIVE VIBE). As they are driving they decide to follow the St Patrick’s Trail from Armagh, through Downpatrick and on up to Belfast. They saw a wonderful array of churches, cathedrals and other holy sites but didn’t have an opportunity to meet any of the characters they had hoped to meet. The following day they decided to take a scenic drive through the Sperrins Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, however they found it hard to track down all the sites that they had marked on the map. They needed more detailed signs and some interpretations which would have made the trip complete. Back in their hotel in Armagh, Dorothy and Stephen pored over the couple of guide books they found in the lounge and realised what they had missed. The well earned whiskey by the peat fire (NATURALLY NI) certainly made up for it!

Of course people will make these sorts of connections themselves if they have enough information to do so. But as a business, there is so much that you can do to encourage and inspire visitors to create great experiential itineraries. It is good for them and good for your business. There are, of course, many different mixes people might choose - but if you are aware of what visitors tend to go for, you can have a look around for other businesses in your area to see who you could work with to offer more – by collaborating with others and offering a joined-up experience.
In their own words

In 2013, NITB conducted research to find out the most memorable moment of our visitors’ experience in NI. The Living Legends theme stood out as a source for creating special memories.

“Being a participant on the ‘pilgrimage’ from behind the Guildhall to the Cathedral and the stops along the way, but particularly the cross denominational service in the Presbyterian chapel on the walls where the hymn singing was ethereal!”

“Patterson’s Spade Mill - fascinating and wonderful to see the mill working - the water flowing, the hammers hammering and a spade being made. Personal tour, and makers telling us what they were doing, answering questions etc.”

“In Armagh at the Cathedral, we visited the grave of Brian Boru and while inside the church were greeted by the Archbishop with whom we discussed our Irish family history in the area.

“I’d never been into City Hall, Belfast and enjoyed it immensely. A wonderfully historic building with fabulous architecture.”

“Derry Walls tour - I had a very poor knowledge of Derry’s history, and how it relates to the Troubles too. The tour guide was excellent, very knowledgeable and very positive looking about future prospects - infectiously enthusiastic!”

Uncover Our Stories

NI Living Legends

1. Industrial Heritage

2. Built Heritage

3. Christian Heritage
Tourism markets may be ever changing but the principles remain the same. A strong quality product, excellent value, good customer service, thoughtful hospitality and a connectedness with other businesses within a destination are the core foundations for any tourism business today.

To encourage people to enjoy a more integrated experience in NI rather than just an individual product, we need to shift our thinking to how we see our business in the context of NI, who we are in competition with and who we should collaborate with. We know that we have a big opportunity to attract many more visitors from both ROI and GB and so we must start first to think NI; then the destination; then locality; and then finally your own business.

Your competition is then primarily other destinations like Scotland, not a neighbouring business in your own locality who might be a better collaborator.

This is where ‘clustering’ comes into its own – small businesses with particular types of customers in common can come together to provide a richer and more joined up experience for visitors. can come together to provide a richer and more joined up experience for visitors.

How to create experiences using our Livings Legends

‘Clustering’ - How your business can offer an experience for NI

So how does clustering work in practice, and how does it really have an impact? Consider this diagram: Look at how a visitor makes a decision to finally end up at your business. Then look at all the different ways you could collaborate with others to get noticed, much earlier and further up that buying process. You can do this by collaborating with others using the visitor’s profile type as the link between you.
How to create experiences using Living Legends

Keep your business on trend

Tourism in NI, like any other destination is affected by a wide range of factors ranging from national economics, consumer confidence, lifestyle trends to technology developments, and changing demographics with a new generation of visitors. So how do you keep up to date and be proactive in changing your business to react to them?

In the past, it would be safe to say that we have relied heavily on our local market for tourism and so these world trends affected us less. However that is definitely in the past now and we are moving on. For our tourism industry to grow and survive we must be able to welcome many more different types of visitors from many more places and be sure that we are aware of what they are looking for from us and most importantly – be able to offer it.

Top trends affecting our markets – and what this means for visitors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trend/factor</th>
<th>What this means</th>
<th>What more you can do</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visitors are value-focussed</td>
<td>• Visitors are more discerning and expectations are rising. They want excellent experiences but aren't necessarily prepared to pay for them! • Tend to wait to book at the last minute. • People are taking shorter holidays closer to home. • Discounts don’t have the highest appeal – people want to feel they have had the best value and it has been personal.</td>
<td>• Are you offering incentives for local visitors to reconnect with the cultural offerings in their area? • Do you offer a range of prices and flexibility to suit a visitor’s needs? • What’s special about the atmosphere of your business? Do you promote that on your website? • Can you team up with a cultural provider to offer themed packages that represent good value for money?</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Value-focussed

The Royal Edinburgh Ticket

In Edinburgh, visitors can take a rich, historical journey through Scotland’s ancient capital with The Royal Edinburgh Ticket.

Developed in partnership by three of the city’s top visitor attractions and Edinburgh Bus Tours, the ticket includes admission to The Royal Yacht Britannia, Edinburgh Castle and the Palace of Holyroodhouse, as well as 48 hours of unlimited travel on the open-top sightseeing buses.

With tour routes taking in iconic sites including:

- The Royal Mile, with its towering tenements and secret underground world;
- the medieval Grassmarket, once the site of public executions;
- Princes Street, with its grand Victorian architecture;
- the elegant New Town;
- and the historic docks of Leith, the ticket offers a fantastic way for visitors to hear the stories and tales of Edinburgh’s sometimes bloody - and always chequered - history.

Is there an opportunity to link visitor attractions under one ticket in NI?

www.edinburghtour.com/ticket-offers/the-royal-edinburgh-ticket
In the stressful busy world of today people are increasingly looking for short breaks to have time off to recharge batteries and find time connecting to themselves and close ones.

- People are increasingly looking to book last minute short breaks.
- They want to invest in themselves and so that can also mean learning something new, having a new experience or just quiet pampering time.

- Promote time to explore and time to connect with NI’s culture and heritage.
- What local experiences do you like to do to recharge your batteries? Can you recommend this same experience to visitors?

Visitors are becoming increasingly savvy about searching things to do whilst on holiday.

- Posting feedback on social networking sites or review sites is easy and can be done in seconds - reaching thousands.

- Visitors are looking for personal, tailored booking experiences.

- Are you monitoring and responding to feedback about you on Travel Review sites?
- Do you offer free Wi-Fi or can direct a visitor to where it is available close by?
- Do you have a mobile optimised website with effective search engine optimisation?
- How can technology help enhance your service or offering?

Visitors are becoming increasingly dependent on their mobile devices. According to the European Travel Commission, 95% of holidaymakers have at least one internet-enabled device and claim they need daily access.

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Museum Without Walls

A new project in Helmsdale is attracting visitors from across the globe to find out more about one of the most notorious events in Scottish history, the Clearances, which saw thousands of people forcibly displaced from the Scottish Highlands during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Using cutting edge digital technology, The Museum Without Walls project at Timespan has developed a Clearances trail through the local valley, which can be accessed via smart phone and tablet app on site and at home.

The trail, developed with input from the local community, starts in the museum and leads visitors through the valley, bringing the history and events that took place there 200 years ago, vividly to life. An avatar also lets visitors experience rural life in days gone by, with a virtual reconstruction of a township.

www.timespan.org.uk

Culloden Battlefield Centre

At the new Culloden Battlefield Visitor Centre and Exhibition the Culloden story is brought to life in an innovative and interactive way which appeals to all the family.

Visitors can listen to accounts from genuine characters who were involved in the Battle of Culloden and imagine what it was like to be at the centre of the action when they visit the Battle Immersion Theatre, where a 360 degree film relives the horror of the battle.

An animated Battle Table provides a bird's eye view of the battlefield's topography and the forces' tactics so that visitors can appreciate how these contributed to the outcome. As the clouds part a narration helps them to visualise the sequence of events as the battle is re-enacted before their eyes using the latest graphic technology.

For a really unique experience, the Culloden Battlefield Guide lets users immerse themselves in the story of the momentous day as they visit the site of the last pitched battle on British soil. With specially written audio and supporting illustrations and video, the portable guide’s compelling content is triggered automatically as visitors explore Culloden Moor at their own pace.

www.nts.org.uk/culloden
#### Trend/factor | What this means | What more you can do
--- | --- | ---
**Authenticity**
Visitors are increasingly looking for ‘the real thing’ and want an authentic experience of the places and culture they visit. | • Visitors want to experience everything that NI can offer - interacting with locals, sampling traditional food, being in the natural environment and absorbing the local stories.  
• People are more focused on emotional connections and getting a sense of place from the places they visit. | • Can you play music, tell stories or even sing? Do you have a passion for cooking, gardening, bird watching or old cars? Do you know one malt whiskey from another? How can you share what you know with visitors?  
• Could you collaborate with other local providers to offer a themed package to jointly promote to visitors? |

**Provenance & Sustainability**
Visitor awareness of the environmental impact of their holidays is expected to continue to rise. Quality food in particular is a high priority for visitors. People are more likely to pay more for fresh local food with a story attached. | • Business that adopt sustainable practices stand to gain a competitive edge on those who don’t.  
• Visitors will be looking for recommendations and advice about sampling local dishes.  
• People are willing to pay a premium for local food and other local products. | • Could you find a ‘point of difference’ on ‘being green’ and reward visitors on their sustainable efforts? How about bike rental?  
• Do you source local produce? Do you tell your visitors the provenance of your produce?  
• Does your staff know enough about local food? Can you provide additional training and encouragement? |

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**Hidden Deeside Tours**
Hidden Deeside Tours in the north-east of Scotland offer visitors a completely new perspective on the rich history and heritage of Royal Deeside, by providing them with authentic insights into local history and heritage stretching back hundreds of years.

On unique, personal 4x4 tours, visitors are taken ‘off the beaten track’ to explore the fairytale castles, mountains and glens, ancient villages and spectacular scenery where local tales and legends are brought to life by a local history expert and tour guide.

The company also offers a bespoke service to ancestral tourists researching their family history. By working with other local experts, including genealogists, authors and storytellers, visitors are helped to dig deeper into their family history and provided with a real flavour of what life would have been like for their ancestors.

[www.hidden-deeside.com](http://www.hidden-deeside.com)

**Cultural Tourism Ireland’s Archaeology Adventures**
Cultural Tourism Ireland is bringing Ireland’s cultural history to life by offering visitors the chance to experience the excitement of a real archaeological research excavation.

On full-day tours to live dig sites, visitors can find out about the history of the sites being excavated, learn about excavation techniques and get hands on experience of what life is like for a field archaeologist on an excavation — in the company of the actual expert who excavated the site or carried out the conservation works.

To round off the day, participants can take a river rafting trip to experience the landscape from the perspective of the earliest settlers, go on a guided tour of the town of Trim, famed for its medieval buildings and structures, or visit Trim Castle where they can learn more about life under Anglo-Norman rule in Ireland in the 12th and 13th centuries.

[www.culturaltourismireland.ie](http://www.culturaltourismireland.ie)
National Museums NI

Q&A with Patrick McLain, Head of Business & Tourism Marketing

Why do you think it is important to bring stories to life for your visitors?

National Museums NI is fortunate to have access to such a wide range of unique artefacts and exhibitions across our properties at the Ulster Museum, Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, Ulster American Folk Park and Armagh County Museum. Without stories, our artefacts and exhibitions are interesting – but are not memorable for our visitors. That is the key. At the outdoor museums our aim is to allow visitors to feel like they are stepping back in time through the use of street theatre and monologues, which add a level of engagement that cannot be achieved in any other way. Being able to interact with the characters makes it a very personal experience for the visitor and gives them a much deeper understanding of both the place and time. We know that this is something that our visitors value - our visitor satisfaction rating stands at 98.5% with many favourable comments in relation to all demonstrations and drama presentations.

How do you go about bringing stories to life at National Museums NI? Do you have any tips for other businesses?

I’ve mentioned the use of street theatre and monologues at our open air museums are both really effective in providing the visitor with a first hand interpretation of historic events. Another very successful method is structuring event days (e.g. Christmas, Easter, Halloween) around an unfolding event. This increases engagement throughout the day by inviting visitors to become involved with the story by engaging directly with the characters. It structures and sustains the visit resulting in an enhanced visitor experience and a longer visit which increases the revenue generated in gift shops and catering outlets.

We also strive to add depth through local authenticity. For example, we find that the craft demonstrations at the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum and the Ulster American Folk Park really contribute to the overall experience. Not only does craft create a very rich experience for the visitor, but it also creates a genuinely living museum experience with interaction between all parts of the museum - for example, many objects are demonstrated being made, they are then used in the exhibit building or by the guides, some are sold in the shop and the skills are used to enhance the museum. Likewise with food and catering, we think it’s important that the food is local, authentic and fitting for the site.

Collaboration is also key. National Museums NI works with many stakeholders such as National Trust to develop complete days out and itineraries for our visitors to allow them to extend their experience.

Tell us about some of your exhibitions and how they are brought to life.

We have many great examples but one of the most vivid is the American Wake at the Ulster American Folk Park. The American Wake re-enacts the traditional 'celebration' that occurred all over Ireland when someone left for America. It brings to life the mix of emotion that came with the excitement of a new life yet the sadness of leaving friends and family that they would probably never see again and lose virtually all communication, which combined with the fear of a very dangerous journey that many people did not survive and the trepidation of the unknown. There is no other way of communicating this complex mix of emotions and showing the impact on an entire family. It creates a very powerful experience for the audience and is genuinely very memorable.

www.nmni.com
Using Living Legends to build your business across all 5 of the NI themes

Research shows that our potential visitors are not likely to come to NI on the strength of a single experience theme. Also – there is no one type of visitor profile who fits just one segment. But this is where the relatively small size of NI is to our advantage. We have the opportunity to group several of the themes together in a single visit to offer our visitors a rich and rewarding experience of the best that NI has to offer, matched to the most motivating reasons that a particular visitor has for visiting.

Using this theme, Living Legends, there is an opportunity to genuinely build stories across all four strands: Industrial Heritage, Built Heritage, Christian Heritage and also Our Own Stories to engage visitors. This is true whether they are primarily visiting for a sporting break, a drive around our coasts, or even a city break. Living Legends is how we create stories for NI tourism and build our business through better customer engagement.

For more tips on which segments prefer which one of the 5 NI themes, download ‘Creating Experiences Toolkit’ from www.nitb.com/experience. This publication is packed with great information and tools on how to mix themes and tailor these to visitor segments.

So there is not an exact science as to how you start to create experiences and link themes around the products you offer, but there are some core principles:

✔ Which types of visitors do you currently attract?
You can’t be all things to all people so make sure you just make a note of the segments that book with you the most.

✔ What are the core stories in your business?
Do you have a heritage? Is it in the name or perhaps in your family’s name? Is it to do with the locality or the type of business that you are in?

✔ Why are your visitors attracted to you?
Do you know why they are visiting? What are they interested in? Is it our myths and legends? Our buildings? Our ancient history or something to do with early Christianity?

✔ How would you categorise these visitors using the segments in Creating Experience Toolkit from www.nitb.com?
Do they also like to tour around the coast, have fine food and drink experiences or visit the theatre? What more do you know about them?

✔ Who can you collaborate with to deepen the story of your business?
Are you situated in a Linen owner’s house for instance? Can you list 10 other Linen experiences that are a ‘must see’ for visitors staying with you? Who else could you collaborate with so that the story isn’t fragmented across our small country? How can you help to join the dots for visitors?
### Basic facts - Mary is the owner of a guesthouse located in a town which has a rich Linen heritage

- Recognise that Culturally Curious segment from GB and Mature Cosmopolitan as being their most common visitor type and also visitors from North America.
- They know that their visitors are fascinated by the story of Linen and they provide some interpretation on this.
- They provide an information stand but don’t offer any tailored recommendations or information to guests.
- Staff have a very poor local knowledge of what is on in the locality and don’t see it as their responsibility to make suggestions.
- They don’t generally ask where people go after they leave. They do try to encourage feedback forms but people rarely want to fill them in.
- Most people tell them they have had a nice time when they say goodbye.
- They know that most people just use them as a base, a bed.

### Create a better experience tailored to this segment and also attract new customers

- Make sure that staff know all about the story of NI Linen manufacture and so can tell visitors all about it.
- Collaborate with another 10 attractions who are also connected to the story of Linen and consider developing a trail that includes your business.
- Work with a group of actors who can host these themed evenings. Link this new product with other Linen attractions.
- Offer a range of souvenirs that include the finest Linen and collaborate with modern producers such as Fergusons of Banbridge for help.
- Provide a checklist to guests before they arrive of things that they might be interested in and offer to help with bookings. Advertise this as an additional value offer.
- Bring other experiences to your business and host special events – such as Linen making workshops, growing flax, weaving and Spinning etc.
For each of the five guides in the Intelligent Perspective Series we will cover a different opportunity for businesses based on the top things you need to know.

Guide 1: Coasts and Lakes ➔ Routes to Market
Guide 2: Unique Outdoors ➔ Sustainability/Green Credentials
Guide 3: Creative Vibe ➔ Social Media
Guide 4: Living Legends ➔ Visitor Feedback
Guide 5: Naturally NI ➔ Authenticity

Social media and reviews

The rapid growth in review websites and social networks has transformed what was once just a chat or a grumble into a worldwide powerful forum. Feedback is everywhere and it can make or break your business. But it can also give you the vital clues on ways to innovate and expand your business.

Did You Know?

From 300-800 AD the Causeway Coast, Rathlin, Glens of Antrim, Islay and Kintyre were part of one sea kingdom known as ‘Dalriada’ and many of the local chieftains such as the McQuillans and McDonnells had important links with Scotland. There has also been a strong Norse influence on the area. Viking raids were common during the ninth century and many of the place names have Norse origin.

Through gathering feedback and asking visitors what more they would like, what the purpose of the visit is etc, you can glean a huge amount of insights - not just for your business but also for your area and sector too. You just need to ask. And visitors love you asking! It makes them feel that you are interested in them, their visit and the time they spend in your business, your town and your country. So don’t hold back as it is the cheapest form of consultancy that you can get!
FIVE ways to use feedback to set your business apart

1. Don’t underestimate a dissatisfied customer
   You may think it’s just one person or group that will be affected by a bad experience, but the power of word of mouth is the strongest form of marketing and a dissatisfied customer will tell far more people about their experience than a satisfied one. Have a system in place to deal with complaints and make sure that staff know their role in the process.

2. Act on the complaint
   Feedback doesn’t mean anything if you don’t do something with it. Consider holding monthly meetings with staff to discuss comments that are coming up time and again. Discuss the best ways to move forward and eliminate issues or improve an experience. Simply ‘pacifying’ customers isn’t enough in the long term.

3. Encourage different types of feedback
   You can initiate feedback for yourself through visitor books, comment cards, online surveys, focus groups or techniques such as mystery shopping. However, with the growing popularity of social media, feedback initiated by the visitor is becoming more and more common. Through websites, blogs and review sites, the effect can be immediate. Stay on top of what business image you are portraying online.

4. Welcome comments
   Make it easy for people to talk to you. Share information with staff; prompt them to encourage visitors to leave feedback or to share their experience on review sites. Perhaps you could even offer incentives to visitors who share their experience via word of mouth or online?

5. See complaints as an opportunity
   Complaints from customers may feel like a headache, but they actually offer you the opportunity to win over a customer. Often it’s not the problem that’s the real issue; it’s how you deal with it. So, train staff to react quickly, politely and sincerely and use it as guidance for future custom.

   The same goes for sites like TripAdvisor – respond to negative comments and instead of being a mark against you, it becomes an opportunity for personal contact, to showcase the professional and helpful personality of your business.
Work with others - collaboration is key!

To effectively offer tourism experiences in Northern Ireland we must start to work together. You are not able to do this on your own! So collaboration is key.

But who do you work with? How do you start it?
If you have been used to working on your own and keeping a close eye on neighbouring tourism providers in case they steal your customers – THINK AGAIN! Competition isn’t ‘here’ – it is ‘over there!’ We must start to organise ourselves to reflect the way that visitors make decisions.

The buying decision for our visitors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customer Decision</th>
<th>Customer mindset</th>
<th>Does a business collaborate or compete?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FIRST</td>
<td>Will we be able to do what we want to do in NI?</td>
<td>NI tourism businesses collaborate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECOND</td>
<td>Where in NI can we meet our needs (activities, places to visit, places to stay)? REGION</td>
<td>Regional/county tourism providers collaborate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THIRD</td>
<td>We have found a great deal/ offer to stay at X (hotel/B&amp;B etc.) – what can we do nearby? TOWN/VILLAGE</td>
<td>Local area tourism providers collaborate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOURTH</td>
<td>Which restaurant/activity provider shall we choose in X? What else can we do here?</td>
<td>Same providers compete (on value and quality – not on price, because it drives down the market), everyone else collaborates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tips on how to collaborate

✔ Choose other providers who have the same quality and values as you do.

✔ Select and approach those businesses that you know your visitors also visit on their trip. You are then ‘linked’ by the visitors that you share.

✔ Have trust, loyalty and transparency between everyone in your collaboration group.

Working together brings great rewards for everyone – better insights, more bookings, more support and an opportunity to grow and learn.
# What you can do NOW

| Know the stories of your area | • Find a way to link the stories of your area to your business  
| • Does your business name, place name, family name etc link to a story in your area? If so how can you use this link creatively to expand your business? |
| Understand what visitors are looking for | • Recognise whether someone is a passionate enthusiast or a dabbler and engage them accordingly  
| • Know who else locally could give visitors more specialist advice  
| • Consider stocking books and other information on topical subjects for visitors to browse |
| Help to join the dots on our Living Legend themes and other themes within our tourism product | • Ask visitors where they have been before visiting you and also plan to go afterwards. Are there clues on this on how to join the dots?  
| • Could you develop an information sheet or make links to other businesses through your website?  
| • Lack of awareness is key issue for visitors – how can you help to ensure your visitors know everything to see and do in the area? |
| Start asking and using feedback | • Do you know what visitors say about you on review sites? Do you answer each comment – good or bad?  
| • Visitors want to feel that you care so how could you gather more feedback and use the information you collect effectively?  
| • Do you know the best questions to ask to get the best feedback? |
| Share more of your own personal stories, skills and traditions | • Do you have a specific skill or passion? Do you sing, tell poetry, tell jokes or play an instrument? Can you share this with visitors?  
| • What family stories and folklore can you share with visitors? How would you do this?  
| • Could you make an event of this? Could you ask others in your area to join in? |
| Collaborate with others | • Consider stocking books and other information on topical subjects for visitors to browse through  
| • Consider who else you can work with to develop a better experience around a theme. A restaurant? An attraction? A museum? How can you collectively bring this story alive? |