




northernireland  
tourist board

# Creating Experiences

A Toolkit for the NI  
Tourism Industry

[nitb.com](http://nitb.com)



“It is the **hidden gems** that have the power to add the value we need to turn tourist attractions into tourist experiences.”

# Foreword

## Develop, Cluster, Promote, Deliver

Many tourism destinations, including Northern Ireland, have traditionally marketed themselves as a series of products e.g. hotel rooms, picturesque views, a location for generic activities such as museums, sports, dining out etc. We have focused on the physical attributes of the landscape or the standalone infrastructure assets on offer.

Our research into global best practice has shown that in order to truly connect with our visitors, and ultimately grow market share, the focus needs to be on the emotions, feelings and sensations the visitors will have on their journey, the stories they will learn and the connections they will make.

Experiential tourism is the opposite of mass tourism that traditionally focused on package tours and holidays with low levels of personal involvement. Experiences must tap the hearts and minds of curious travellers, inviting them to connect with Northern Ireland's people, culture and geography through personal exploration.

Planning and delivering exceptional visitor experiences requires considering the entire visitor journey from the visitor's perspective, from the moment they think about travelling until they are sharing stories, photos and videos at home or on-line.

This will require the tourism industry to work much more closely together to offer the visitor an end-to-end holistic experience that meets the needs of each visitor segment.

Only products that are unique, authentic and that encourage interaction could be described as experiential. This approach is firmly embedded in other world-class destinations and most importantly is the bedrock of the NI tourism brand.



# Understanding Experiences





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

Canadian Tourism Commission

*I loved it when I had to  
put on my wellies and  
find the tadpoles.*





"The visitor becomes a hands-on participant not a passive observer"

Experiential tourism shows rather than describes. The tourist becomes an active participant in the experience. In experiential tourism people value their visit because of direct experience.

Experiential tourism encourages visitors to participate and promotes activities that draw people into cultures, communities and the outdoors. Different visitors will want various levels from toe-dipping to total immersion but the principles remain the same.

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

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





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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

*“The rope bridge was amazing but having Peter there with binoculars to show us the Fulmars, Kittiwakes and Razorbills really made the children’s day.”*

# Increase Revenue Generation Potential

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

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

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

## Progression of Economic Value

Greater differentiation  
Higher yield



Source: Nancy Arsenault, Celes Davar and Todd Lucier (2011)

# Thinking About Delivering a City Experience

## Writing Belfast

Niamh and her two friends Michelle and Sarah have arrived from Dublin to take part in Writing Belfast a 4 day experience exploring creative writing, literary history and contemporary culture.





# First impressions



The Merchant Hotel, Belfast, Co. Antrim

Arriving in style straight from the station...lifted and laid the whole time.



That's my room up there!

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





# Checking in

Looking at the itinerary - all so well organised.



Looking forward to tomorrow, but for now time to celebrate being in Belfast... for the first time!

What a place - lap of luxury!



Portrait of Hugh Odling-Smee - what a brilliant name, what a brilliant guide - I learnt so many things - even remembered some of them.

# The personal touch

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

Michelle bids farewell to our faithful guide.



# The best of local food & drink



The John Hewitt Pub - named in honour of the famous poet...beautiful bar, great local beers...



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

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



Don't just stand there, do something!

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

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

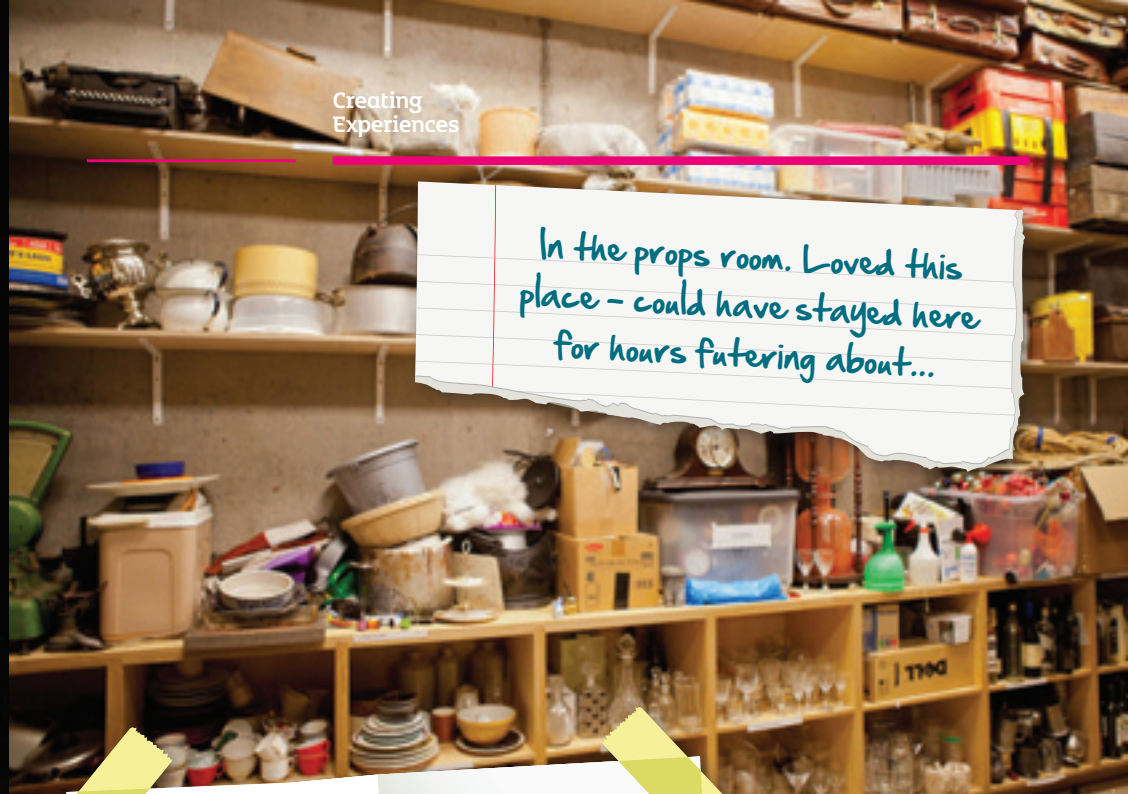
It's not like school at all...we actually wanted to be here.



# Added extras



The new Lyric theatre - incredible - ready for a performance of mixed marriage by St. John Irvine - really good.



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

Backstage. Born to act eh?





# Magic moments

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

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

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



# Access all areas

I read the Narnia books as a child...adored them - the idea of going through a wardrobe into another world - magical genius!

Ah the peace, the quiet.

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

A MAP OF NARNIA AND THE SURROUNDING COUNTRIES



# VIP treatment

Our tutor, Belfast writer Glenn Patterson, showed us round the Ulster Hall and its famous organ!

Glenn's great. Lovely host and fantastic tutor.

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



# History within reach

So many books, so little time.

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

When you spend time in this library you don't really want to leave.



# Making memories

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

Do you want to see my etchings?

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



# Going the extra mile



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

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

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





# Taking something home

## BOOKSTORE

David Torrens the owner presents me with my framed print!

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

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



# Developing Experiences

02



What are the defining characteristics of a tourism experience?

## It is globally unique

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





## It is interactive

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

## It is authentically local

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

*Aunt Sandra's  
and her candy  
factory... couldn't  
get the kids out!*



Creating Experiences

# It is visitor inspired

Experiences must focus completely on the visitor and take a holistic approach to understanding and meeting visitor needs. They need to be unique and offer something different and special, something visitors can't experience at home.

The cycle tour had everything. Even a stop off at Bushmills!



The Giant's Causeway, Co. Antrim



The Bushmills Distillery, Co. Antrim



Sperrins, Co. Tyrone



# What should Northern Ireland tourism experiences look like?

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



Nordic Walking, Sperrins, Co. Tyrone

The Crown Bar, Belfast, Co. Antrim



## NITB Brand

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

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

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

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



## Our Vision

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

*I'd never  
even heard  
of zorbing*





# Our Strengths


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

*Our instructor took us all the way to the top*



# Our Stories

NI has a host of stories to celebrate that revolve around our beautiful scenery, our living history and a host of interesting characters, living, dead and imaginary. We want visitors to 'uncover our stories' through the design and delivery of tourism experiences.



I found this  
little nook and  
didn't want  
to leave.



Theme	Hero Assets with potential to be best in class experiences	Supporting Assets with potential to be best in class experiences	Cross-Cutting
<b>Living Legends</b> making our history, legend & stories alive and interactive	Examples include Titanic and Maritime, Saints and Scholars (including St Patrick's & Christian Heritage), and the Walled City	Examples include NI Heroes, Industrial Heritage, Built Heritage (including landmark Buildings), Literary Greats, Museums and attractions, Genealogy, events	
<b>Coasts and Lakes</b> turning our coast and waterways into unique global destination experiences	Examples include Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coastal Route, Mourne Coastal Route, Fermanagh Lakes	Examples include Lakes, Loughs and Waterways, Cruising, Angling, Hub Towns, Seaside Towns & Villages/Coastal resorts Beaches, Trails & Paths (Coastal, Forestry, Mountainous or cross country), Hallmark water based/coastal events	<b>Naturally NI – experiencing local culture through nature</b>  <b>Examples include living landscapes, wonderful wildlife, NI local food &amp; produce, cookery schools, speciality restaurants, distilleries, linen, gardens, wildlife, geneology, open farms, rural arts and crafts, markets and fairs, uniquely NI Culture</b>
<b>Unique Outdoors</b> becoming a distinct outdoor recreation and adventure playground	Examples include Links golf, National Park, Northern Ireland a compact adventure playground	Examples include Mountain biking, Canoe Trails, Adrenaline activity, Walking, Hiking, Cycling, Surfing, Hallmark outdoor activity events	
<b>Culture and Creative Vibe</b> promoting contemporary & vibrant NI experiences	Examples include The Belfast & Derry~Londonderry City Experience	Examples include Theatre, Street entertainment, Music/film, Distinctive/Award Winning Pubs & restaurants, Café culture Tours, Shopping, Art galleries, City Quarters, Reconciliation tourism, Public realm, Nightlife, Hallmark events	

## Introducing Our Core Experience Themes

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





## To exploit these themes and stories fully we need to be 'best in class'.

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

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

We need to build an inventory of visitor experiences that will best exemplify each theme as well as the NI tourism brand in order to capture the attention and imagination of consumers to entice them to visit NI now.





## So as an individual tourism business, where do you fit?

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

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

Chapter 3 explores this thinking further.





## Practical Tips Generating Ideas

Choose a theme or story that celebrates your local place, tradition, people or culture through which the experience will be developed. Think about how it will appeal to the core visitor segments we have defined - what are the particular aspects that would interest them most? What types of ways might their motivations inform how the experience is played out?





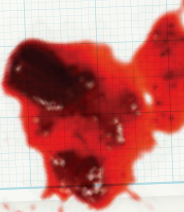
We need to develop our own ‘best kept secrets’ about the things to see, do, explore and taste off the beaten track. Sharing this information will make your guests feel really special and will showcase the best that Northern Ireland has to offer. Finding someone who knows where the best fish rise or how to break the unbreakable 4th at Royal County Down will lift the visitor experience out of the ordinary.

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

*The homemade jam class opened my eyes!*

## Pay attention to the simple things.

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







## Show you care.

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

## Create conversation pieces.

Room 21 will become much more memorable if named after someone famous. Sell the journey as well as the destination. Make it your mission to collect local stories and tall tales and share them with visitors – the fact and the folklore.

## Help your visitors create their own stories.

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

## Share the myths and legends of your area.

And, if anyone asks, of course they're true! It's the little things that make lasting impressions. Paint a vivid picture of what's on offer and share this with your visitors. Play your part in creating their memories.

*memories every step of the way*





# Planning. It is a journey. Plan for every part

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

This section examines how experiences are put together and the practicalities of collaboration.





## What's the Story?

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

**Establish the flow and itinerary of the experience.**

- Think about your experience as a story – just like a book it will have a start, a middle and an end. How will it all weave together? Plan in as much detail as possible every step of the way. Plan time for interaction, conversation, reflection.
- Attention to detail at every step of the way and personalisation will give you competitive edge and add value to visitors experience. Remember your experience will only as good as its weakest part.
- You need to have clear goals about how you hope your guests will feel during and after their experience and to design experience elements in a way that contributes to meeting these goals. To generate this you need to know who you want to come.



give visitors a unique view





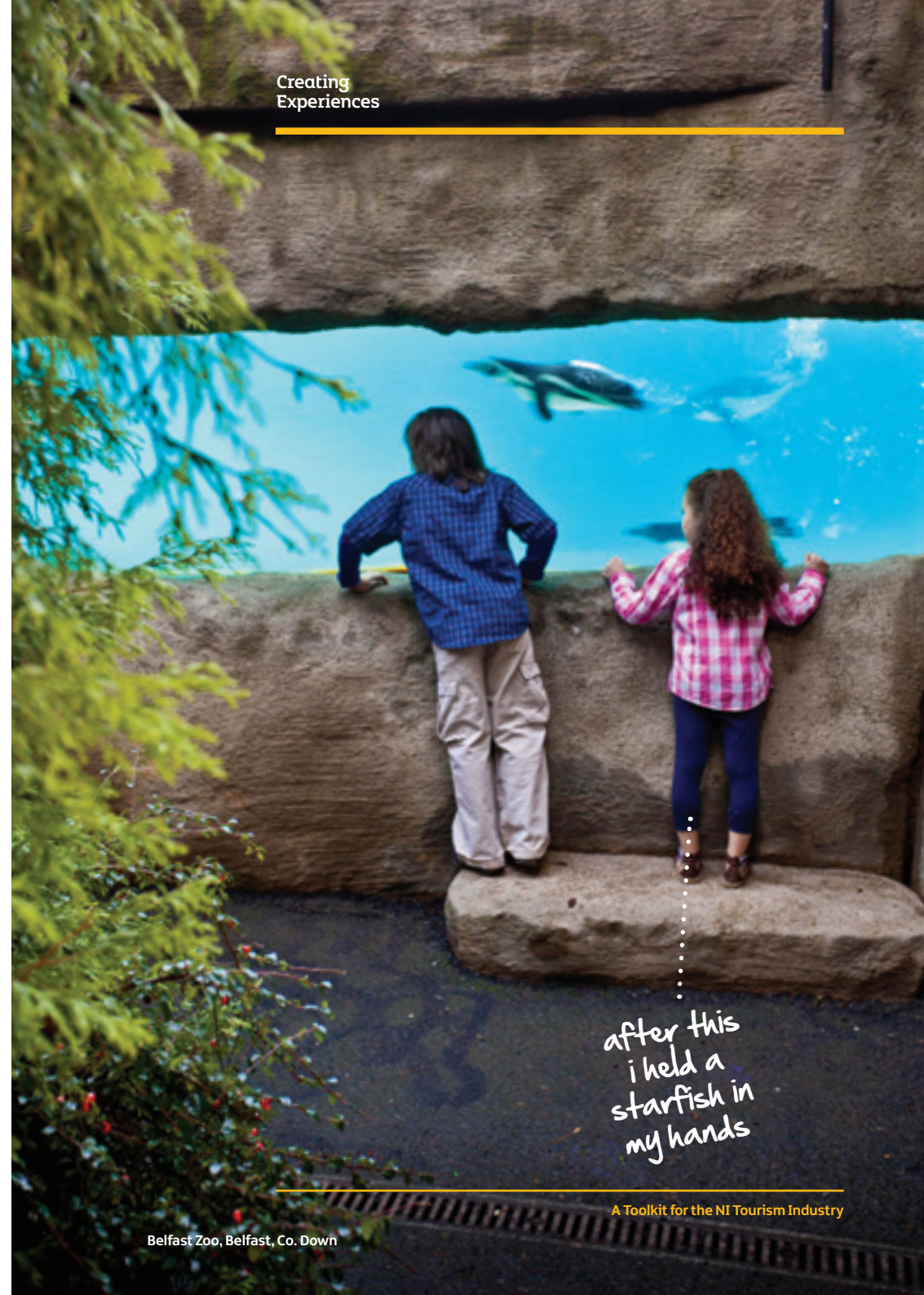
# What will they do, see and feel?

## Look at familiar things from a different angle.

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

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

How can your local knowledge of the area and the WOW moments/hidden gems help deliver truly memorable engaging and interactive experiences?



after this  
i held a  
starfish in  
my hands



# ‘Put the visitor at the heart of planning your experience’

put  
yourself  
in their  
shoes



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

## I am a visitor, what appeals to me?

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



## I am a guest, I am special

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

## I want to be engaged

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

## I want something to remember

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

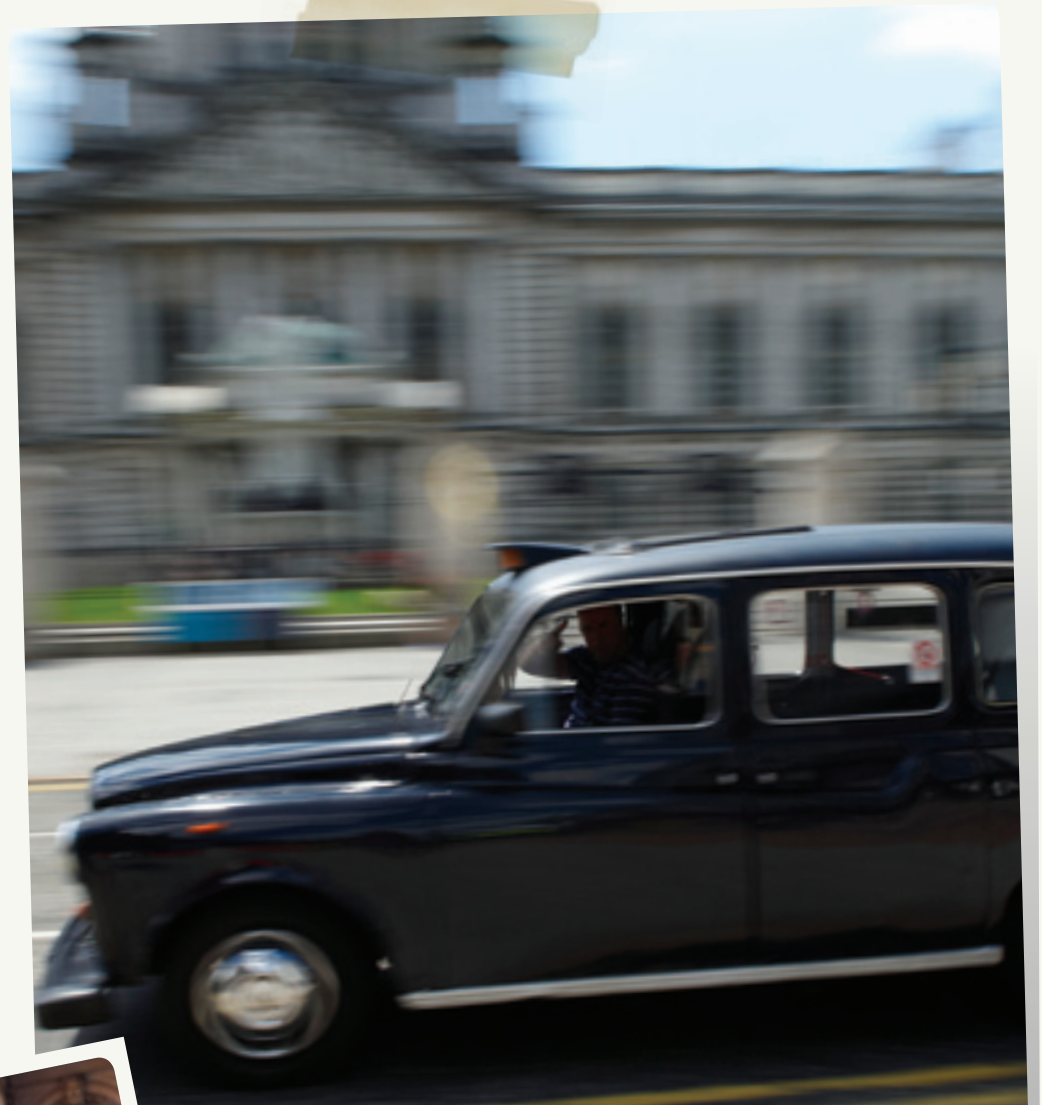
**Remember** – uncovering our stories sits at the heart of the NI tourism Brand – what stories will your visitors leave with? How did your experience help them become a part of that story?

**Remember** – authentic and unique experiences are not one dimensional but rather multi faceted – they engage and immerse the visitor at multiple levels.



## How will it be organised?

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



*Make every  
small trip  
an experience*

Logistical planning is about paying attention to the glue that holds things together. Take a systematic approach to checking that everything is in place.



*run it like clockwork*

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

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

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

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

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



# Clustering Experiences

for Individual customers

03

# Where do I start?

## The Customer

Understanding what tourism experiences are is one thing. Developing them so that they are attractive, effective and ultimately profitable is another.

As a starting point we need to ensure that as well as reflecting the core values of Northern Ireland as a tourism destination our experiences meet the needs and motivations of key market segments.



## Who's Coming?

World leading destinations focus their efforts on well-defined groups within key markets. In this context important new research<sup>1</sup> has encouraged us to define our core visitor categories as follows :

<sup>1</sup>NITB commissioned research in 2012 to gather and explore the views and motivations of potential visitors in NI and ROI regarding their propensity to holiday in NI. Tourism Ireland in conjunction with NITB and Fáilte Ireland and ITIC conducted similar research culminating in 'GB Path to Growth' report published in December 2012 which sets out a new plan for restoring growth from the island of Ireland's greatest source market – Great Britain.

Category	Visitor Focus	Key Words	Markets
Time Together	Good quality food and drink Natural Scenery Landmarks Contemporary Cultural Experiences	Romance Cool Nightlife Gentle Walking Shopping Relaxation	NI ROI
Mature Cosmopolitans	Relaxation Good quality food and drink Scenic Drives Theatre Authentic pubs Good Value Key Attractions	Curiosity Authenticity Insight Exploration Eating Out Natural Beauty	NI ROI
Family Fun	Fun Quality Time Safe Child-orientated Attractions Entertainment Memories	Value for Money Offers Family Accommodation Cafes Activities	NI ROI
Young and Lively	Entertainment Energy Social Urban Cool Nightlife The 'Wow' factor	City experience Contemporary Culture Music Festivals Events The Local Scene Street Animation	ROI
Great Escapers	Slow Travel Relaxation Rebalancing Getting away from it all Connecting with Family	Breath-taking landscapes Ancient sites Remote places Landmarks Restaurants offering fresh, local Food Authentic Pubs	GB
Social Energisers	Excitement Energy Fun & Laughter The 'Wow' Factor Adventure Spontaneous Social	Entertainment Festivals Contemporary culture and Music Clubbing Water sports The pub experience Shopping Sightseeing	GB
Culturally Curious	Curiosity Authenticity Insight Independence Immersion in Culture Off the Beaten Track	Broadening the mind Active sightseeing Historic buildings and attractions World heritage sites Artisan food Events	GB

## The Segments in More Detail

Although this broad labelling of potential customers is useful in focusing our minds on the type of people who might sign up for a Northern Ireland experience if we are to create truly exceptional products we must see them more as individuals and understand their needs and expectations in greater detail.

We must also remember that people can appear within multiple segments. The extended family illustrated here exemplifies this and can provide us with more information.





## NI & ROI Segments

### Mature Cosmopolitans

Liam (62) and Catherine (63) have been together for over thirty years. They love to travel and are always on the lookout for interesting breaks close to home and if it is good value, all the better. However, they do like to stay in the best hotels and eat well. They know their food and love to see local chefs doing something different with local produce.

Liam loves red wine and malt whiskey. He has been on a few courses to make sure he knows what he is talking about. He wants to feel that he knows Northern Ireland inside out and is keen to go places that are new to him and a little off the beaten track especially if it has a bit of history, a story and a good local pub with no piped music!

Catherine adores a little bit of luxury. She appreciates good quality in all aspects of life and is very aware of the details in the places she stays. She hates hotels that cut corners and expects excellent service wherever she goes. She is an avid reader and thinks of herself as being pretty well up on matters literary and cultural. She loves the theatre and although Liam can take or leave it, they often go on holiday with other couples who share their interests and this allows them to part for a few hours and come back together to share the story of their day.



Liam (62) -  
Loves red wine and  
malt whiskey.



Catherine (63) -  
Adores a little bit  
of luxury.



## Time Together

Brian (26) is Liam and Catherine's youngest son. He is married to Niamh (25) and they have one son, Drew who takes up a lot of their time and energy. They have been together since they were teenagers and share ideas about what makes a good break. Although they are happy to split up occasionally and share time with friends, they are determined to get at least one trip away a year without Drew, who is happy to stay at home and be spoilt by his grandparents.



*Brian (26)*

Niamh wants to make sure that her and Brian keep the romance alive in their marriage and always keeps an eye out for short breaks that fit the bill. She likes surprising Brian for his birthday with a weekend in a good hotel close to quiet walks, atmospheric pubs and intriguing restaurants. Once they arrive she likes to ditch the car and walk everywhere so that they truly relax. She is the driving force behind the getaways and loves special offers and daily deal websites.



*Niamh (25)*

The grandparents often take Drew at a moments notice so she can be spontaneous.

Brian is happy to let Niamh organise the romantic breaks. He works hard and enjoys being taken away to a stress-free environment where he doesn't have to plan too much. He is sure that Niamh knows what he likes – good food and drink and a nice, quiet hotel with a few good pubs close by. He is a curious traveller, however, and loves nosing about under the surface of things to find out more.

*Niamh wants to make sure that her and Brian keep their romance alive...*





## Family Fun

Phelim (35) is Brian's elder brother who with his partner Lesley (33) has a son Ewan (6) and a daughter Anna (8). Their life more or less revolves around the kids who are all-action. The children are used to packing as much as they can into a day and are sports mad. Their holidays are planned well in advance and are either self-catering or in three star hotels with all-inclusive deals and options for entertaining the kids.

Both Phelim and Lesley are happy to centre their break around the children as they have a lot of fun watching them enjoying themselves. However, they ideally want to find somewhere to stay that will allow them to get some time alone during the day so that they can take it easy. This means kids clubs or some kind of monitored activity. They also want to make sure that the kids are exhausted by bedtime so that they can relax with a drink in the knowledge that they have a few hours to themselves.

Any mini break package that has a clear focus on children's enjoyment is of real interest to them but Lesley in particular is always seeking a little extra that will really engage the little ones and give them the happy childhood holiday memories that she had.



Phelim (35)

Lesley (33)



*Both Phelim and Lesley are happy to centre their break around the kids...*



## Young and Lively (ROI only)

Michelle (24) and Sarah (24) are Niamh's best friends. Ever since they were teenagers they have been hanging around and going on holidays together. As they have moved into their twenties they still take the opportunity to escape the responsibilities of work and family and let their hair down.

However, they are all keen to do something different when they go away together so that their friendship stays fresh. They love getting involved and trying something different but like it to be in a city where they can experience something of the pub and restaurant culture, and the nightlife as well.

They are all outgoing girls so meeting new people in unaccustomed situations is no problem and they are all keen to find new places to visit that are out of the ordinary.

Michelle (23)  
and Sarah (22)



Michelle and Sarah are Niamh's best friends.



They are all outgoing girls...



# GB Segments

## Social Energisers

Brian (26), Harry (25) and Steve (25) are busy young men. They work hard and play hard. With no family responsibilities they usually have a bit of spare cash and are always happy to jump on a plane and grab a weekend away in a nearby city. A good hotel is a must but they won't spend much time there, as they will be trying out the cafes, restaurants, pubs and clubs of wherever they find themselves. If there is a chance to try out an adventure sport close by they will go for it but will they always want to return to the buzz of the city. With a love for music and comedy they are always on the look out for gigs and festivals that can tie in with their trips away.



## Culturally Curious

Tony (59) and Helen (58) have taken early retirement and like to travel. They pride themselves on finding out as much as possible about the places they visit and usually begin with the key tourist attractions. Once they have orientated themselves they might venture further afield but they like it to be made easy for them. What they really enjoy on their visits are added extras – guides, literature, films – anything that reveals just that little bit more about their chosen destination.



## Great Escapers

Graham (35) and Julie (33) like to get away from their stressful jobs and their two young children who will happily enjoy some time at their grandparents house. Outdoor activities are a must be it walking, cycling or occasionally something more adventurous and they want these activities to be accessible and close to good restaurants and bars where they can rest and unwind afterwards. They also enjoy architecture and historical locations but relaxation and a stress-free environment are essential.



A focus on these key segments and the research-driven customisation of experiences for each target group means we'll be ready to concentrate on delivering a better experience for the visitor and ultimately a greater return on investment.



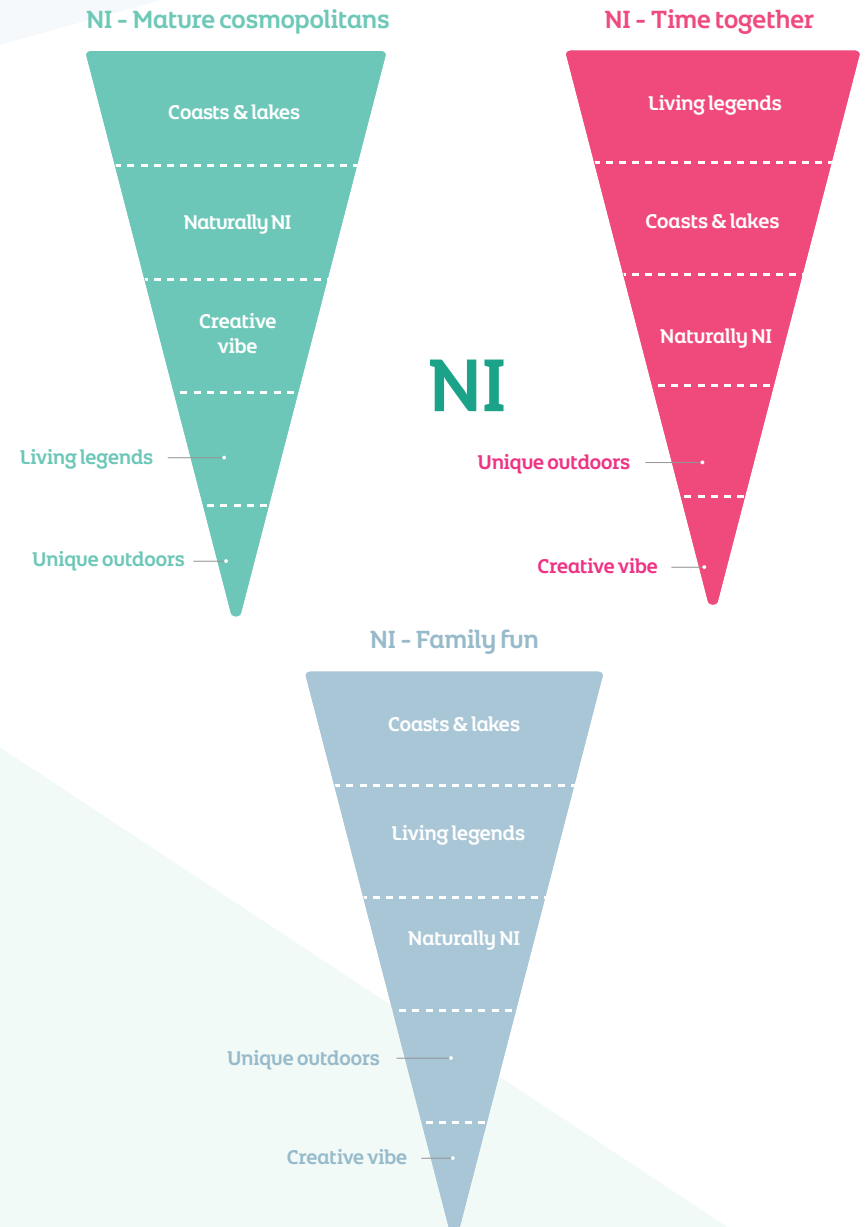


# How do they buy?

Chapter 2/Developing Experiences introduced the key experiential pillar themes. Our research shows that most of our potential customers are not likely to come to Northern Ireland on the strength of a single thematic element. However, because the scale of Northern Ireland provides an opportunity to combine the themes together into a single visit, we can give a unique depth and breadth to a total holiday experience.

Therefore whilst it is important to develop a critical mass of products and experiences within each theme and within each destination, broader linkages will be necessary in order to satisfy the demands of our market segments. In other words, the strength and uniqueness of Northern Ireland lies in how the themes are brought together into a single holiday experience for each individual market segment.

The following diagrams illustrate the clustered thematic priorities for each market segment. So, when designing an experience for a specific type of customer, these provide you with a hierarchy of relevant themes to assist you.

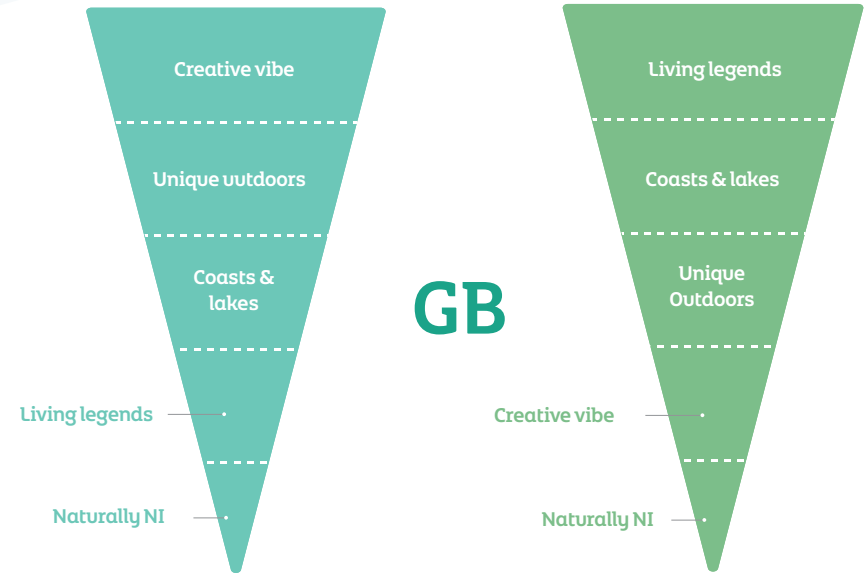
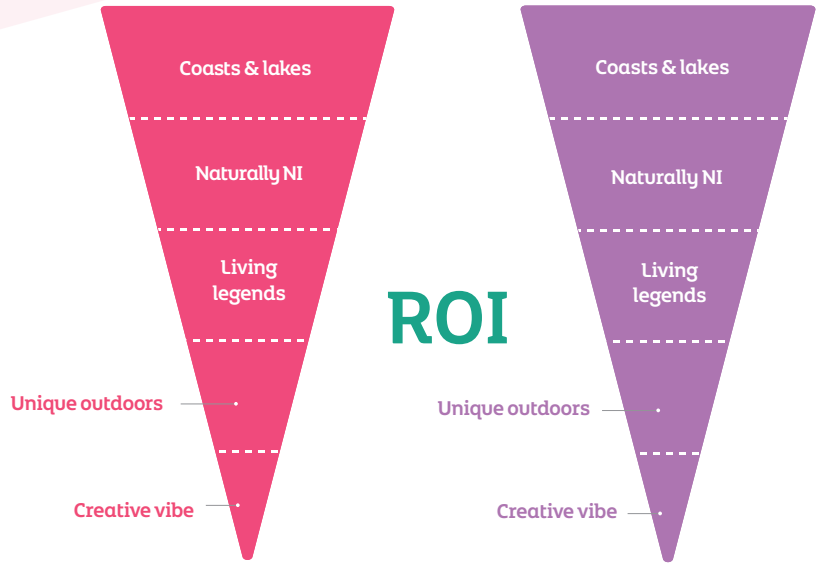


ROI - Mature cosmopolitans

ROI - Time together

GB - Social Energisers

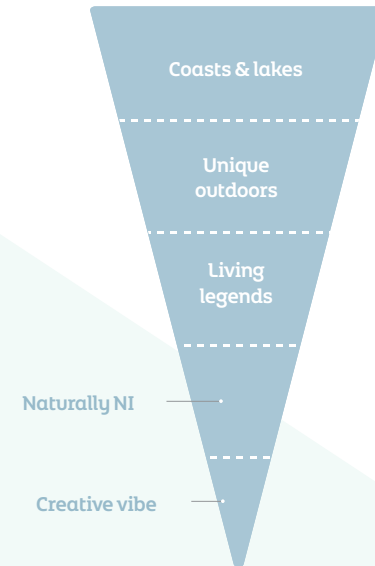
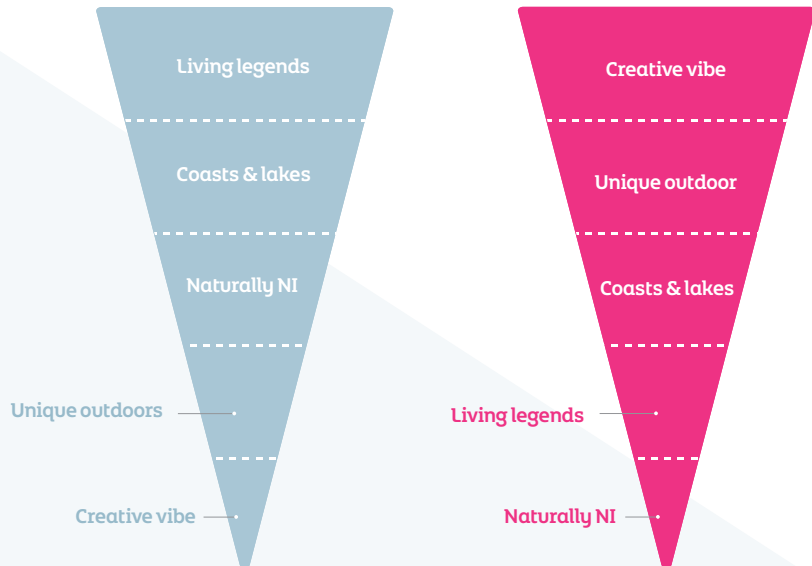
GB - Culturally Curious



ROI - Family fun

ROI - Young & lively

GB - Great escapers





# Promoting Experiences



04

The graphic features a large, stylized number '04' in white, set against a background of overlapping geometric shapes. The shapes include a dark blue triangle at the top, a yellow triangle with diagonal stripes, a purple triangle with diagonal stripes, and a pink triangle with diagonal stripes. The overall design is vibrant and modern.

“OK, so you’ve developed great experiences...”

**OK so you've developed great experiences, now all you have to do is let potential visitors know about them!**

In the same way that the experience has been designed, marketing and promotions must be done in a way that connects with your target visitor.

There are a huge variety of channels through which you can communicate either directly or via an intermediary. Your challenge is to find the right fit and sell the experience through it. The key is to focus on those channels that will deliver you most return and this needs to be constantly evaluated. Having said that there has never been a more important time to be online.



## Reaching your target customer

The different consumer segments will be motivated by different experiences and different marketing messages and each segment will be reached through different channels.

### GB Market

Within the GB market for both Social Energisers and the Culturally Curious, broadcast (TV, outdoor and cinema) can be important, although in a focused and narrowcast way. Digital and social channels will be key for Social Energisers, whilst press partnership and sponsorship will play an important role for the Culturally Curious. For the Great Escapers, word of mouth, social media and online activity will be important. They may also be reached through some of the advertising aimed at the Culturally Curious. Use of PR and publicity will also be critical for this group.

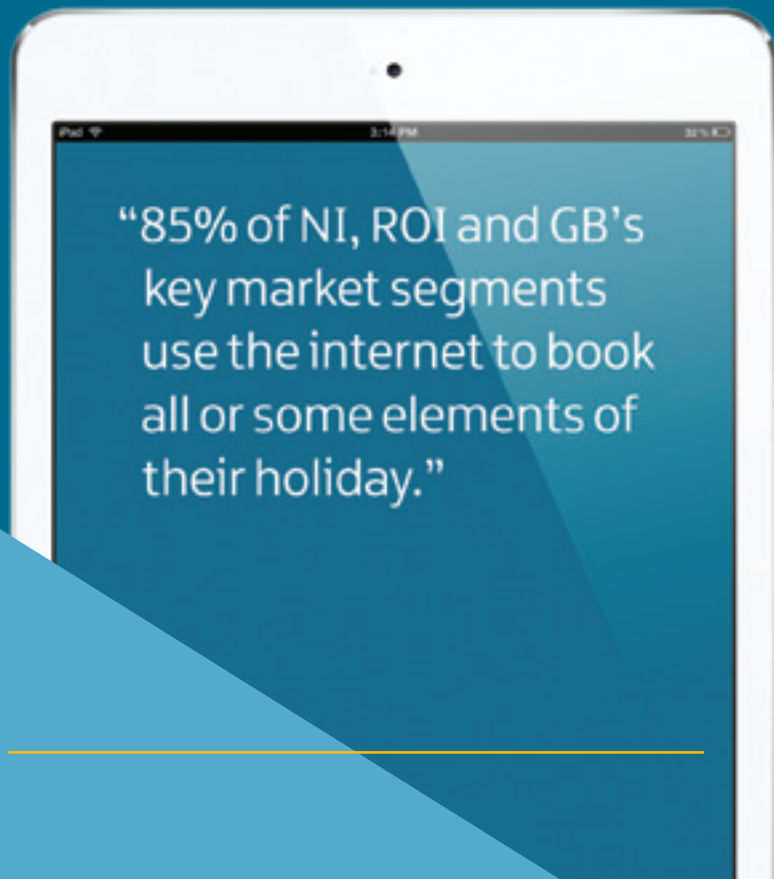
### ROI Market

Within the ROI market, for the Mature Cosmopolitans and Time Together, TV is important particularly local channels and programming, although they watch different styles of programmes. Digital and Social channels will be key for the Young and Lively, whilst press and radio partnership and sponsorships will play a key role for all four segments, although again for different papers and stations, radio is particularly important for the Family segment. Although Mature Cosmopolitans are less digitally connected than other segments, deal sites such as Groupon are important for all segments.

### NI Market

Within the NI market TV is important for all three segments, particularly local TV, although they watch a different style of programme. Radio and local press are also important, although again they listen to and read different papers/stations. Time Together are more likely than the other two segments to use smart phones and are also heavy users of daily deal sites, as too are Families and Mature Cosmopolitans.

It should be noted that the internet and digital channels have changed the way in which consumer's research, plan and book holidays. Almost 9 in 10 travel purchases are influenced by digital channels, (websites, social media, peer reviews, and smartphone or tablet apps), even if the final purchase isn't made online. However around 85% of NI, ROI and GB's key market segments use the internet to book all or some elements of their holiday.



It is important that you ensure your digital channels are fully optimised to be compelling to the customer segments. Key considerations include:

- Develop content specifically to 'talk to' your key segments
- Provide prices in Euro for the Republic of Ireland market
- Make sure your website is accessible across all platforms – PC, smartphone and tablet
- Consumers are motivated by good value online deals so ensure you present a variety of value offerings
- Maintain a positive Trip Advisor rating
- Deal sites such as Groupon are particularly important to the NI and ROI consumer, optimise these where possible

Don't forget about the practicals too e.g. how will your visitor book your experience? Will you require a deposit? Can they pay in full? What's your refund policy? How will you handle compliments and complaints? Who will manage and respond to comments on social media (e.g. Trip Adviser etc)? Can people buy vouchers for gifts?



# General Marketing Tips

## The Holiday Shopping Journey

All consumers go through 5 key stages when planning and purchasing their holiday. It is vital that your experience is marketed effectively throughout. Many businesses make the mistake of seeing marketing as something that happens before a customer books but not after. In reality the marketing process never ends, you should be conscious of how your experience is presented to the customer at all times.

Stage	Media	Key Points
Dreaming/ Being Inspired	Advertising, PR, Web, Brochures.	This is the customer's first point of contact with your experience concept. The design of your marketing material in terms of both its language and imagery is vital. You need to ensure that you understand the principles of design or have someone advising you who does.
Planning	Web, Social, Guide Books, Exhibitions, Word of Mouth.	As the customer progresses to exploring your offering in more detail and finding out more about the place they are planning to visit you need to ensure that they can find information easily that builds their interest and moves them along the path to booking.
Booking	Website and Tour Operators, Search Advertising, Deal sites, Travel websites.	When the customer wants to make a purchase it is vital that they can do so easily and securely. You need to consider what other purchase access points exist apart from your own website or phone line.
Experiencing	CRM, Welcome, Quality, TIC, Word of Mouth.	Marketing does not cease after the sale. Looking after customers once they have booked is essential. Good quality communication in the lead up to their visit and excellent customer service while they are here will encourage return visits and good word of mouth references.
Sharing	Social Media, Word of Mouth.	Again, marketing does not cease after the experience is over. People have always returned after holidays and shared stories but social media has made this a massive part of your on going marketing strategy. You need to understand social media, monitor what customers are saying and provide opportunities for them to engage with you.

## The Marketing Mix

You will have to develop your marketing from an endless range of marketing possibilities including print ads, on-line ads, brochures, websites, social media, tradeshows and travel media. Some of these are free and others cost but all need to be cost-effective. The activities you choose will depend on your target market, your goals and your budget. Marketing is now all about having a two way conversation with the customer.

<b>Online</b>	The internet is the first place many potential visitors look for information and is also a great medium for conversations.
<b>Online advertising</b>	Online ads can have the same effect in raising awareness as other types of display adverts, such as magazines and newspapers. It allows you to target your market specifically by passion or geography and is easier to track than traditional print ads.
<b>Email marketing</b>	Invite customers to connect to you and build up the opportunity to build a relationship with them. E-mail marketing is a cost effective trackable means of encouraging new and repeat visitations – but make sure you have people's permission to include them in your database.
<b>Social media</b>	With the number of social networks doubling every year it is easier than ever for people to share photos, information and reviews about their travel experiences. Suddenly there are millions of brand ambassadors – or detractors. Are people talking about your experiences? If so, what are they saying?
<b>Advertising</b>	Traditional media such as magazines and newspapers remain critical for building the awareness you need. What is your target market reading, watching or listening to?
<b>Media Relations</b>	An article in a high profile magazine or newspaper, or a mention by a hot blogger can raise your profile considerably. Editorial coverage is considered more credible than advertising. Consider what story ideas you can pitch about your experience to local media, travel writers or bloggers. NITB and TIL regularly pitch story ideas and bring media to NI. Can you get involved by providing stories and or supporting press familiarisation trips and press promotions?
<b>Consumer Shows</b>	Provide an opportunity to interact with and gather information and insights from potential visitors. Which shows would your target markets attend. Can you partner with others or NITB and / or TIL to attend?
<b>Travel Trade</b>	This includes tour operators and travel agents and is a great way to match to potential visitors, particularly in long-haul markets.



## Positioning your experience – the importance of the USP

Once you have identified the type of people that you are targeting and how you hope to reach them you then have to create a compelling message for your audience that persuades them of the benefits of booking.

It is important to consider this from your consumer's point of view. The overall benefit for the customer includes the experiences they have in your community while they are there – dining, entertainment, sightseeing, meeting locals, shopping, etc. Your product enhancement efforts need to include what you can do to improve these experiences for your customers as well.

**What is your 'unique selling proposition'? Within your communications focus on the emotions, feelings and sensations the visitors will have on their journey and the stories they will learn, inviting them to connect with Northern Ireland's people, culture and geography through personal exploration. In-order to be able to compete within a global market these should be 'best in class' experiences.**

And just to complicate matters, don't forget that different types of customers have different sets of benefits in mind and are seeking out different experiences. You need to design quality products and experiences for each of the key market segments you are targeting.

## Promoting your experience

There are a number of ways you can promote your products and services from digital, advertising, direct selling, collateral, promotions and publicity to name a few. As previously stated all your communications should be consumer centric. Therefore you should develop a communication plan for each segment that focuses on reaching potential consumers where they are most likely to be and engaging with them in ways that should drive conversion.

**Capture ATTENTION** – attract the reader’s attention and then pique their curiosity enough to read further

**Generate INTEREST** – move the reader from curiosity to real interest.

**Develop a DESIRE** for the product or experience.

**Issue a Call to ACTION** – invite the reader to respond and give instructions on how to do so.

## Using Images

Is the image a true reflection of the experience?	Is it the correct resolution?
Do photos show people engaged in something?	Do you have permission to use it?
Do they evoke feelings connected with the NI brand?	Do the people in the photos reflect your target segments accurately?
Does the image feel authentic?	Do the images reflect your best assets?

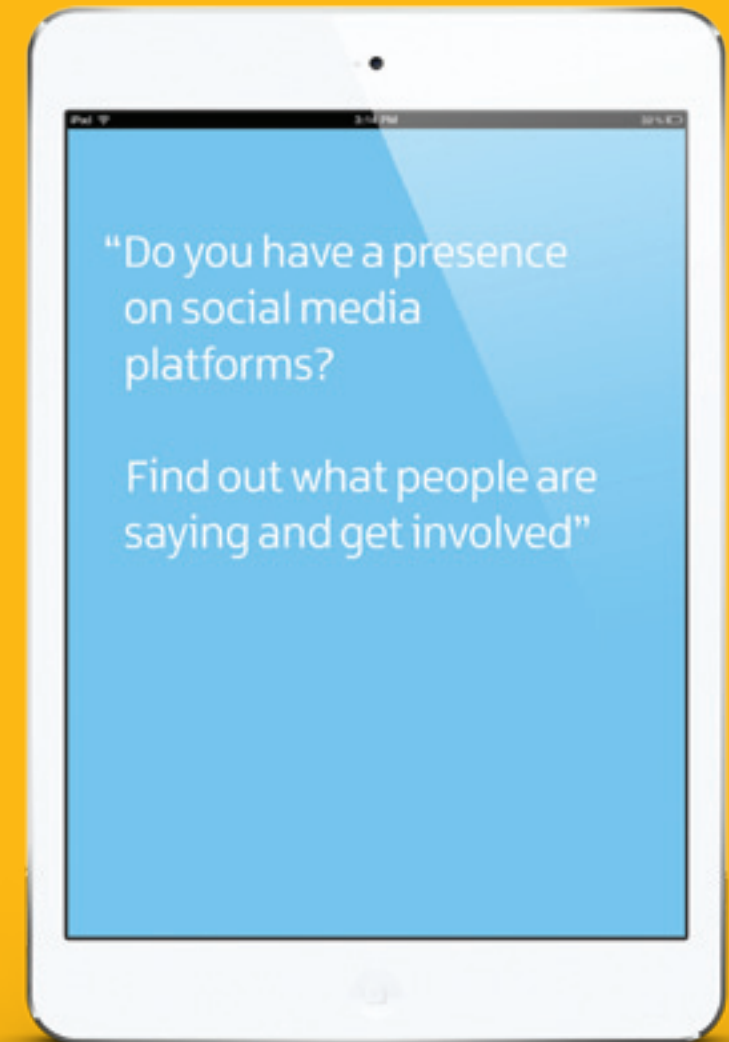
## Using Language

Do your descriptions reflect your unique selling proposition?	Is the tone of your text warm, friendly and relaxed?
Is your language focused on how the visitor will feel?	Are you being conversational rather than formal?
Is your language accurate, brief and lively without being exaggerated?	Do you issue a “call to action” – the thing you want the customer to do?



## On-line

<p>Is your <b>website</b> good enough? How do customers get to it? Is it updated regularly? Can it be used as a route to purchase?</p>	<p>Do you have a presence on <b>social media</b> platforms? Who in your organisation is monitoring this? Do you understand how to get the best out of it? Find out what people are saying about you and get involved.</p>
<p>Do you understand <b>search engine optimisation</b>? What types of words will your target customers use to find the holiday they are looking for? Try it yourself? How do you rate? How can you rate higher?</p>	<p>Can visitors to your website connect to you through <b>e-mail</b> and build a relationship? Are you building a database of contacts? Do you have people's permission or buy-in?</p>



# Delivering Experiences



05



**‘You are in the business of giving visitors a great experience and enabling them to take special memories home from Northern Ireland.’**




**If you have designed your experience well then delivering it should be a pleasure. You are in the business of giving visitors a great experience and enabling them to take special memories home from Northern Ireland. So, with a well-designed experience in place, now is the time to create attitudes within you, your staff and your associates that will ensure success in the pursuit of excellence.**

This section is comprised of tips in four areas of service that will help you deliver world-class experiences. Try to see these as an indication of the types of attitudes and actions that will help achieve excellence, not a definitive list. As you develop your experiences they will all have different contexts for high quality delivery and as the provider you will get quickly get to know what these are.

## Demand High Standards

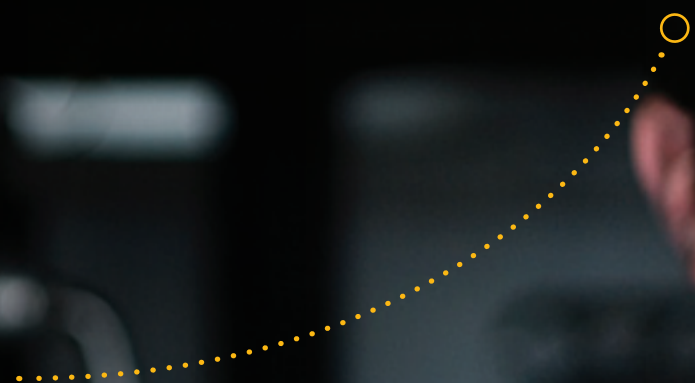
It's not in our nature to cut corners. Just look at the number of world-class artists, sports people, entrepreneurs, entertainers and many more to come from NI over the years. If you truly love what you do, surround yourself with a team of motivated, skilled people who share your passion. Work with only the best. Set challenges that will push everyone to their limits. And create something exceptional.



*William remembered  
all our names...  
every day!*



- Only recommend the best. Be a visitor at home. Gain first-hand experience of everything that your area has to offer and recommend only the things that made a lasting impression.
- Learn from others. Experience first-hand how they engage with visitors. Benchmark, set goals and strive to constantly raise your game.
- Engage experts. Your suppliers are experts in their respective fields. Ask them for ideas on how you can offer your visitors even greater levels of excellence.
- The Merchant Hotel in Belfast went to extraordinary lengths to acquire an extremely rare bottle of Wray and Nephew Rum, which became one of the key ingredients of its now famous Mai Tai cocktail – one of the most expensive drinks in the world... while it lasted!



‘Sometimes you need to go the extra mile to create something that is truly exceptional.’

**Put yourself on the map with some original thinking. Look at what other attractions are doing. Take inspiration from them. Always try to add an authentic Northern Irish twist and then tell your story to the world.**

You have to be in it to win it. Believe in yourself and enter for relevant awards. If you are lucky enough to win, make sure everyone knows it!

Sometimes you need to go the extra mile to create something that is truly exceptional. This may involve putting in extra hours, travelling further and calling in more favours. But the results will be worth it.

Test the experience yourselves? How do you stack up against others? Think bigger than just the guy down the road. Remember your visitors will compare and rate you based on the experiences they have gained elsewhere, many beyond Northern Ireland. Is your experience ‘best in class’?





## Pay Attention to Every Detail

There is really no end to the lengths to which you can go in attempting to ensure that your experience is tailored to your visitor's every need. However, you must be careful not to destroy your profit margins and not to suffocate the guests with kindness.

Paying attention to details should be done with a light touch and sincerity. It is up to you to judge what to do and when and this will vary according to the personality of each visitor. The following is only a selection of tips.



- First impressions really do count. Make sure you have time to organise your premises properly before the arrival of guests.
- Check-in can be a chore. Make it a pleasure. A cup of tea and a tray-bake while your guests check in.
- Remembering someone from a previous visit speaks volumes about how you value your guests.
- Simple things make such a difference. Does the layout of a room make the best of the view? Could your guest toiletries better reflect the character and quality of your business?





*Offer to put together  
a picnic packed with  
local fare and recommend  
a scenic place to enjoy it.*





- Create a mailing list to keep in touch with visitors throughout the year. Send a handwritten Christmas card, birthday or anniversary greeting
- Offer hand-made truffles with after-dinner coffee, tray-bakes with afternoon tea, or a take-out lunch for family guests setting off on a daytrip.
- Know your guest's favourite tittle and have it ready for them on arrival.



- Make friends with the best restaurant in town to ensure that your visitor always gets the best table.
- Befriend a reliable, visitor-inspired taxi driver.
- Leave nothing to chance.



## Motivate and Empower your Team

So you know the visitor & have planned the experience around them – but do your team? If you employ staff or family or if you are working in partnership with others you must strive to ensure that they share your values and understand exactly what the experience is trying to achieve. You can't be everywhere so it is vital that you are surrounded with people you can trust to deliver the experience in the same way you would.



*We caught  
our first fish  
thanks to Johns  
local knowledge*

- Keep everyone in the loop. Ensure they each know their role and where they fit into the experience.
- Set them standards. Ensure your team has adequate time to prepare, train and practice delivering their part in the total experience journey.
- Celebrate your people and make the most of their talents. Ask your chef to open up the kitchen to share recipes and tips on the traditional way of doing things!
- Empower your staff to deal with every situation. Develop an ideas culture. Reward staff for generating and sharing visitor inspired concepts.



At the bottom of the Thompson Dock with someone who really knew what he was talking about





- Maximize every opportunity and partnership: your staff, your suppliers, and your partners.
- **Consider offering a monthly award to the staff member who has contributed the most creative visitor inspired idea. Don't just talk about ideas. Put them into action.**
- Value your staff and they will value you and your visitors. Celebrate their ideas and show how they have made the business better for you, for them, and for visitors. This will keep your team motivated and your visitors inspired.
- **Encourage staff to play an active role in your business. Define a shared vision.**
- Define staff roles. Ensure your team is satisfied, committed and rewarded.
- **Keep everyone informed with developments in your business and in Northern Ireland tourism in general.**

- Happy, empowered, knowledgeable and informed people will care more for the visitor and will be committed to excellence.
- **Meet regularly with your team to generate ideas on how they could do things better.**
- Encourage them to be visitor inspired. Reward and celebrate the best ideas.
- **Transform your staff into tourism experts.**
- Encourage staff to share visitors' insights, complaints, queries and suggestions
- **Discuss how your team will deal with problems if they arise?**

Motivate  
and Empower  
your team



**‘People enjoy being asked what they think and, if done in the right way, you will learn everything you need to know about your business from your clients’**

## Communicate Constantly

More often than not the cause of problems in any situation involving people is lack of communication. To avoid this you must develop a culture of open, friendly communication between you and your customers. People enjoy being asked what they think and, if done on the right way, you will learn everything you need to know about your business from your clients. This can be done before, during and after their visit.

*We had a wonderful time.  
The staff were very friendly.*

*9/10*





# top 10 must see

- the c
- car
- joan  
down



The Giant's Causeway, Co. Antrim

- Find out what brought your guests to Northern Ireland. Find out why they chose to visit you. Find out what they hope to see, enjoy and taste.
- Ask visitors in advance what they are most looking forward to seeing in Northern Ireland.
- Help them get the most out of their stay. Suggest an itinerary.
- **Put together a Top 10 list of the classic must-see landmarks** in your area and ask visitors what they enjoyed most about the classic landmarks. Their experience is bound to uncover another story. You never know, you might just learn something.

- **Build these stories and guest tips into your Top 10 to share with tomorrow's visitor.**
- Think about your relationship with your visitor every step of the way. Get to know what they hope to get from their trip to Northern Ireland. Find out why they chose here ahead of other destinations and ensure the reality exceeds their expectations.
- **Spend time with your visitors. Get to know them and exceed their expectations.**
- Knowing your visitors' holiday goals and taking care of their every need will show just how committed you are to making their stay extra special.
- **Spend time with them if you can. Share your love of Northern Ireland over a brief chat at breakfast or a nightcap.**

- Give people a reason to choose you. Start a database and send regular updates to your existing customers. Tell them what's on, what's new and why they just have to visit.
- **Speak to your guests and encourage them to share their holiday highlights.**
- Be brave and ask them how you could improve things. Ask what you could do to make them want to return every year.
- **Develop a satisfaction survey and encourage every visitor to complete it. Take on board their suggestions. Adopt their best proposals. Make improvements on your improvements and then play to your strengths.**
- Create a customer survey and invite visitors to provide you with feedback.



