Series 2

Unique Outdoors

A practical guide to experiential tourism in Northern Ireland

nitb.com
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
2. Unique Outdoors
3. Living Legends
4. Creative Vibe
5. Naturally NI

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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 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?

• Develop a deeper understanding of who is likely to be attracted and what else you can offer them
• Work more closely with other providers and to grow the market share for everyone
• Encourages you to become better at what you do and 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
• 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. 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 - 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 experience that we can learn from. We hope that you enjoy the opportunities that this approach will give you and 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.

So what is our CHECKLIST for creating an experience?

✔ It must be globally unique

Visitors are looking for offerings that can only be found in the location they’re visiting, or a focus on things that are distinctly NI.

✔ It must be authentically local

Genuine local experiences are often the ones that provide the stand-out quality that people remember. Visitors want something they can’t experience elsewhere.

✔ It must be interactive

Visitors don’t want to just see things. They want to learn something new that evokes emotions; feel a sense of belonging and feel alive.

✔ It must be aligned to the needs of our visitors

When making decisions, visitor needs come first and we can work back from that knowledge. This begins with a good understanding of the visitor segments.

Creating unforgettable experiences in Scotland

Kelburn Secret Forest

Located on Scotland’s west coast, Kelburn Castle, Country Centre and Estate provides an engaging and accessible adventure experience for families. From the supervised Indoor Playbarn to the raised Adventure Course with a high wire crossing, children of all ages can have an active adventure experience.

However it’s not until visitors are catapulted into the magical world of ‘The Secret Forest’ that the truly unique experience begins. Whilst negotiating raised walk ways, stepping stones and a maze, visitors are transported into a land of fairytale where they discover a Secret Grotto, Gingerbread House, a Castle with No Entrance and the Woodman’s cottage. This fictitious playground captures the imaginations of both children and adults providing an engaging and immersive experience.

Can you turn your offering into an immersive adventure for all the family?

www.kelburnestate.com
In this theme – Unique Outdoors – we are considering all activities that involve a combination of physical activity; cultural exchange or interaction; and/or an engagement with nature. However, 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 Unique Outdoors 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

Northern Ireland already boasts world-class outdoor products such as mountain biking, links golf and our coastal activities. However, these signature experiences aren’t the only way to attract more visitors. For NI, a real opportunity lies in developing a critical mass of experience-led businesses across all the themes that can link together and enable us to 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.

What activities are included in this theme – Unique Outdoors?

Some of the key activities under this theme are adventure, walking, mountain biking, cycling and canoeing. But we offer many more outdoor activities – do you know them all? How many have you tried yourself? Are you able to recognise which activities might appeal to your visitors?
Why are our Unique Outdoors so important?

NI has the potential to become a real centre of excellence in outdoor leisure activities, a product area which ties in with trends of health and wellbeing and the search for ever increasing authentic experiences. With many more visitors ‘trying their hand’ at outdoor activities, NITB is encouraging providers to become “Adventuremark” approved, partly for increased recognition and partly to ensure the highest levels of quality and safety possible.

The vibrant outdoor activity industry presents NI with an opportunity to appeal to a broad market of potential visitors, from young people to families to active seniors. And activity visitors are a market that businesses should definitely pay attention to – research indicates that they spend one third more than the average visitor.

Look at the huge range of attractors across NI in the map below. This is just a sample of what NI can offer as a Unique Outdoor destination. Are you making the most of these assets to grow your business?

Did You Know?
The Adventure Travel Trade Association’s (ATTA), who is bringing their ‘World Summit’ to Killarney in 2014, placed the island of Ireland in the top ten developed countries with the potential to become a major adventure tourism destination.
The bits we’re getting right...

We have an outstanding natural advantage and our infrastructure is improving all the time, but are we really promoting the best of our Unique Outdoors to visitors? No matter where your business is based in NI, there will be some form of activity that will excite your visitors based right on your doorstep. How can you tap into the USPs (unique selling points) of our Unique Outdoors product and other supporting products to enhance your own business offering?

Top 5 strengths – and how to tap into them!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unique Outdoors USPs</th>
<th>How to tap into this strength</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> NI offers over 70 types of outdoor activity within a very compact area. Don’t underestimate the appeal of this – visitors have the opportunity to enjoy a city experience within minutes of rural outdoor activities.</td>
<td>If your business is in Belfast or Derry-Londonderry promote ‘City Plus’ trips, where visitors can come to you but also enjoy the benefits of your links with nearby outdoor activities. Promote the breadth of activities available in your area on your website – don’t assume what visitors will already know. Link to key activity websites for more information.</td>
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<td><strong>2.</strong> Our top Golf courses are amongst the best in the world, and golf is the second most popular activity in NI, after walking. In 2009, over a quarter of golf participants had come here <strong>specifically</strong> to play.</td>
<td>Make sure visitors know how close you are to the nearest quality golf course. With a packed golf schedule, golfers need a lot of information before and during their stay so they can make the most of the area. Do you have local information to hand? Encourage golfers to bring partners and families with them on their trip by promoting other activities and, for example, spa days.</td>
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<td><strong>3.</strong> The Mourne Mountains is a signature project in NI. The highest peaks in NI, they offer the best walking products and world-class rock climbing. The Sperrins, too, are ideal for outdoor activities such as hiking and hill walking.</td>
<td>Slieve Donard and Slieve Binnian offer unmissable walking opportunities. Are you telling your visitors about them? Provide them with information on how to get there, timings, difficulty levels, etc. With over 500 different routes to climb at all grades, there will be a rock-climbing experience to suit your visitors. Why not suggest one of the artificial climbing walls for beginners, as a thrilling and truly memorable experience?</td>
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<td><strong>4.</strong> NI has a wonderful mix of unique terrain (coasts, mountains, rolling countryside, lakelands, canals), much of which is free to access. The majority of competing National Parks are landlocked, so can’t offer the variety that we can.</td>
<td>Have a list of a range of activity providers, encompassing several terrains, on your website. Water skiing and wakeboarding is an exciting activity that can actually be picked up quite quickly, even for children as young as four! Would this excite your visitors? There are several multi-activity centres in NI. Suggest to them to your guests for a taster of several adventures in one day.</td>
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<td><strong>5.</strong> Many of our core products (surfing, motorsports, mountain biking) are season-proof and weatherproof. By linking in with these products as well as NI’s significant portfolio of outdoor activity events, it can help to extend your visitor season.</td>
<td>For dedicated bike enthusiasts, why not suggest the 236 Atlantic Challenge from County Donegal to County Antrim. Can you team up with any other businesses along the route? Refer visitors to <a href="http://cycleni.com">cycleni.com</a> for more information and also information on bike hire. Know what is supplied by activity providers so you can advise your guests. For example most mountain bike activity providers will supply bikes and helmets and rock climbing centres will provide safety equipment and specialist shoes.</td>
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Scotland is a big competitor for NI. Field, forest, mountain, water – there is every kind of activity all contained within a compact and beautiful environment, carefully joined-up to offer a no-hassle experience for visitors.

The cycling product in Scotland is also comparatively well developed. The success is not only attributable to the natural landscapes (which NI also have) and the investment in top quality built facilities – but it is also due to the strategic approach that was taken through ‘Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland’ and the collaboration and partnerships of many other tourism providers to ensure an excellent experience is offered. This collaboration encompass all stages of the cycling product, including bike hire, accommodation, transport links etc. making for a seamless experience for biking visitors.

Northern Ireland is also enjoying this surge in growth, with Mintel reporting that that visitor spend on outdoor adventure activities has jumped from £107 million in 2009 to an estimated £128 million in 2013 and a projected £148 million in 2018!

The bigger picture

Activities tourism is fast becoming a key focus for countries the world over. According to the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA), the value of global adventure tourism jumped from £55 billion in 2009 to a massive £163 billion in 2013. This includes hard activities (such as rock climbing and white water rafting), which are included in Unique Outdoors, and soft activities (such as walking and bird watching), which fall under the Naturally NI theme.

Who competes with us for this theme – Unique Outdoors?

Scotland
Scotland is a big competitor for NI. Field, forest, mountain, water – there is every kind of activity all contained within a compact and beautiful environment, carefully joined-up to offer a no-hassle experience for visitors.

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Devon & Cornwall
Two national parks, Exmoor and Dartmoor, draw in visitors looking for activities and also offer easy access to the coast. Golf and fishing are particularly popular, with several course options and the opportunity for both saltwater and freshwater fishing. However other activities are also well-supported with websites promoting a range of innovative options from go-karting to sailboarding.

Republic of Ireland (ROI)
The Wild Atlantic Way, set to launch in March 2014, is a major competitor to our outdoor activities product. The west coast is world famous for surfing, particularly in counties Kerry and Clare. Off the Cliffs of Moher, Aileen’s is internationally renowned for big wave surfing. Also, Mayo is home to the Great Western Greenway, the longest off-road walking and cycling trail on the island of Ireland.

Peak District
Considered more adrenalin-pumping than the laid-back Lake District, the Peak District is a National Park and is known for its broad range of outdoor recreation – all within quick reach of major urban centres including Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham. There is something for all level of abilities, plus skills courses and wet weather options. Through their visitor website, www.visitpeakdistrict.com, the visitor is clearly offered all types of experiences to attract them to holiday in the area. From great places to eat, places to stay, things to see and do, as well as a detailed list of what’s on - everything is presented as a cohesive package of exciting experiences that can be tailored according to preferences. There is no shortage of the right information to choose your holiday from and also to choose exactly what activities you want to do each day.
### SWOT analysis for Unique Outdoors

#### STRENGTHS

- World-class Links golf, supported by famous golfers, and promoted through successful high profile events such as the Irish Open Championship at Royal Portrush in 2012.
- Our mountain ranges offer all sorts of activities, from kayaking at the Sperrins to rock climbing at the Mournes.
- People come from all over the world to experience surfing on the Causeway Coast.
- We have significant potential for a strong cycle touring product. NI offers short and long-distance routes both on and off road and also family-friendly mountain bike trails and traffic-free canal paths.
- Variety of dramatic landscapes over a relatively small and compact area making it easy to get around.
- Strong motorsports heritage which has led to the popularity of rally driving and several motorsport-related events such as the North West 200.

#### WEAKNESSES

- Perceived poor weather for outdoor activities.
- Issues in accessing rural locations, both in terms of public transport and signage.
- Lack of information available on the wide range of activities and things to see and do.
- Lack of online presence of tourism businesses and activity providers making booking more difficult.
- Some misconceptions about what NI has to offer. For example, many people think our diving waters are cold and dark, but they are actually quite warm and clear.
- With no National Park and much of the countryside off-limits due to private ownership, people in Northern Ireland have restricted access.
- Limited availability for visitors to hire outdoor activity equipment - especially at short notice.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

- NI is price competitive compared to neighbouring regions with a similar offer – which means we could tap in to the huge ROI and GB potential markets.
- New purpose-built mountain biking trails launched in the likes of Rostrevor, Castlewellan, Davagh Forest and Barnett Demesne in Belfast. Opportunities for all types of businesses to capitalise on these.
- Activities like mountain boarding and coasteering are attracting a whole new generation of activity enthusiasts. NI offers tracks suitable for beginners or more advances riders.
- Significant opportunities in water-based activities, with our extensive coastline and high number of inland lakes.
- International events like Giro D’Italia offer up a great opportunity to boost our cycling product.

#### THREATS

- Poor information on target markets and therefore lack of information for creating new products and packages through better collaboration.
- Lack of joined up working between tourism businesses - either within a geographic area or within similar markets.
- Perceptions of poor value – according to Toluna research (2012), some 40% of ROI and 33% of NI consumers believe that many adventure activities are too expensive for them to participate in.
- Destination perception - NI is seen by some as a more urban destination, whereas ROI is perceived as more rural and idyllic.
Who are our visitors?

Outdoor and adventure activities are growing in popularity worldwide. This niche tourism experience is currently attracting all sorts of visitors – not just the hardened enthusiast. Families, couples and older visitors too are all venturing further to ‘have a go’ at activities they may not have tried before – and they keep coming back.

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.

For more information look at the Creating Experiences Toolkit and the Intelligent Perspective Series – Overview report.

The segments that most are attracted to this theme, Unique Outdoors, are Great Escapers and Social Energisers from GB; Family Fun from NI; Young and Lively from ROI. These names have been given to the different visitor types to help us to understand their main attributes.

www.nitb.com/experience

How do visitors book activities?

The types of activity holiday can be categorised as:

Incidental holiday activities
– the types of activities that are undertaken as part of an overall holiday (common in NI)

Adventure Holidays
– the type of activities that are the key focus of the visit (niche markets but huge potential for development in NI)

First timers
• Tend to book in advance and get ideas through tourism websites
• Likely to be in a larger group
• Will want equipment and training

Just for the fun of it
• Tend to use specialist magazines, social media and word of mouth for ideas and planning
• More likely to spontaneously decide on the activity at the time – due to more proficient skill level
• Usually have an idea of what to do but no booking made

Serious learning
• Tend to access information through accredited activity providers and centres
• Likely to book in advance
• As the activity is likely to be the main focus of the visit – they would prefer a ‘one stop shop’ approach to booking transport, accommodation, equipment etc.

Serious enthusiasts
• Rely on own knowledge and specialist information sources.
• Plan everything independently
• Use commercial websites to find accommodation and other services
• The activity is most likely to be the sole focus of the visit

Did You Know?

According the ONS (Office for National Statistics), future demand for adventure travel is likely to come from: single professionals (especially women), affluent active families and adventurous 50+ of both sexes. They will also be active, confident, well-travelled people who want more than sun, sea and sand.
A practical guide to experiential tourism in Northern Ireland

<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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</table>
| Great Escapers        | GB   | • Slowing the pace of life  
• Getting away from it all  
• Authentic and beautiful places  
• Relaxation  
• Connecting with family  
• Out-of-the-ordinary things to see and do | • Provide lots of information about unique and innovative activities.  
• Encourage visitors to try something they haven't done before – NI offers lots of skills classes and taster activities. It is not all for the hardened enthusiast.  
• Suggest activities that truly show off our landscapes.  
• Carry brochures about nearby forest parks and soft adventure activities.  
• Provide information about local pubs for post-activity relaxation, preferably with a traditional, authentic feel.  
• Think about offering additional services to help guests relax after a long day out. What about in-room pamper packages? Who can you collaborate with locally? |
| Social Energisers     | GB   | • Action-packed days  
• Fun-filled nights  
• Adventure activities  
• The ability to be spontaneous  
• New experiences and exploring new places  
• Being social  
• The ‘Wow’ factor | • Work with local activity providers to offer last-minute booking spaces to your guests.  
• Create sample itineraries for day trips within the local area, taking in a wide range of activities  
• Can you get involved with any local activity events?  
• Is there a must-do activity that your area is famous for? Such as the Lough Erne Canoe Trail? Your visitors will want to hear about it.  
• Provide transport information.  
• If your business is in the city, can you link up with a rural business to offer activity packages?  
• Use our small compact country to your advantage – this group like to do many activities in the same day – can you offer this? |
| Family Fun            | NI   | • Fun things to do  
• Things to keep children entertained  
• To see the kids happy  
• Time to explore together  
• Safety assurances | • Promote nearby family-oriented activities on your website and in your welcome packs.  
• Could you link with a local activity centre to offer a discount pass for your visitors?  
• Provide suggestions for restaurants and cafes that will cater for young children.  
• Suggest rainy day activities that will occupy children.  
• If you offer special amenities that will make life easier for active families, such as drying facilities, ensure you promote that.  
• Children like to meet other children – can you arrange groups of visitors to do the same activities? Reward with prizes! |
| Young and Lively       | ROI  | • Variety of entertainment  
• Cafe culture  
• High profile attractions  
• Cool nightlife  
• The ‘Wow’ factor  
• ‘City Plus’ experiences | • Does the language and style of your marketing materials sell the cool factor to this young target market?  
• Are you linking to a range of activity providers on your website?  
• Ensure you promote the most cutting-edge activities, such as mountain-boarding and adrenalin water sports.  
• Include information about nightlife and transport to follow up an adrenalin-fuelled day.  
• Offer prices in Sterling and Euros for ease of conversion.  
• Offer price sensitive packages to cater for these guests. Remember they will often be single so do you have the right facilities for them? |

Visitors

When using 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.

**Can you recognise your own types of visitors? Do they fall into a couple or more of these categories?**
How to create experiences using this theme

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

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 foundation 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 county or area; 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 better be a 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.

Case Studies

2. Clustering in practice

Teaming up with adventure operators
The 4-star Golf and Spa Roe Park Resort has teamed up with a variety of local activity providers including Carrowmena Activity Centre, Segway Express and Corralea Activity Centre to provide visiting families with an active experience whilst staying with them in comfort and luxury.

Visitors can chose from a range of packages including climbing, kayaking, abseiling, surfing, visiting the on-site water park and segway tours of local area.

By collaborating with more than one operator Roe Park Resort is able to offer visitors a greater choice of activities, allowing them to create the ideal experience to suit their whole family – an ideal option for the ‘Family Fun’ segment.

www.roeparkresort.com

3. Clustering in practice

A luxurious adventure!
Todds Leap Activity Centre, based in County Tyrone has joined forces with neighbouring Lavender Health Spa to offer visitors who want to combine the adventure of the great outdoors with the finer things in life.

Visitors can immerse themselves in adventurous activities including Zip Line, Archery, Rodeo Bull, and Off Road Driving at Todds Leap. And then it’s time to pamper an unwind at Lavendar Spa with a range of luxury treatments from a dip in the hydrotherapy pool or hot tub to a mud chamber experience – while enjoying bubbly and chocolates.

This collaboration creates the perfect experience for the ‘Great Escapers’ who like to relax, and the ‘Social Energisers’ who enjoy action packed holidays. Both might be encouraged to explore new activities. Who could you collaborate with to enhance your offering and turn it into a unique experience?

www.toddsleap.com
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.

**Did You Know?**

In the Scottish Borders, a series of 7 mountain biking areas were developed, 7 Stanes (www.7stanesmountainbiking.com) which offers over 400km of cross country mountain bike trails attracting over 400,000 visitors a year, which the Scottish government estimates to generate around £118 million per year for the economy.

**Did You Know?**

There is a growth in family and multi-generational holiday. United Kingdom Tourism Survey data shows that 37% of adventure sports trips include children, compared to the average of only 32% of all trips. Watching wildlife (45%) and cycling (46%) are the two types of adventure tourism activities most likely to include children.

NITB operate a range of Welcome Schemes as part of its Quality Grading Scheme. These are aimed at anglers, cyclists, dog owners, families, golfers and walkers.

Could your business be assessed for suitability to join one of these Schemes? They offer an additional appeal to visitors to book with your business rather than another.

www.nitb.com/businesssupport/qualityassurance/accommodationwelcomeschemes.aspx
Since this National Park was established in Scotland in 2003 a balance of conservation and commercialism has built the destination to what it is today. The region is made up of five separate communities and covers an area of 1,748 square miles in Aberdeenshire, Moray, Highland, Angus and Perth and Kinross Regions. Tourism is a hugely important sector for the area, accounting for almost 30% of all the added value created since 2003 (£115m) and is a centre for outdoor pursuits and sightseeing.

With both the National Park and local businesses relying heavily on the other, effective collaboration and joint working is crucial to their respective growth and success. But historically not everyone has seen the relevance of the National Park to their business and vice versa which often resulted in a fragmentation for the visitor. People rely on access to information such as what to do, what to see, where to stay, where to eat etc and so need the overall experience to join up. Also, with the diverse range of businesses operating across the area, – from nature watching to skiing; cafes to traditional land-based businesses; speciality retail to ranger services; four and five star hotels to track maintenance work etc – there are very different priorities on a day-to-day basis. And yet the visitor expects that everyone they meet will want to contribute to the delivery of an overall first class, fully joined up visitor experience, tailored for them!

This disconnect was well understood by key stakeholders and after several years of preparatory work, in 2006 Aviemore & Cairngorms DMO was established. This was a great step forward to provide a more joined-up experience for visitors across the region. A ‘one stop shop’ website www.visitcairngorms.com was developed and businesses pulled in on a membership basis to offer their products and services through this channel. Website categories were developed from a visitor’s perspective - on the land, on the mountain, on the tee, on foot, on a bike etc. and member businesses can tailor their special/last minute promotions and offer online booking through the website. The DMO in return offered the businesses joint marketing, training and benchmarking opportunities.

The approach proved a positive one. For businesses, the membership was a more cost effective way to market. Each month on average 14,000 click-throughs were tracked to member businesses and this also enabled cross selling and recommendations like never before. If one business had no availability, the visitor would then automatically be offered a choice of other similar businesses to be interested in. The DMO team also managed a complex social media programme and encouraged all businesses to get involved. They understood the power of this channel for their visitors and wanted to make sure that the free marketing was captured and reused through the site – to be shared with other potential visitors.

In 2011 the DMO, the Chamber of Commerce and Hostel Group merged to form The Cairngorm Business Partnership with a mission of Promotion, Development and Advocacy. The public sector, too, were supportive as there was now just one voice for the area and for local businesses this was just the operational glue they needed.

The quarterly Business Barometer now reports the highest level of business confidence yet in 3.5 years. Membership is now at 300 which include all of the major and more influential players. With a database of 1400, there is still, however, much to do to bring the remaining small and micro businesses onboard too.

With both business confidence and visitor numbers growing year on year, The Cairngorms Business Partnership attribute their success to being a private sector led organisation that can react to market forces and enable an accessible, joined up experience for visitors to the area.
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, we have relied heavily on our local market for our tourism markets and so these world trends affected us less. However, 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 able to offer what they want.

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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visitors are value-focused</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>Nearly half of NI consumers take part in a sporting activity at least once a week – don’t forget they will be looking for activity day trips and short breaks, too. Suggest activities at a range of prices to suit all budgets. Can you create added value deals that incorporate a nearby activity? Short breaks are the norm for people heading to the outdoors so they need lots of information on hand to save time and enjoy what they came to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time for me</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Visitors are more health-conscious so promoting hiking and cycling will have a strong appeal. What do you like to do to recharge your batteries? Can you recommend this same experience to visitors? Consider seeing all that is on offer locally and trying it out yourself to you can pass on direct knowledge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Time for Me

Northern Edge Algonquin, Canada

The Edge, is an award-winning, solar-powered nature retreat based in Algonquin Park, Ontario. They combine a range of active pursuits, all with well being and nature at the heart, to provide visitors with a relaxing, well-being experience. Activities such as yoga, sea-kayaking and pizza-making from forest ingredients are combined together to create an active yet relaxing experience for visitors. Visitors can also learn how to restore a sense of balance and peace to their lives as well as providing them with nutritional information.

What can you add to your offering to help visitors relax and ‘switch off’?

www.northernedgealgonquin.ca
### Trend/factor

**Technological innovations are reshaping the industry**

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.

**What this means**

- 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.

**What more you can do**

- Link to activity providers on your website, and consider including a calendar of local events.
- Are you monitoring and responding to feedback about you on Travel Review sites?
- Do you offer free Wi-Fi and what other businesses offer it nearby? Tell your guests.
- Can you recommend activity providers that have online booking systems?
- Take note of your visitors' interests and tailor future offers via email.
- Many activity providers now offer an app to visitors – make sure you know who is doing what so you can pass the information on.

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### Authenticity

There is a well established and growing demand for genuine travel experiences that are authentic to the particular destination. Visitors are increasingly looking for 'the real thing' in their experience of the places, landscapes and culture they visit.

**Visitors want to experience everything that NI can offer - interacting with locals, tasting local food, being in the natural environment and absorbing the local stories.**

**People are more focused on the purpose of the trip and how it will make them feel rather than just on scenery and climate.**

**Provide information packs for visitors on arrival with details about the must-do activities.**

- Are you a keen mountain biker or canoeist yourself? Visitors will love to hear stories about your own experiences.
- Feature testimonials from past visitors to show what impact an activity has made to their trip.
- Could you collaborate with other local providers to offer a themed package to jointly promote to visitors?

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### 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 freshly cooked locally sourced food with a story attached.

**Businesses that adopt sustainable practices 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 provenance in food and other local products.

**Make life as easy as possible for visitors who don’t arrive by car – such as station pick-ups and information about public transport.**

- Promote responsible and sustainable practices to visitors, including sticking to marked footpaths and avoiding littering.
- ‘Unique Outdoors’ goes hand in hand with sustainability and environmental awareness. Demonstrate to visitors how ‘green’ you are through awards and good practices.
Case Studies

6. **Technological Innovations**

**Stray Boots, USA & UK**

Stray Boots offer visitors an interactive self-guided city walking tour from their mobile phone. Through a series of challenges, which involves solving riddles and taking quirky photos, visitors go on a fun treasure hunt around the city and discover the city’s key highlights along the way. On the completion of each challenge visitors are informed of fun, interesting facts about the area.

This innovative idea provides technology savvy travellers with an interactive and engaging tour allowing them to ‘connect’ with the city in a unique way. Perfect for the ‘Great Escapers’ who like out of the ordinary things to see and do, and the ‘Family Fun’ segment who need to keep the kids entertained!

Could an ‘App’ help turn your product into an experience and bring it to life in an interactive and engaging way for visitor?

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

7. **Authenticity**

**Be unique, not predictable**

Cape Race Cultural Adventures in Canada creates one-off, unique experiences that allow the curious traveller to go off the beaten track and immerse themselves in the heart of Newfoundland’s community – an experience they cannot gain anywhere else.

Based on travel preferences and interests, visitors are given their own personalised guidebook, ‘Traveller’s Diary’, which is filled with suggestions based around their needs, wants and desires. There is no set itinerary or scheduled activities – visitors are left to discover and explore on their own selecting what they wish from their ‘Traveller’s Diary’.

The guidebook may highlight local biking and kayaking routes, however the lasting memories are created when they interact with the local community on a spontaneous visit to a local pub or when they accept a neighbour’s invitation to dinner. It is these deep human connections that enhance their experience as it allows them to delve further into the community’s culture.

Can you host an event that allows locals and visitors to interact and share stories and experiences?

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

8. **Sustainability**

Mountain Innovations, an activity provider based within the Cairngorm National Park, is an excellent example of a business responding to growing climate change concerns and the needs from environmentally responsible travellers.

The whole company’s operation is built around environmental responsibility and they have many green initiatives in place which appeal to the ever cautious eco-traveller including, composting all kitchen vegetable waste, sourcing produce locally, and giving visitors who travel by public transport a £15 discount (Green Travel Discount) on their holiday or course. Even the company’s accommodation base, Fraoch Lodge has been accredited with the Green Tourism Business Scheme Gold award.

Can you offer an incentive for visitors travelling by bike or public transport? Do you promote your green credentials? Can you create more links with local suppliers?

[www.scotmountain.co.uk](http://www.scotmountain.co.uk)
Creating an ‘end-to-end’ experience

To create the best experience you need to maintain a high level of service for visitors at all stages of the lifecycle:

- **Dreaming/being inspired**
- **Planning**
- **Booking**
- **Experiencing**
- **Sharing**

**Dreaming/being inspired**
Tourism is a fast-paced, ever-changing industry and the internet and social media mean instant information. For NI to grab a share of the market and stay at the forefront of minds, information must be accessible.

With 94% of all visitors to NI booking their trip independently (NI Visitor Attitude Survey 2011) there is an increasing demand for online information and we need to be ready to deliver that.

In terms of your online presence, don’t sell the destination – sell the story. Most internet users have made the decision in principle to visit, but you can ‘close the deal’ with stories. Paint vivid pictures of your local landscapes, living legends and exciting activities, and send the message that the unforgettable can happen.

**Planning**
According to the Visitor Attitude Survey 2011, visitors from outside NI base trip planning on personal recommendations (43%) and a significant number rely on Travel Review sites (14%). If we offer great experiences and encourage visitors to share those experiences, it will have a big impact. Travel review sites are a key tool for businesses to communicate with visitors, celebrating good reviews and responding to constructive criticism.

**Booking**
Like all other stages of the buying process, visitors want to be able to make a booking with the minimum of hassle. It has been proven that many more visitors will book if they are able to do it for themselves online and have enough information to know the choice they are making is the one they want. And they will increasingly use travel review sites to gather this information.

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**How to work with Travel Review Sites**

**Don't panic about reviews.**
The reality is that around 88% of online reviews are positive. When it’s all about how you react and respond.

If you respond professionally and show that you care about your guests’ comment, it may make a new visitor more likely to book with you.

**You can't please everyone all of the time.**
Everyone has different expectations, so what may be good value to one person might not be to someone else. So don’t worry if you aren’t getting five out of five in every review – but do ensure you’re offering the best service for your key markets.

**Will a bad review put others off?**
An authentic review site will almost always include some form of ‘bad’ review. If the majority of your reviews are positive, people will see through any unfair comments. Your review profile will build an overall 'feel' for the business, which is why it's important to encourage visitors to leave feedback and build your presence.

**The more reviews, the merrier.**
Reviews drive interest and increase visitor confidence in your business. Also, adverts with reviews, even negative ones, will appear higher up in Travel Review Sites search results pages. So keep asking for feedback!

![Graph showing increase in enquiries with number of reviews increasing](image.png)
**Experiencing**
We should play to our strengths in order to give our visitors the once-in-a-lifetime experiences that they are looking for. Make sure you help them experience that famous NI warm welcome, the opportunity to view our famous landscapes and a spot of adventure along the way!

**Entice overseas visitors with our fantastic product**
Outdoor NI reports that domestic tourists accounted for 65% of all visitors engaged in activity tourism in NI (as of 2008). As overseas adventure enthusiasts spend more, despite their lower numbers, it would indicate the need for stronger marketing efforts to attract them. If we can catch these visitors with the right product marketing at the planning stage, it’s then down to making sure they have a expectation-exceeding experience that will encourage them to sell NI when they go back home.

**When in doubt, keep it simple**
Walking and hiking are the most popular outdoor and adventure activities undertaken by any island of Ireland consumers during a holiday or short break with 56% of NI and 61% of ROI consumers having engaged in these pursuits. No fancy equipment required, just some solid shoes – and hopefully a warm drink and shower when visitors return to their lodgings. How can you go the extra mile to welcoming hikers?

**Sharing**
Encouraging visitors to talk about their holiday is a fantastic – and free – marketing opportunity. The opinions of satisfied visitors will carry a lot more weight than any PR or advertising campaign. Can you encourage your visitors to talk about their experiences with you on Facebook, Twitter and other social media?

**Power of Word of Mouth**
Make sure you reply to every review that anyone makes of your business on travel review sites. Did you know that reviewers can contact each other to ask advice? You want to be sure your reviewers are your sales force, not your detractor! Note from one reviewer to another.... Looking for suggestions for a four-night stay? “Hi everyone – we are planning to visit Northern Ireland during the Halloween break. We are a family of two adults and two teens (13 and 16). We hope to stay for four nights. Any suggestions as to where we should go and what to do? We like to do activities but don’t know what is available? Also welcome suggestions re. places to stay (we usually go self-catering), things to do etc. We will be driving from the South of Ireland. Thanks in advance.” This itinerary and bookings will most likely be made on the recommendations of the TripAdvisor community and their perceptions. This is how it works!

**Promote our best-in-class facilities**
NI is proud to be able to compete on a global stage with its outdoor offering. Did you know that Royal County Down and Royal Portrush golf courses are consistently ranked amongst the best in the world? Did you know how popular the surf schools on the Causeway Coast are? And did you know that NI is fast becoming a haven for mountain bikers from all over the globe? Take advantage of the success of these facilities and tell your visitors about them.

Consider this...
Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.
Henry Ford
Using the NI themes to build your business

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. For more tips on which segments prefer which of our 5 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 to how you start to create experiences around the products you offer, but there are some core principles:

✔ Which types of visitors do you currently attract? List each of the different segments. 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.

✔ Look at the themes that these segments are attracted to the most. Does your business fall into this theme? Can you recognise it?

✔ Now look at the other themes that your top segments also are attracted to. Can you also offer products and services within this theme, too? If not – who could you collaborate with so that you can? Make a list of where your visitors could find these sorts of things to do and see so that you can tell them.

How to offer your visitors a better experience and grow your business at the same time

**EXAMPLE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your business</th>
<th>List the segments you currently attract?</th>
<th>What themes can you offer?</th>
<th>What other themes could you offer?</th>
<th>How?</th>
<th>What do you need to do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small hotel in Portrush</td>
<td>Mature, Cosmopolitan, Family Fun, Great Escapers</td>
<td>Naturally NI</td>
<td>Know all the best places to eat along the coast</td>
<td>Find out for yourself and speak from experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cosmopolitan</td>
<td>Coast and Lakes</td>
<td>Signpost guests to the outdoor activities available on your doorstep</td>
<td>Team up with a local activity provider</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family Fun</td>
<td>Unique outdoors</td>
<td>Collaborate with local history tour</td>
<td>Negotiate a preferential rate for guests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Great Escapers</td>
<td>Living legends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Basic facts** - John runs a family hotel near Portrush

- Recognise the Family Fun segments from both ROI and NI as being their primary visitors.
- They know that their visitors like to visit the Giant’s Causeway. Visitors usually just find them – they rarely promote themselves so they are not sure how people find them. They have a website but never update it.
- They don’t generally ask where people go after they leave in the morning.
- They don’t think to ask what people thought of their stay or what more they wanted.
- Most people tell them they have had a nice time when they say goodbye.
- They often have low occupancy rates and need to grow their business - particularly for the shoulder season.

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

- Find out everything there is to do in the area – particularly for wet/dry and warm/cold days.
- Develop a range of local restaurants who you would recommend to visitors. They may not want to eat with you every night. Consider a ‘dine around’ promotion with others.
- Know all that there is to do in the area and offer to arrange outings for guests.
- Promote the great drying and storage facilities that you have.
- Offer a special treat to everyone who has been doing activities all day when they come in – hot chocolate for the kids, homemade cake, nip of whiskey. Show you are thinking of them not you.
- Encourage the family to do activities together. Organise a family challenge over 3 days – (with prizes) and promote this.

**‘TO DO’ list**

- There are 2 other segments that this hotel could be attracting – (Great Escapers and Social Energisers)
- Invest in a website
- Do a social media course and start to engage for feedback and reviews
- Ask for feedback - ask what more you could do
- Offer a truly authentic experience that is unique – get creative – Social Energisers love to find something quirky and then they will spread the word
- Collaborate with other tourism providers in the area – what joint packages could you offer around the Unique Outdoors theme?
Opportunities for businesses

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: Naturally NI  ➔ Authenticity
Guide 5: Living Legends  ➔ Visitor Feedback

Sustainability

The Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS) is one of the world’s largest sustainable tourism certification schemes, with more than 2,200 members across the UK, Ireland and Canada. It has been endorsed by the International Centre for Responsible Tourism. Other green schemes are BS8901 as well as the Green Hospitality Scheme and Eco Tourism Ireland.


If you are interested in GTBS accreditation, refer to The Green Business Tourism Scheme at [www.green-business.co.uk](http://www.green-business.co.uk) for further information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tips for your business</th>
<th>What you can do for visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highlight the sustainable aspects of your business on promotional material and provide a link to your environmental policy on your website.</td>
<td>Provide incentives for visitors that cycle to your business, such as storing and lock-up facilities – or even a discounted rate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with and promote other green producers in your area, including food producers, artists and craftworkers – it gives visitors an authentic, local experience.</td>
<td>Provide public transport information in a communal area of your business and on your website, including local taxi firms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce dependency on your car and encourage your employees to use public transport. Be flexible to suit travel times.</td>
<td>Why not provide an itinerary of activities that will not require driving?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market jointly with other like-minded businesses in your area</td>
<td>Encourage visitors to walk or cycle by providing maps and information about distances and difficulty levels. Offer bike hire – or speak to a local bike hire company about services for your guests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising local events and festivals on websites and provide details in your booking confirmation emails.</td>
<td>Provide details of the daily weather forecast and tips for rainy-day activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sustainability in practice

Barton Court, Devon
Barton Court is a sympathetically renovated development of 13th century farm buildings, situated within the owner’s working farm. Much of the original timber and stonework have been retained giving a very authentic feel to the self-catering cottages. The estate stands in six acres of peaceful landscaped gardens with an orchard, a woodland area with a spring-fed stream.

As part of their commitment to the environment the large buildings have been fitted with solar heating solutions, and recycling bins are provided for all the cottages.

Guests are encouraged to be conscious of their power use, and are invited to explore the organic farm and sample the delicious produce. There are lots of family-friendly activities on offer, including the opportunity to tend to the Devon Red cattle, witness lamb births and pet and groom the miniature Shetland ponies, as well as wildlife-spotting of badgers, foxes and barn owls in the vast grounds.

www.barton-court.co.uk

Did You Know?
If you want to attract a perfect target market for activities tourism, just look next door! ROI consumers highly value being active – according to TGI data, 66% of the ROI population do some form of sport or exercise at least once a week. This is compared to 47% of the NI population! Promote short breaks and day trips to encourage them over the border to test out our unique NI adventure product.

Green Credentials
Figures show that over half of NI and ROI consumers are ‘fairly concerned’ about the environment. Visitors are increasingly looking for products and services that are sustainable and that maximize community benefits. Promote your commitment to sustainability, and it can mean the difference between choosing your business over another.

In fact, when choosing accommodation, a third of NI & ROI consumers say just that. And with this trend expected to become more and more prominent in the long-term, there is no better time to start futureproofing your business. As an added bonus, you could benefit from potentially huge savings from following sustainable best practices such as improved management of energy, waste and water.
How exactly do you ADD VALUE?

FIVE ways to offer more – without slashing costs

1. Give visitors take-away skills
Visitors are increasingly looking for an ‘educational’ aspect to their holiday experiences – ‘currency’ or ‘bragging rights’ that they can take back and talk to family and friends about. There are numerous opportunities to offer this in NI.

Horse riding is a great option for all ages, from children to seniors. Some of the equestrian centres in NI offer lessons for beginners – would your visitors like to try a new activity through trails and beaches? Some sailing centres in NI run taster days, where families, groups or individuals can both enjoy the fantastic views and pick up some sailing skills as part of their experience.

Or could you offer visitors an experience they’ll never forget – their first skydive! Perfect for adrenaline junkies, Parachuting, sky diving and gliding are the activities which most consumers are most likely to have never participated in during a holiday or short break on the island of Ireland. Could they change that, thanks to you?

2. Offer add-ons tailored for them
There is a lot you can do to delight activity visitors, by offering useful services or products. For example, could you have spare walking boots or waterproofs for visitors who decide they would like to tackle a local trail? If your pub as at the end of a cycle or hike trail, could you advertise a free pint to the victorious people who finish the trail?

Alternatively you could team up with an activity provider to offer a special deal to visitors who would like to try a new activity. What about a group tuition rate for new divers who would like to take their first dive in sheltered sea conditions or a swimming pool?

3. Provide bespoke information packs
Visitors are looking for information, recommendations and itinerary suggestions. Can you put that together for them? How about the ‘top ten things to do’ in our area? Or the ‘2-day weekend guide’ to sampling the best your area has to offer? Don’t forget to provide wet weather options and also put local guides and activity magazines out to inspire visitors.

4. Make sure your staff are informed
Your staff are your eyes and ears on the floor for making sure visitors have all the information they need and also to gather feedback.

It helps if they can have information such as a five-day weather forecast and public transport details to hand. Consider sending them on fam trips so they can make solid recommendations for various types of guests.

5. Go the extra mile
Surprise your visitors. You may be meeting expectations right now, but could you be exceeding them? Be flexible for hikers and bikers – they may not be able to fit in with regular arrival or meal times. And things like a simple piece of homemade cake after a long hike or an early evening dram after a day of cycling can be just the things to win people over.
Spotlight on biking

NI is fast becoming the go-to destination for mountain biking in the UK. Mountain bikers from all across the UK and Ireland have been flocking to Northern Ireland to ride over 110km of purpose-built mountain bike trails at Davagh Forest, Barnett Demesne, Castlewellan and Rostrevor.

The trails are ideal for both leisure and competitive mountain bikers and have already attracted attention on the worldwide mountain bike scene, having secured the Single Speed European Championships for 2014. Do you tell visitors about our mountain biking opportunities and get them involved in the hype? They would love to know!

Cycling is also seeing a huge surge in popularity in Northern Ireland. There are now over 1000 miles of National Cycle Network across Northern Ireland, including seven long distance rides. These routes offer visitors a great way to get off the beaten track and explore NI’s vast and varied landscapes, from dramatic coasts to the rolling hills.

For tips on how to become more bike-friendly and attract more of this growing target market, download the guide at www.nitb.com/activities.

Did You Know?

Northern Ireland is playing host to the opening stages of the Giro D’Italia in May 2014? This annual stage cycling race is one of the Big Three - Tour de France and Vuelta a España, are the others.

The race, which has a potential global audience of 800 million, attracts over 200 of the top professional cyclists from across the globe will be in Northern Ireland to take part and there will be a supporting programme of events and activities. The first day of the race kicks off at Titanic Belfast and passes via Stormont before finishing at City Hall. The race will then head north-bound through Antrim and Ballymena before looping back round to Belfast via the iconic Causeway Coastal Route. The third stage will see the cyclists make their way to Dublin after starting in Armagh.

This is a fantastic opportunity for NI’s tourism sector so make sure you are clued up on what is happening!

Ride Rotorua

Rotorua markets itself as the spiritual home of mountain biking New Zealand. Ride Roturua offers a range of mountain bike trails that take visitors whizzing through forests via gorges, jumps and loops that they’ll never forget!

The company works with bike hire companies, bike-friendly accommodation providers and guiders to offer a complete biking experience that fully caters for the market. Also, situated at the heartland of Maori culture, and being situated near geothermal hotspots and prime fishing areas, multi-day adventure tours are very popular – taking in everything from biking, bungee jumping and boat rides to thermal spa relaxation.

www.riderotorua.com
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 compete</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.

Tell stories in an innovative way

Through regular events including bike rides, evening performances and walks, A Bit Crack Storytelling provide storytelling experiences in the north-east of England.

The ‘Tales of the Forgotten North’ experience takes visitors on a journey through Northumberland and the North Pennines, where they visit archaeological sites, stop to share tales, enjoy meals together, and if weather permits sleep under the stars.

Through live storytelling and close interaction with the environment, whether on bike or foot, visitors gain an up close and interactive tour of the area.

www.abitcrack.com/bicycle-rides
**What you can do NOW**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What you can do</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborate with others</strong></td>
<td>Visitors like to try more than one experience on a trip. How can you collaborate with others to offer a wider range of experiences? As an example, how about some local real ale tasting after a day’s walking or cycling? Or some traditional local storytelling linked in with a day’s wildlife watching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Get to grips with social media new technologies</strong></td>
<td>Outdoor enthusiasts are more than ever using social media to share their experiences and their photos and to learn from others. Someone might post an account of climbing in the Sperrins and, within a couple of hours a dozen other people will be posting comments. Are you joining in these on-line forums to raise your profile and demonstrate your specialist knowledge and expertise? Have you set up your own Facebook and Twitter accounts? Are you including video footage on your website or posting footage on to YouTube?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Put yourself in your visitors shoes</strong></td>
<td>Outdoor activities appeal to people with all levels of proficiency and skill. Don’t be mistaken in thinking that it is just for enthusiasts. Today, there are more families than ever before who want to take part and so they need help and information to get started tailor experiences for real people not just ‘marketing profiles’.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Get the basics right</strong></td>
<td>Walkers and cyclists will really appreciate it if you can give them route maps to help plan their day. If you can also recommend places to eat and drink along the way – it will make their day even more special.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attract more visitors with green credentials</strong></td>
<td>Look at how you could enhance your green credentials? By taking even small steps – you can significantly reduce your environmental impact. If you are already eco-friendly make sure you let potential visitors know all about it.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Keep an eye on others and copy their good ideas</strong></td>
<td>Look at what others are doing in offering experiences around this theme. Is there anything that you think is being done particularly well – what can you adopt in your own business?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Use Events and Championships to grow business</strong></td>
<td>Events and Championships provide a high profile focus that sparks renewed interest in adventure activities. Think about how can you exploit any events or championships that are happening in your area or elsewhere regionally?</td>
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