



EUROPEAN UNION  
European Regional Development Fund

**Interreg**   
France ( Channel  
Manche ) England  
**EXPERIENCE**  
European Regional Development Fund

# Designing and Marketing Low Season Tourism Experiences

## EXPERIENCE Best Practice Companion Guide





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This manual is organised in six key messages. Case studies and best practice are included to provide insights, learning and impact from across the project:

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# What is Interreg EXPERIENCE?

EXPERIENCE is a major project to boost visitor numbers in the low season through an innovative, sustainable tourism strategy.

The €24.5m project was co-funded by the Interreg France (Channel) England (FCE) Programme, which committed €17m from the European Regional Development Fund.

Running from September 2019 to June 2023, 14 project partners, led by Norfolk County Council, developed new autumn and winter experiences to attract new visitors across the six project pilot areas in England and France: Norfolk, Kent, Cornwall, Pas-de-Calais, Compiègne and Brittany.



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# Who should read this manual?



Any business that is looking to benefit from the opportunities low season tourism brings.

We know change is tricky and we live in uncertain times where things around us are changing too fast. Key source markets have dried up and businesses have to reinvent themselves. Creativity, resilience, and resourcefulness are essential to survive.

Increasingly, a focus on low season demand is more important than ever for tourism venues to survive. We offer you operational tools, down to earth examples, and tips on how to shift your hospitality and tourism business from delivering products and services, to offering year-round experiences.

Give yourself some time to think about what kind of changes your business needs.

# 01

## Products, make way for experiences.



An experience should aim to stimulate the five senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste) and/or arouse positive emotions (happiness, fun, surprise, joy, contentment).

Products are so yesterday, and customers want to engage with your offering with all their senses. To design experiences, you need to be clear what you want your customers to achieve when they are with you.

Between September 2019 to June 2023, the EXPERIENCE project worked on development of a new sustainable tourism strategy, resulting in over 1,500 new autumn and winter experiences to attract new visitors across the project pilot areas.

To learn more about the strategy see 'A New Strategy for Sustainable Tourism: EXPERIENCE Best Practice Guide'.

We'd like to share the learning and outcomes from EXPERIENCE so that you can apply it to your leisure and tourism business.



# What is a sustainable tourism experience?

It is active, participatory, authentic, and respectful.



Sustainable experiences offer a way for travellers to encounter authentic and memorable events. Many travellers are losing interest in destination-based, pre-packaged tourism and want to enjoy bespoke and unique experiences.

An experience is a product or a service that triggers pleasure, or positive emotions or senses, enables the acquisition of new manual or intellectual skills and/or fosters beneficial interactions with others.

Experiences can be sustainable when they respectfully address the needs of visitors, the tourism industry and host communities while improving long-term economic outcomes, socio-cultural benefits, and environmental preservation.

Some visitors may prioritise their wellbeing through outdoor activities, detox holidays or meditation. Plenty will look for fun by going to festivals and events that celebrate local nature and culture. Many seek to live like a local and benefit from unique tips to travel off the beaten track. Others want to learn or improve their skills, for example foraging, cooking or woodworking.

A sustainable experience should respect host communities and their cultural and natural heritage, targeting people's wellbeing and the environment where it takes place.

Sustainable experiences do not have to be expensive, but customers may be willing to pay more if sustainable offerings fulfil their needs better than other experiences.



# Engage your customer's five senses.

## Experiences are multi-sensory.



Multi-sensory experiences offer an opportunity to be more inclusive and accessible. They can provide the type of engagement that allows people with physical or sensory disabilities to enjoy the experience.

A multi-sensory, integrated approach is a key component of experience design since sensory experiences influence decision-making, brand experience and destination imagery. A person's perception of an experience is determined by whether their five senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste) are aroused.

As a rule of thumb, the more stimulation there is the more chance you have to provide a successful experience that reaches more people, more deeply, with more lasting effects. But, equally, you can stimulate senses by deliberately encouraging users to enjoy the darkness or the silence, for example.



**Aesthetics**, colour and light are the primary contributors to experience perception, so it is crucial to control the setting where an experience occurs, particularly if it is outside. For example, poorly-maintained paths could impact negatively on a customer's perception of aesthetics.



Experiences can be enhanced by **music**, and other natural or artificial **sounds**, provided there is a link with the theme.



**Textures** improve a traveller's engagement with their surroundings so touching trees and interacting with the elements are good ideas. New technology provides opportunities for remote experiences through 3D touch and other sensory stimulations.



**Odours** and **tastes** are essential to gastronomic and tasting experiences, but they are also used increasingly in museums and attractions to enhance visitor engagement.



# We use our local and seasonal assets as motivation for a visit during the low season.

Laurence Francart is Director of the Compiègne Tourist Office (FR).



## What we do:

We know there is a strong desire from visitors to rediscover what nature has to offer so we created a unique experience, with special discoveries from autumn to spring, by setting up a wild-plant themed tour with a forest expert within the Compiègne forest.

## How we do it:

Following a visit to the Compiègne forest with a forest expert guide, we decided to explore the idea of creating tours that would highlight the unique discoveries that can be found in our local natural environment during the low season. The forest of Compiègne, being the fourth largest forest in France, is a real treasure of biodiversity just waiting to be discovered and interpreted in a playful way. The range of experiences we offer include 'forest bathing with friends', 'botanical treasure hunting with the family' and 'discovering the culinary flavours of wild plants'.



## Our Tips:

The key to the success of such an experience is its fun aspect. Few holidaymakers want to feel like they are going on a school trip, but most are looking for memorable experiences while learning interesting, and sometimes even practical, tips.

With each season offering specific, accessible wild plants and unique surroundings in which to set different experiences, the forest offered a wealth of opportunities perfectly aligned with our desire to return to a deeper connection with, and understanding of, nature. By highlighting the uniqueness of a season through this type of product, we give visitors a clear motivation to visit during the low season amongst others.

We aim to make the experiences unique and personal. For example, on our 'Discovering the Culinary Flavours of Wild Plants' tour, we provide a guidebook with plant cards to help visitors with their research and blank pages at the end to record the forest's 'secret' recipes.



# Experiences are co-created. People are at the centre of experiences.



- **Hospitality and tourism businesses:** customer-facing workers such as receptionists, guides and waiters are those who engage the most with travellers. It is crucial that they provide bespoke services and answer various needs with flexibility rather than provide the same experience to everyone.
- **Other businesses:** stakeholders (such as artisans, crafters, artists, farmers, local shops and foresters) have an important role to play through their interactions with travellers.
- **Locals:** travellers may want to experience an off the beaten track existence and live like a local. Airbnb experiences and the various Greeters networks are examples where such an interaction is possible.
- **Travellers:** travellers exchange information and tips before, during and after their trips. Promoting visitor reviews about you on social networks, forums and on-site, is fundamental to your success.



The quality of interactions between travellers and people they meet at the destination directly affects the travellers' overall satisfaction levels.

Driven by a sense of meaningfulness, many travellers want to engage with local people to encounter authentic experiences. Sometimes it is important that the experience itself is genuine while sometimes what matters is that the relationships between people are genuine even though the experience is staged.





# We developed unique accommodation on our farm.

## Kristina Boulden is Director of Romney Marsh Shepherds Huts (UK).



### How we do it:

Whilst Romney Marsh Shepherds Huts has benefited from being part of the Produced in Kent initiative, the EXPERIENCE project has brought us something new. It has helped us focus on the types of experiences and the key messaging we want to give our customers. Knowledge that we would not have access to if we would not have been guided by the project. What we do have here as generational farmers is a unique knowledge of the local area and we find that when people come and stay with us, they often want a bit of hand holding to be able to have the best experience during their stay. For example, the Marsh Safari visitors can be guided around the area and learn about the history of the local churches. The vineyard tours often start from the huts, include a lunch somewhere with tasting of local wines before our visitors are dropped back here afterwards. These are great examples of local businesses collaborating to provide unique insights to our visitors and leave them with great memories.

We were really excited to be part of the initiative Discover Your Kent Experience run by Visit Kent through EXPERIENCE where we were invited to be one of the tour stops for the 10 tour operators who visited a range of Kent experiences in February 2023. That allowed us to reach much further than we could have done without the project. Collaboration between businesses has been key and thanks to Visit Kent, EXPERIENCE has created the opportunity to bring local businesses together to provide visitors with the best experiences we can offer. As a result, we are now offering a solution that includes the best of Kent which is in part down to this new collaborative approach that has enabled us to better work together to provide unique experiences.

### What we do:

We run a mixed farm with over 1000+ sheep whose breed is indigenous to the Romney Marsh. As a result of attending local events people asked if they could come and stay on the farm. In 2018, we launched the Romney Marsh Shepherds Huts which have been bespoke built by local craftsmen and now allow us to share our unique landscape on the Romney Marsh. We have worked with Visit Kent for several years who have been able to provide us with key market data showing how tourism is evolving in Kent. I was introduced to the EXPERIENCE project during one of the Visit Kent business engagement events and jumped at the opportunity to be part of the Experience Development Programme. It gave us the opportunity to network, access new markets and gain knowledge which we would not necessarily have had been able to dip into had we have not been involved with Visit Kent.



### Our Tips:

Seize opportunities to connect with local stakeholders and participate in business networking events where you can exchange best practices and learn from each other.



# Why low season experiences?

## Healthy year-round business helps you and your destination thrive.



A significant percentage of tourism and hospitality businesses close for the winter, particularly in rural areas. Others reduce their opening days (limiting to weekends only) or reduce their opening hours. The rest remain open but limit the activities/services they offer and the personnel they employ, to minimise operating costs. In the future, some business may struggle to survive with summer trade only.

### Seasonality occurs for three very valid and real reasons:

- **Natural factors**  
(weather dependency, climate, location and access)
- **Demand factors**  
(holiday patterns, availability of leisure time, social norms)
- **Supply factors**  
(available activities, trading patterns)



The approximate seasonality for rural tourism businesses is 10-15% of demand in January to March, 25-30% April to June, 30-50% July to September and 15-20% October to December.

Low season experiences cannot be exact replicas of summer experiences only sold to people who accept autumn and winter weather. Equally, you do not want simply to sell low season experiences to those customers who are only willing to buy them because you offer discounts. You need to find something unique about your low season that will help you design experiences that are particularly attractive.



# We offer an alternative way to enjoy the countryside and promote more sustainable tourism.

## Virginie Fovet runs Les Sens des Bois in Licques (FR).

### What we do:

Les Sens des Bois is an estate dedicated to well-being. Its three gîtes offer an interlude of calm and serenity in a green setting at the campsite: a 10-person gîte, a 2-person gîte with private spa, and an eco-responsible chalet with Nordic bath.

### How we do it:

I developed my business in the context of the pandemic and I felt alone. Thanks to the EXPERIENCE project, I was able to sign up for training courses which enabled me to exchange ideas with other service providers and to improve my skills.

For example, I've updated my website and improved my marketing photos. The estate is also a lively place for collaborations as I work with local artisans and stakeholders to offer a variety of workshops: local and eco-responsible products, cocooning workshops, beauty advice, training, local shopping, sustainable catering, etc.



### Our Tips:

Take part in training courses and meetings organised in your area. It can feel like this takes up your valuable time, but you will get good advice and networking opportunities that could open up new opportunities for development.





# Be proactive in managing your seasonality challenges.

## Treat seasonality as a business risk.

Spend time understanding why your product/market combination is seasonal and consider options to reduce the business risks arising from seasonality.

### **Avoid**

Change plans to circumvent the problem, such as identifying new markets you can serve that either complement your current markets or are not seasonal.

### **Control / mitigate / modify / reduce**

Reduce the likelihood of low season conditions negatively impacting your business. Identify ways to upgrade your offering by addressing some of the challenges of low season, such as weatherproofing your current services and investing in infrastructure.

### **Accept**

Assume that your experiences will have limited demand due to uncontrollable events; reduce prices to attract demand; reduce operating costs to reduce losses; budget the remaining cost via a contingency budget line.

### **Transfer / Share**

Outsource a portion of the risk to a third party (or parties). For example, outsource an activity, such as running an event, to an expert company.

Are you tired of mostly accepting the risk, rather than finding ways to avoid, control or transfer it? Then it's time to get creative.



©L'œil de Paco



# We are capitalising on our regional assets to keep our business open during the low season.

## Angus Tobey is owner of The Hoxton Special (UK).

### What we do:

The Hoxton Special is a water sports school and café located in Marazion, on the Mount's Bay Coast Path. From this converted lifeguard hut, we offer kitesurfing lessons, paddleboarding and kayak hire. We also serve drink and food in our café right on the beach. For the first time this year, we will be open January - March.

### How we do it:

October until December is a good time to kitesurf, so our business is usually open until Christmas and then as the quieter months kick-in we close until April. This year, for the first time, we are planning to remain open 5 days/week through winter.

Although the demand for water sports is lower in January - March, we are confident the increased use of the newly renovated coastal path will bring more trade to the café. Since the Mount's Bay Coast Path has been upgraded, we have seen more cyclists and walkers as well as a rise in awareness of our business, with more customers noticing it and coming for a drink, bite to eat or to find out about our water sports offer. We are hoping to make the most of this by keeping our doors open.

Our location is very exposed, and the weather here can be quite spectacular. Influenced by the Nordic tradition of Hygge, we will be swapping the summer surf styling of the hut for a cosy warm interior, with rugs and a cast-iron burner, offering customers a welcoming warm retreat from the surrounding elements. We will also be adapting our food & drink offer, taking inspiration from Fika, the Swedish tradition of stopping to drink coffee and eat cake.



### Our Tips:

Don't stick to your usual business model. Look at the opportunities around you, be brave and think about the small changes that might help overcome some of the barriers to staying open though the low season.





# We adapted our experience to make it accessible.

## Jack Roberts is the Operations Manager at Geevor Tin Mine (UK).



### What we do:

Geevor Tin Mine in Pendeen is a family friendly, year-round, multi award- winning heritage attraction and museum. Our rich mining history set in the wild and rugged landscape on the North Atlantic coast makes Geevor a must visit location within the Cornish Mining World Heritage Sites.

The site is brought to life with a real underground experience, poignant areas of the site left unchanged, machinery demonstrations, interactive exhibits, and stories from tour guides recalling their time working at Geevor.



### Our Tips:

Whenever introducing accessibility tools to your business or premises it is vital to work with interest groups. Involve those who will directly benefit from the tools you are introducing in the decision-making process.



Extensive restoration of the site has taken place since it reopened as a museum in 1993, this year in particular the Victory Shaft Headgear has been restored and will be reopened to the public in early 2023.

### How we do it:

We created the Geevor 360 VR tour, a pioneering 360-degree virtual reality tour, which opened up parts of the site that can be harder to access due to their industrial nature. The VR Tour is provided to improve access to Geevor.

The VR “tour”, viewed through an Oculus headset, gives access to parts of the eighteenth century mine-workings and twentieth century mill, in their breath- taking setting upon and beneath cliffs near Land’s End, for people who would not otherwise get to enjoy all Geevor has to offer.

The tour gives a chance for even more visitors from far and wide to experience some of the most impactful and engaging parts of a visit to Geevor.



# Lessons learned:

## Sustainable experiences for low-season.

Design authentic, multi-sensory, and transformative experiences.

Sustainable experiences are sought after by an increasing number of travellers who prioritise unique, authentic, and tailored experiences over traditional destination-based tourism. These experiences can range from outdoor activities and cultural festivals to off-the-beaten-track adventures and skills development opportunities.

A sustainable experience is characterised by its genuine and immersive nature, respecting the local community and cultural heritage while prioritising people's well-being and benefiting the environment.

Cost-effectiveness is not the sole determinant of a sustainable experience's value, as customers may be willing to pay more if their needs are met effectively. Multi-sensory experiences play a crucial role in designing successful experiences as they stimulate the senses and influence perception and decision-making. Inclusive and accessible multi-sensory experiences provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities or sensory limitations to engage fully.

Travellers seek meaningful interactions with locals to encounter genuine experiences, where the relationships formed can be as important as the experience itself.

The hospitality and tourism industry, as well as other businesses and locals, have essential roles to play in delivering bespoke services, fostering interactions, and ensuring visitor satisfaction.

Overcoming seasonality challenges requires boldness and innovation to design attractive low season experiences that are not merely replicas of summer offerings or dependent on discounts.

By developing experiences that engage the senses, your business can create positive memories and stronger connections between the visitor, business and destination, leading to higher ratings on platforms like TripAdvisor.



# Task 1:

## What do you want to achieve? Prioritise and develop plans to achieve your objectives.

Simply wanting to grow your business is not enough, you need to be clear about what you want to achieve. Here are five common objectives:

- **Generate first time sales.** Which markets are available, or more easily identifiable, for low season and what type of incentive do you need to attract those markets?
- **Increase customer loyalty and repeat sales.** What do you need to do to tempt past customers back? Do you need to remind them of a favourite experience, provide a new experience or offer a discount?
- **Increase the volume of the same service purchased.** Your target may be to get customers to stay longer or to buy three souvenirs instead of two.
- **Increase the number of services purchased together.** Bundling different services allows you to tailor-make experiences and to upsell. It also makes planning the experience easier for your customer. Who can you partner with to cross-sell?
- **Increase the size of the group.** Your strategy may be to get loyal customers to return, but with family and friends. What incentives can you provide your loyal customers to do so?

Can you think of a sixth objective that is specific to you, that we did not include?

It is best not to say “I want them all”, because each objective requires a different set of actions. Instead, prioritise these objectives based on: 1) feasibility, and 2) importance. When you brainstorm ideas on what to do, try to relate your ideas clearly to these objectives.



# 02

## Different seasons, different markets.



**The time you invest in learning about different markets will be directly proportional to your ability to reduce your seasonality and your understanding of how to be more inclusive of different groups that may have been inadvertently sidelined.**

High and low season customers are different. They seek leisure and travel experiences for different purposes; they seek different benefits, search suppliers differently and will be satisfied with different types and levels of service. So why do we often treat them the same?

Use the new knowledge you gain to adapt your offer to different types of customers and to balance changes in demand.



# Locals first.

## Your key to winter survival is to have a healthy, regular local clientele.



Your reputation depends on what your local community thinks of you. How you welcome the local community to your premises says a lot about your business and how you want to be remembered.

Selling to first time customers and repeat customers is very different.

First time customers rely on third party marketing and website searches, so you are likely to pay a commission to attract them. The products they buy will be stereotypical of what they perceive to be the “must do” attractions in your destination. As a result,



© Kent Downs AONB and North Downs Way National Trail

they will follow a pre-specified route, staying in the most popular locations. They are more predictable, but also harder to influence, and they normally have a pre-specified time or day to leave your destination. They are more likely to visit as a group. They can be highly price sensitive but also use price as a sign of quality because they cannot judge quality in advance as they have no prior experience.

Selling to your local market is quite literally the opposite. If they don't know your business, they certainly know your competitors and they have a keen sense of what's good value for money. This means they will recognise quality as they can distinguish between fake and real products. They are more likely to seek variety but will also develop a list of favourites (cafes, restaurants, places to visit...). They are more likely to visit independently and more flexibly. For this reason, you are less likely to pay for a third party to bring them to you so, instead, you can devote your marketing budget to your social media activity and other locally focused forms of marketing and focus on strengthening customer relationships.

The local market is more likely to repeat, recommend and upgrade. The person that visits you in a group of friends today can return for a family reunion next month or book for a team building retreat next year. Therefore, you need to show your local markets that you have multiple offerings, to demonstrate that they can do something different when they come back.



# We support a range of community-based initiatives.

Roselyne Williams is Director of the Redwing Contemporary art CIC (UK).



## What we do:

Our initial mission was to support creative people who have difficulties engaging with the mainstream art world by providing a safe and supporting space which is both accessible and accepting. We now support a range of community-based and community-led initiatives such as a café, a housing co-operative and a community larder.

## How we do it:

We started with two pop-up art galleries and then were fortunate to acquire a dilapidated building to host a more permanent gallery. The local community soon walked in, with lots of ideas. We shared the space and worked together, creating a space where people could feel safe and comfortable. A place where people, often isolated from society, could belong, and speak with each other.



## Our Tips:

We have been open to new people and new ideas. We are open to organic growth where the measure of success is not the profit margin, but the community benefit the work brings. We would encourage others to appreciate the value of different people and new ideas, and the strength that can be established through organic growth.

For example, the café evolved organically - initially we had a kettle and provided tea for users, then someone came in and asked whether we did lunches, so we started doing light meals and grew from there.

We are now the only 100% vegan café in Penzance. We continue to operate as a gallery, where artists who would be isolated within the mainstream art world are welcome and supported, but we are now so much more. A not-for-profit organisation providing a resource in the community, supported by the community and belonging to the community.

Through the EXPERIENCE project we have been accredited by Cycling UK as a cycle friendly cafe. This has equipped us with the tools and training to diversify our client base and encourage more cycle tourists.



# We delivered Experiential Tourism Networking Events.

## Helene Pasquier is Interreg Senior Project Officer for Norfolk County Council (UK).



### What we do:

We organised a series of interactive networking event where local businesses could receive positive feedback to improve their experiential offer and meet with other businesses to potentially work together. The aim was also to inspire each other in their journey to extend their offer in the low-season and become more sustainable and experiential.

This allowed local businesses to hear about best practice & make contact for future collaboration with businesses and local Destination Management Organisation.

### How we do it:

As a local council, we worked in collaboration with local Destination Management Organisation to deliver experiential networking events.



### Our Tips:

Don't hesitate to have B2B sessions integrated in any other events you are holding. It doesn't take long and can be very informal. Organise events in central/urban locations but also explore options to hold events in rural locations to attract different types of businesses.

First of all, we looked at finding a venue that support sustainable experiential tourism. We made part of the agenda of the day for the owners to provide a tour of their venue and highlight how they came about developing off-season sustainable experiential products.

We prioritised finding a venue that supported sustainable experiential tourism and part of the day's agenda was for the owners to provide a tour of their venue and share their insights on developing low season sustainable experiential products.

We dedicated part of the day to hold a Business to Business (B2B) session, inviting a number of businesses to present/ demonstrate their experience live. This was an opportunity to test and get feedback on their offer. This was followed by group discussions to support improving the current experience: targeting new markets, how to increase visibility, pricing structures, how to make the offer more experiential, possible collaboration opportunities, etc.

Finally, we organised a speed-networking session so everyone could speak to fellow businesses/local organisations and have a chance to develop contacts.



# We delivered Peer Networking Events for Kent county.

## Geoff Baxter runs Smarter Society (UK).

### What we do:

I work with local authorities and other organisations to deliver programmes that make a difference. We set up the EXPERIENCE programme to build a portfolio of high-quality services and experiences that could market Kent as a destination for all seasons, building visitor numbers in the low season months.

In 2021, this rapidly transitioned into a Peer Eco-system approach in the Kent pilot area where participating Experience Development Programme SMEs started meeting up to discuss business issues in regional groups. Peer networking has increased in popularity in the last 3-5 years as the group works together and competes against each other to deliver more successful individual outcomes than would otherwise be the case when not operating in a supportive peer network. I was delighted to see the participating businesses making changes to improve their overall business performance during the pause that the pandemic created.



### How we do it:

Building upon existing intelligence, we set up the Peer Ecosystems on a sub-regional level in Kent in the north, east and west of the pilot area. Our sessions started off with a presentation from a specialist speaker which were followed by break outs into smaller discussion groups, to discuss the issues and share experiences. The process really embraced group learning, shared paths for clear action, was accountable and created new relationships. I am true believer that Peer Eco- Systems promote 'Action Learning' which is 'an approach to problem solving and learning in groups that brought about change in individuals and their businesses who participated.

125 businesses in Kent have benefited from the process in the Kent pilot area. They have co-created new ideas and have confirmed new experiential products amongst peers and in some case creating new itineraries linking complimentary experiences in the area that have been launched as a direct result of the Peer Networking.



### Our Tips:

- Learn how other businesses are addressing challenges faced in developing new Experiences for visitors;
- Build new relationships with other local businesses to work together to create revenue opportunities;
- Critical to learn from industry best practices and seek further support from an ecosystem which you and your business have become part of;
- Embrace co-creation and creative thinking about future partnering ideas with other businesses;
- Find out rapidly what works and what doesn't!
- Identify collectively how to provide your visitors with a variety of interesting or exciting experiences that leave them eager to return for more.



# Encourage repeat visits.

## Low season is the time for loyalty.



Provide discount vouchers for next purchases that are time-limited, for example, in your café or the car park, so that customers are encouraged to make more regular repeat visits.

### Think ahead

Businesses tend to get fewer first-time visitors in the low season and, instead, rely on repeat markets. Look for ways to encourage customers to return. In particular, incentivise the loyalty of your most valued customers. Here are a few ideas.

**Tell customers what to look forward to.** On their way out of your venue, tell customers what's on next week (or next month).

**Create an annual pass.** Nowadays, many visitor attractions have annual membership or a one-day ticket that is valid for multiple entries. You can further learn from the techniques used in leisure centres to manage demand: create an autumn to spring membership, a midweek membership, or a 9am to 3pm membership.

**Create a sense of belonging.** Create a club of regular users; give them status and reward their loyalty with new offers, such as being able to experience things before others do (from seeing an exhibition the night before it opens to being invited to sample a new cake or dish before it is added to the menu). This is, in itself, a great way for you to test new ideas with a more forgiving audience that will give you feedback.

**Run clubs.** You can have a parent and toddler group, a grandparents and grandchildren group, or work with specific community groups to increase occupancy of your premises; elderly loneliness is fast increasing and opportunities to meet socially help immensely. Weekly groups at low occupancy periods provide groups with a sense of ownership and belonging to your venue and, often, meeting at a less crowded time is beneficial to these target groups.

**Discount or upsell.** Provide discount vouchers for next purchases that are time-limited, for example, in your café or the car park, so that customers are encouraged to make more regular repeat visits. Provide upgrades for visits Monday to Thursday (e.g. buy cake and you get a coffee for free) to encourage higher expenditure. Offer a large group discount or an upgrade. Make sure that the discounts are on items that have a low production cost.

**Provide loyalty gifts.** Loyal customers or annual members could be given a birthday gift, such as a free pass to bring a friend or a recommendation voucher to invite someone with a discount. Regular customers can be rewarded more frequently with a loyalty card scheme.



# We adapted our summer offer to the winter to attract a more diverse audience and to extend our season.

Andy and Annie Hamilton are the owners of Eastwood Whelpton (UK).



©Eastwood Whelpton



## Our Tips:

Ensure your marketing tools reflects the autumn/winter so visitors can identify themselves to the experience they are about to book into!

### What we do:

Eastwood Whelpton offers a range of sailing and historic cruiser experiences as well as 'Learn to Sail' holidays in the Broads National Park. As a result of EXPERIENCE, we now offer a new Autumnal Themed afternoon tea experience on our historic cruiser.

We redesigned our summer experience of afternoon cream tea and adapted it to the colder off-season months. We embraced what comes with the winter; the cold wind and rain but also the cosiness, beautiful landscape and wildlife that are unique in this season. We turned them into features to offer a warming experience, including mulled wine & afternoon tea in a heated cruiser cabin.

### How we do it:

We are looking at further extending our offer by adding another classic wooden Norfolk cruiser to our fleet and needed to find ways to generate additional income to finance the refurbishment of the boat.

Instead of closing after the busy summer season, the EXPERIENCE project supported us to extend our offer by adapting our products to attract visitors travelling in the low season.

We changed our summer traditional afternoon tea experience to include a warming beverage such as mulled wine to keep our customers warm.

We also worked on our imagery with a local photographer who took pictures that depict colder weather and displaying people with woollen jumpers and winter hat. Those photographs reflect the cosiness and warmth that is so typical in those slower months.

Part of this work also included our desire to diversify our audience. Traditionally, sailing attracts financially comfortable people, often from a white ethnicity. It was important that our pictures showed a diverse group of people to highlight inclusivity and support extending our target market.



©Eastwood Whelpton



# Aim for equality, diversity and inclusion.

## The world is a mosaic: design experiences for every market.

Remember that there are a range of disabilities and most of them are not visible: one in five UK consumers has a disability and this market has more opportunities to travel in the low season. Companies that demonstrate disability confidence achieve over 25% higher revenue.

Is your business implicitly biased by targeting white, Christian, middle class, heterosexual couples with two children, who will drive and have no disabilities? You may feel uncomfortable with this question and yet the photography you use in your website speaks volumes.

We often think of stereotypical consumers and design products for their needs. Think about the age, ethnicity, gender, ability, sexuality and religion of the consumers you want to attract. Targeting a diverse community is not only the right thing to do, it also gives you excellent business opportunities. Nowadays, not being inclusive is a greater risk. Consumers want brands to be braver at showing more diverse people and they want adverts to accurately reflect society.

Half of UK consumers are more likely to buy from brands that show diversity, as they find this increases trust. Half of consumers stop buying from brands that do not represent their values and are turned off by adverts that negatively stereotype. This increases substantially for any minority groups.

When aiming for diversity and inclusion, think about the services you provide to this market and how you communicate these. For example, in most rural areas, it is often difficult to find halal food, which excludes Muslim communities. People with disabilities may feel uncomfortable to book with you when your disability statement is superficial or hidden on your website. You may provide directions based on the assumption that your target market owns a car, which discriminates against lower earning groups. Your pricing of family entry tickets may discriminate against divorced, separated or same sex couples because discounts are commonly based on the principle that a family is heterosexual with two children. The list is endless.



Remember that there are a range of disabilities and most of them are not visible: one in five UK consumers has a disability and this market has more opportunities to travel in the low season. Companies that demonstrate disability confidence achieve over 25% higher revenue.







# We are making our site accessible to everyone by making improvements to our unusual accommodation.

## Erwan and Isabelle Normand from Domaine du Treuscoat (FR).

### What we do:

The Domaine de Treuscoat offers an experiential experience that focuses on accessibility from three angles: mobility (disabilities), intergenerational and inclusiveness. Our all-inclusive offer allows everyone to enjoy our site and activities, whatever their budget. Our unusual accommodation and leisure facilities offer an exceptional setting in an unspoilt environment that is accessible to all.

### How we do it:

Located in Pleyber-Christ, Le Domaine du Treuscoat has been constantly evolving since it opened in 2016. Our guiding principle from the outset was to run the estate in a sustainable way. By developing the potential of the 63 hectares through the creation of a residential leisure park and discovery activities, we are committed to preserving its environment and making it accessible to all.

We took advantage of Covid 19 lockdown periods to step up investment in both our accommodation and accessibility to the park.



**Our Tips:**  
Anticipate accessibility issues when developing your project as this will make it easier to implement and minimise costs.

Since it opened, the Office de Tourisme de la Baie de Morlaix (Morlaix Bay Tourist Office) has supported and advised us on the development of our facilities to meet the needs of customers with different types of disability. Our aim is to achieve the Tourisme et Handicap (Tourism and Disability) label.

During the periods of lockdown, we also looked at ways of offering a variety of activities for all ages, including signposted interpretation trails, horse-drawn carriage rides and mini-golf.

Our inclusive approach is also reflected in our pricing policy, offering a range of accommodation with leisure rates for seniors, PRMs and students, as well as an annual pass for local residents.

Thanks to the implementation of these 3 pillars - accessibility for people with disabilities, intergeneration and inclusiveness - we are now seeing an exceptional customer return and a 3-fold increase in business.





# Lessons learned:

## Engagement through collaborative networks. Empower local communities and businesses.

Working with smaller, non-traditional businesses requires specialised expertise and dedicated support, impacting staff time and resources. By leveraging tourism expertise, we could better nurture these businesses to improve the overall quality of our new offer.

Engagement and buy-in from local districts are vital for success. By partnering with district-level organisations, you can leverage their networks to extend the reach of your initiatives. Identifying key local organisations with existing networks allows you to strengthen collaborative efforts and amplify impact.

Peer support through a network that facilitates communication and collaboration among businesses and other professionals fosters knowledge sharing and mutual assistance. This network-based approach can bring stakeholders together, strengthening relationships and empowering local communities.

To encourage wider participation in business training, provide flexible/accessible options. For example, use a mixture face-to-face and online sessions and at different times of the day.

Provide training materials in a range of formats, including bite-sized videos, toolkits, and presentations, to ensure accessibility and reach a broader audience.

To optimise impact, focus on distinct geographic areas, carefully curating activities that communicate each area's unique selling points (USPs) and reflects its distinct identity. This tailored approach allows us to highlight the best of what each location has to offer, engaging both local residents and visitors.



## Task 2:

# Identify complementary markets.

Diversify your markets and learn how to respond to their different needs.

We have learned that low season visitors tend to be more local, stay for a shorter period of time and book late (or just turn up). They are also likely to be repeat visitors and therefore seek variety, compared to high season visitors that are more likely to be first time buyers.

Does it sound like a management nightmare?

It does not necessarily have to be, but it does require you to be more flexible and it can provide new opportunities for you. Working with different markets also reduces your risk of dependency on a single market, which makes your business more resilient.

Prepare a day calendar, from your opening to closing times. Write down which type of customers you expect at each hour and what percentage of your maximum available capacity they represent.

Now do the same for different days of the week, noting any particular differences. Finally, do the same for October to March, noting specific monthly activity.

Next, colour code the different segments (in your day, week or months) according to the capacity figures: red for under 50%, amber for 50-75% and green for above 75%.

Make a list of the types of customers you get currently and group them in two columns: Group A are those that can change the time and day when they come and Group B are those that cannot. For Group A: return to our list of strategies to encourage them to return and think how you can use these to change the times at which your customers visit you, away from green (above 75% occupancy) times, towards amber and red times. For Group B: identify actions you can do to increase the number of people at that same time.

In addition, brainstorm who might be in a Group C: potential customers that are currently not frequenting your business. Identify how you are not meeting their needs and what changes you would need to make to do so. Also consider how compatible they would be with your Group A and Group B clients that visit you at the same time.

# 03

## Appreciate your resources and improve your infrastructure.



**Seasons are like a kaleidoscope: they allow us to see a place in different lights, inspiring different emotions. Having four seasons is an opportunity to offer just as many reasons for your visitors to come experience something that is unique both to your place and that specific time of the year.**

We often take what's on our doorsteps for granted, so let's look at your resources with fresh eyes and see how you can turn them into something special, with targeted investments.

Seasons are like a kaleidoscope: they allow us to see a place in different lights, inspiring different emotions.

Having four seasons is an opportunity to offer just as many reasons for your visitors to come experience something that is unique both to your place and that specific time of the year.

If you cannot find something special about every month of the year in your local area, do not expect that your visitors will do so. It's for you to take the initiative.

Businesses and destinations alike will need to upgrade their infrastructure and facilities before they can design low season-ready experiences.



# What are your seasonal assets?

Think about what you like to do in your area from November to March.



Understand your assets and then think about how they can be meaningful to create new experiences or to enhance current experiences.

- **Natural environment.** Each season calls upon different senses. The colours, smells and sounds are unique to specific times of the year and you need to bring out your inner poet to see, hear and smell through your visitors' eyes. The sound of the wind in the branches, the moving trees mirrored on the water, the smell of wet earth. In winter there may also be specific migratory birds or animals, or flowers that cannot be found in summer.
- **Emotions.** Now that you have turned up the sensitivity of your senses, how do they translate into emotions? You must show the link to your customers: braving the rain or the tumultuous sea becomes an adventure, the outdoor coolness reinforces the sensation of cosiness and serenity when cuddled up by the fireplace with a hot mug of tea.
- **Access.** Visiting an area in the low season can mean having access to places usually off limits during crowded summer seasons. Create tourism products that enable visitors to go behind the scenes, for example, a nature conservation tour with park rangers or the restoration area of a museum.
- **Time is different.** When you holiday during the low season, time can feel slower. Maybe because it is less crowded, or maybe the weather stops you from packing your day with an unlimited number of activities. Yet taking a break means slowing down. What can you offer that your visitors can enjoy most in a leisurely way? Activities such as visiting a great second-hand bookshop, a local café with comfy sofas and excellent coffee, or cooking lunch with a chef after you've sourced local ingredients.
- **Specific events.** Slowing down allows you to go local. What local events take place in your area? Are there local craft or artisan fairs? A carnival? A food, music or art festival? What seasonal wildlife is specific to your area? Can you build an experience around it?



# We are investing in our local heritage to give our visitors an outstanding experience.

Nathalie Bernard is President of the Bay of Morlaix Tourist Office (FR).



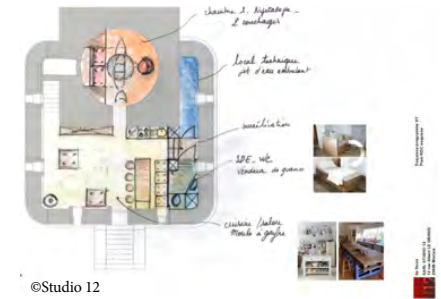
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©Studio 12



## Our Tips:

Your local heritage can be a real driver of tourism and economic development. Identify places or buildings that could be developed in your area. Unusual accommodation, cultural sites, life-size escape games, immersive interpretation centres... the possibilities are endless!

## What we do:

We offer visitors to the Bay of Morlaix unusual stays in a former lighthouse, uninhabited since 1938, for an unforgettable tourist experience. As part of the EXPERIENCE project, the Ile Noire lighthouse has been renovated in the spirit of Robinson Crusoe.

## How we do it:

More and more tourists and visitors are looking for original and authentic experiences during a stay or an excursion. The Bay of Morlaix already has two so-called 'unusual' accommodations, one in the lighthouse keeper's house on Ile Louët and the other in the old school on Ile Callot. Today, the calendar sells out in just 8 minutes as soon as bookings open. We wanted to replicate these successful models in the lighthouse on Ile Noire, which is still in operation.

By restoring the Ile Noire lighthouse, Morlaix Communauté and the Community Tourist Office will be offering a unique visitor experience for a night or two, right in the middle of Morlaix Bay. An old building, a terrace with breathtaking views of the Château du Taureau and the sea and oyster farmers and nesting birds as its only neighbours.

Originally completely isolated, the site will become self-sufficient in energy thanks to the installation of photovoltaic panels and a wind turbine. A water desalinator will allow seawater to be recovered for use in the bathroom, and an innovative non collective sanitation system will be installed.

As well as experiencing a special night, visitors will be able to take an active part in monitoring bird populations in the Bay, using binoculars and a naturalist's notebook which are available in the gîte. Documentation on the local flora and fauna will also be available to visitors to raise awareness of this fragile ecosystem.



# Assess the readiness of what you offer in advance of October to March.

Make sure you have the right people, infrastructure, and equipment in place.



It's a chicken and egg situation: you may only be prepared to make the investments once you know there is demand, but there will be no demand until you take the risk. So, whether you like it or not, you will need to take the initiative and get your resources in place.

**Offer an indoor space.** One of the biggest concerns for visitors in the low season can be the weather conditions. What indoor alternatives can you offer? Do you have a playroom, a reading room or a space for indoor activities? It is essential to identify activities that are not weather dependant. If you cannot offer indoor spaces, provide some sheltered places outdoors and use wintery weather conditions as a fun/new way to experience things.

**Provide suitable equipment.** Anticipate your customers' needs by offering weather-proof equipment: wellington boots for scenic walks on muddy paths, umbrellas for in- between transfers, warm blankets in the rooms, driers for dripping clothes. This shows customer care and customers will be aware of your added service compared to competitors.

**Guarantee weather-proof access.** Is your place accessible in muddy conditions? If you want visitors all year round, you will need to ensure that your place remains accessible under any weather conditions, particularly for customers with limited mobility. Whether it is your parking, driveway or the access between different focal points in your grounds, you need to make sure it is safe for visitors to drive/walk/cycle/wheelchair around.

**Train your staff accordingly.** Since in low season you will typically have fewer visitors, there is more time for your personnel and customers to bond over meaningful conversations. This is an opportunity to build long-lasting relationships with your customers to increase repeat business and loyalty. Make sure your staff know all there is to know about low season activities, local specialties, traditions and your local environment.



# We are creating a legacy: artwork that empowers the locals and triggers a sense of place.

Léa Guzzo is former Senior Culture & Creative Industries Officer at Cornwall Council (UK).



## Our tips:

Carefully consider who sits on the selection panel for a public art commission. When writing the brief/ tender, build in social engagement as essential to the making and delivery of the artwork.



## What we do:

We have learned that commissioning art that is inclusive and engages our residents is key to increase everyone's participation in culture. Our latest example is 'Gwelen', co-created by artist Emma Smith and residents of West Penwith.

## How we do it:

Gwelen is a site-specific artwork made for and by the local community. The artwork is made up of 85 sculptures along the coastal path between Marazion and Penzance. Named Gwelen - gwel means rod, pole, wand and gweles is to see - the artwork is an invitation to rest and imagine the ancient, submerged forest hidden in Mounts Bay, an enchanting phenomenon that is rarely seen, but occasionally uncovered at very low tides. Each sculpture was tailor-made to support the poses and measurements of over 600 residents who contributed ideas on how they would like to sit or stand whilst pausing along the coastal path.

To create something long-lasting and place-making, as part of the art commission, the artist ran an ambitious engagement programme within the local community.

This included talks, open studio events, foraging and woodworking workshops. Contributors to the designs included residents, students, parents and community groups and individuals who responded through an open call. Once installed, each participant was sent a map with a number, showing where 'their' sculpture is along the trail.

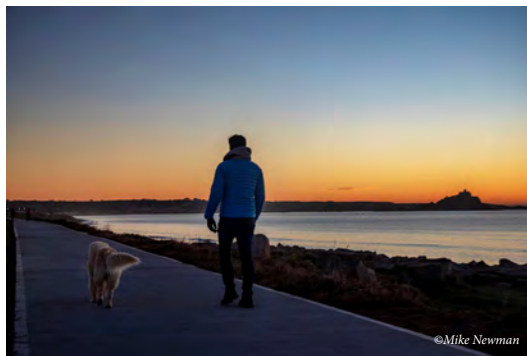
This unique approach has ensured the artwork's long-lasting legacy, creating a sense of ownership within the local community.





# We design year-round inclusive infrastructure, to create benefits for all.

## Rebecca Lyle is Principal Transport Officer at Cornwall Council (UK).



### What we do:

Active travel is at the heart of Cornwall Council's objectives as it helps reduce our carbon footprint and increases year-round well-being for locals and visitors. We encourage people to travel within, and to Cornwall, by using public transport or by walking and/or cycling, and we recognise the need to design year-round inclusive transport infrastructure.

### How we do it:

We create new trails and routes across Cornwall. In West Cornwall, the path linking Penzance to Marazion is a unique asset for pedestrians and cyclists and is an important part of a wider community vision to deliver the Mount's Bay multi-use trail helping to connect residents and visitors to the maritime environment. Prior to the works, the route was unusable for wheelchair users and families who struggled, unable to use pushchairs due to the poor condition of the surface, particularly in autumn & winter. At times it was also difficult to cycle.



### Our Tips:

Celebrate and bring back to life existing assets. Build infrastructure specifically designed to be accessible to all and resilient to the impacts of climate change where possible. Make sure to include the needs of your residents as well as those of visitors to ensure the infrastructure maximises impact.

Resurfacing the route to make it more resilient, creating safe passages through car parks, improving access ramps to the beach and providing benches and cycle parking has made the coastal path fully accessible all year round.

Connected to the railway station in Penzance, visitors can come by train with their bike (or hire one) and explore the surrounding landscape safely and easily. Since the re-opening of the route, we have seen a 70% increase in cyclists using the path out-of-season, creating demand for local hospitality businesses.

80% of residents feel that sustainable tourism should be more encouraged in their local area, and refurbishing the trail proves that tourism can bring large infrastructure to rural communities, helping shift negative opinions about tourism locally.





# Make targeted investments.

## Close the last mile gaps that impede your customers to enjoy your offers.

New low season tourism activities and itineraries need to be supported by the creation of new infrastructure to ensure a high-quality visitor experience.

The creation of new tourism infrastructure suitable for off-season can include:

- Weatherproof existing access paths to connect tourism assets
- Upgrade short sections of route to connect assets together
- Use lighting and glow in the dark to make access more attractive
- Use surfaces and light to create tourism interest
- Create changing spaces for low-season users
- Account for wheelchair turning circles
- Create step-free access where possible
- Build height adjustable benches/sinks/counters with tactile/braille/pictograph guidance for use

Weatherproofing for low season tourism requires different infrastructure investment than in high season. Traditionally less demand for low season activities means it is harder to justify such investment. Capitalise on existing resources and infrastructure to make them less weather dependent. Think of how your investment allows flexible use of those spaces for different purposes and users.



Make all your tourism infrastructure investments based on their ability to support year-round experiences in an inclusive way, for visitors and locals alike.





# We worked closely with specialist advisors to run a successful and inclusive commissioning call to artists.

## Norfolk County Council EXPERIENCE Project Team (UK).

### What we do:

We commissioned a series of permanent, outdoor public artworks to create a new contemporary art trail to span across Norfolk's existing network of long-distance walking trails. We wanted artworks to be placemaking, inclusive, accessible, and of high-quality. Attracting a wide range of artists to respond to our call for commissions was therefore key.

Public commissioning processes are not always the simplest to navigate and can be intimidating for artists with no experience of responding to public tenders. It was important for us not to take a 'business as usual' approach and to explore ways to adapt the tendering process to encourage wider interest and bolster artist confidence to apply. These efforts were hugely successful, attracting 225 submissions, including applications from international artists based in China, Denmark, Netherlands, USA, Spain, Germany, Costa Rica, Thailand, Germany and Lebanon.



### Our Tips:

Build in plenty of time to work with your procurement teams to find the best approach; it took us around two months to agree the process and get everything prepared. Consider who you would like your call-out to reach, and how you can minimise barriers at each stage of the process.



### How we do it:

We took advice from Creative Giants, an artist led creative agency, and ran a series of focus groups with emerging, diverse, and disabled artists. From these focus groups we gained an understanding of what barriers can exist for artists within public tendering processes, and we spent time working closely with procurement colleagues to find ways to address these barriers and explore where and how the tendering process could be adapted.

For example, we learned from our focus groups that for those artists with dyslexia, spoken word & visuals are often an easier format. Providing a commissioning brief in audio format to break down the process step by step would allow people to go back and re-listen to any elements. We commissioned full audio recordings of the commissioning brief along with instructions and provided this as part of our Invitation to Tender pack

We also reviewed NCC tender application forms and simplified these as much as possible, working closely with procurement to ensure the forms were clear, did not contain any unnecessary jargon, and focused on the strength of the creative idea.





# Lessons learned:

## Strategies for Successful Infrastructure Projects.

### Collaboration, Stakeholder Engagement, and Expertise as Key Factors

Successful infrastructure projects aim at leaving a positive impact on local communities, the environment and visitors. EXPERIENCE achieved this with strategies that included:

- Planning infrastructure improvements that gave an opportunity to simultaneously enhance biodiversity and local nature recovery efforts.
- Using surveys and focus groups to reach local communities/underrepresented artists in the early stages.
- Early commissioning of local experts and groups, bringing valuable project management support and setting a solid foundation for works.
- Considering a more inclusive approach and process to reach new or underrepresented artists.
- Where possible, ensuring infrastructure projects contribute to a circular economy by utilising local skills, materials, and businesses.

These strategies contribute to the long-term care and appreciation of the investments made and ensure the authenticity and widespread awareness of the projects.

Infrastructure projects are not solely about functionality and construction; they hold the potential to create a positive impact on local communities and attract visitors. One effective strategy is to identify opportunities for the creation of cultural landmarks that offer unique perspectives and experiences. These landmarks, whether reinventing existing capital assets or developing new structures, can serve as focal points for hyper-localised tourism initiatives, showcasing the region's distinct character and enhancing its appeal.

Transparency and community involvement are essential in commissioning projects. Engaging representatives from the cultural sector, elected members, and the local community in the decision-making process adds legitimacy and ensures the chosen commissions are of high quality and aligned with the community's needs. Through open call tenders, proposals are evaluated, judged, and scored by a panel with diverse perspectives, guaranteeing fairness and inclusivity in project selection.

Co-construction with users, stakeholders, and associations is critical for projects situated in natural environments such as forests. Managing and anticipating conflicts of use while preserving the environment necessitates engaging relevant parties from the outset. By involving economic stakeholders, associations, and local expertise, infrastructure facilities can meet expectations and become genuine tourist attractions that benefit both visitors and the local community.



# Task 3:

## Identify assets that could support low season tourism.

Make the most of what you have, and invest wisely.

Identifying the specifics of seasonality in your area and, most importantly, how these can be reflected in your customer experience, is not always as obvious as it sounds and it may require some brain squeezing. It is tempting to make investments with a mentality of extending the high season, rather than purposefully addressing needs specific for the low season. The following steps will help you get some perspective:

Reflect on your personal interpretation.

In your own words, what does autumn and/or winter mean to you? Translate your thoughts into images. What are the mental images you associate with either late autumn or winter?

Research how these materialise in your area.

Identify at least three “events” that only take place between November and March in your area, for each of these three categories:

- Natural (fauna and flora)
- Regional specialties (historical heritage, season-specific savoir-faire, gastronomic specialty)
- Cultural (national/regional/local celebrations, community events, arts, sporting events, entertainment)

Turn negatives into positives.

Classify your list of winter thoughts and images into positive and negative. For the positive ones, reflect on how you currently use them in your experience design and marketing practices. For the negative ones, think how you can change your services to either turn these into a strength, or how you can overcome pre-conceived ideas that they are actually negative. Invest accordingly.

# 04

## Let's design innovative experiences.



**37%** of domestic visitors

choose a destination because of the experiences it offers. (VisitEngland, 2019).

Now that you are familiar with the low season assets and resources available to you, and have planned your investment decisions, use them to design experiences that have meaning and value to your customers. It's time to use those resources and assets to get creative in how you package them as an experience that consumers can recognise and purchase.

You will need to create experiences that are great, even when it's cold, wet and dark. Co-create experiences with other nearby businesses and use local events to drive demand.



# Low season is the time to experiment and learn.

## Use low demand periods as a chance for product development and marketing.



Customer needs are changing and in high season you do not have the time (nor want the risk) to experiment. So, use your low season to develop products based on the five concepts below that have proven to be highly successful at increasing revenue in our industry:

### **Premiumisation.**

You are special! Emphasise the superior quality and exclusivity of your experiences to make your customers feel special. This also allows you to be less price sensitive.

### **Gamification.**

You are fun! Engage your customers with playful experiences to encourage them to spend more and come back.

### **Personalisation.**

You are unique! Customers look for products customised to their needs. Personalise low season when you have more time to cater for fewer customers.

### **Co-creation.**

You are social! Customers want to be the protagonists of their experiences not spectators. So find a way to involve them further and create opportunities for them to share their experiences with others online.

### **Packaging.**

You are hassle-free! Give your customers peace of mind by showing that all their needs are covered. Identify all the customer needs (transport, activities, food and beverages, entertainment, interpretation, accommodation, souvenirs...) and select which of these your target markets will appreciate having you take care of for them and which they can do for themselves more cost-effectively. Only package the elements that add value to the customer.

After you have experimented with your low season offer with a combination of these five ideas, then use your learnings to also improve your high season experiences. Make small changes first, to see how your customers respond and what the additional cost in time or resources is for you. Constantly learn from your experiments and introduce new improvements.

EXPERIENCE has developed over 1,500 experiences in France and England and have showcased just a few of these in the case studies, Visit the regional websites for more inspiration. You can also search for examples of experiences in other regions through Airbnb Experiences, TripAdvisor Experiences, Expedia Local Expert or Get Your Guide. What can you learn from the examples?

Search for examples of experiences in Airbnb Experiences, TripAdvisor Experiences, Expedia Local Expert and Get Your Guide, locally to you and in a highly popular region in your country. What can you learn from the examples?



# We have been testing out the benefits of local hospitality when travelling in a vast and poorly connected region. Martin Vericel and Dorian Bord from the association Univoyage (FR).



## Our Tips:

Setting the scene takes time and effort (150 km by bike), but it also leads to encounters and exchanges that go beyond a first impression of the area. This experience should inspire other regions that want to offer an alternative to mass tourism, which is carbon-intensive and concentrated in tourist centres.



## What we do:

We put ourselves in the shoes of two colourful characters, postal workers, who meet in the Pays d'Artois and discover local hospitality with astonishment as part of the EXPERIENCE project. Together, we have to rely on the generosity of the local people to carry out our mission and collect the memories and desires of a region in transition. The initial route that we had imagined from Villeurbanne was eventually modified as we met and consulted with local residents.

## How we do it:

This staging had several advantages. It allowed us to immerse ourselves completely in the area, discovering the villages that make it up and the people who live there. It also gave us a fuller understanding of the area and its challenges, such as the need for connections between the 'central' town and the surrounding communes. Along the way we had many informal and formal exchanges thanks to some colourful encounters.

The reputation of the people of the north is well established, and we can now say that they are naturally welcoming, as demonstrated by Stéphane and Claire's family, who welcomed us and offered us a meal, even though they didn't know us, Time for reflection and analysis. Cycling gives you a different view of the area, a slower way of appreciating your surroundings and taking the time to talk to the locals.





# We design theatrical tours for local people in the low season. Camille Copigny runs La Cahute collective (FR).



## What we do:

Through this unusual tour led by professional actors from the collective La Cahute, visitors can discover the history of the two Empires in Compiègne. In particular the lives of Empresses Marie-Louise (wife of Napoleon I) and Eugénie (wife of Napoleon III).

The tour, aimed at the general public, immerses visitors in the history of the imperial city in the heart of the state-owned forest of Compiègne in a fun and immersive way. Spectators interact with the actors: they are invited to dance together in the heart of the forest by the Empress Eugénie: this sequence, which at first surprises the visitor, turns out to be a moment of laughter and conviviality. The tour also highlights the Empress's cradle, the third stage of the restoration of which was co-financed by the EXPERIENCE project (a wrought-iron arbour, once covered with climbing plants, that enabled the empresses to stroll in the park sheltered from the sun). This tour is accessible to people with reduced mobility and families. Tours are available all year round.

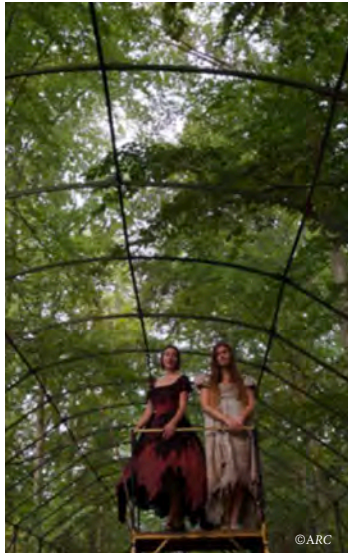
## How we do it:

This offer is marketed directly by the Tourist Office who organise ticket sales as well as promoting tours through their traditional communication channels. Tours are also promoted on our own social media and blog. On the day, the Tourist Office will be in charge of welcoming and supervising visitors. Oise Tourisme also helped us promote this offer for the press release which led to an article appearing in the local press.



## Our Tips:

Use a troupe of professional actors who are comfortable with street performances  
Look for interesting collaborations to help make unique and unusual tours.





# Create economies of scale and new experiences. Bring in your partners and competitors to maximise your impact and reduce risks.



When demand is low, the easy option can be to fight for the crumbs. But by pooling your efforts, you might be able to create a demand that wasn't there in the first place just because the existing offer wasn't sufficient.

**Find a common** need with other businesses in your area. For example, often, the Christmas season is not exploited to its full potential, partly because offers are too limited. If you are a venue or a hotel, your impact on your own is limited despite your best efforts to be creative in your offer. Yet, if different local organisations was to put on an attractive show, the range and scale of your appeal to potential visitors has the potential to be much more effective, with everyone benefitting.

**Coordinate** exchanges between stakeholders (or find the right facilitator to do so) to find a common approach and put together a finely tuned communication campaign that offers a range of complementary local experiences to your visitors.

**Share data.** First off, data that might be irrelevant to some may be relevant for others. Secondly, the more information that you, and other local stakeholders, can gather on consumer behaviours and expectations, the more easily you can form a cohesive and impactful communication campaign and design better experiences for your visitors.

**Join forces.** Create new experiences by combining complementary products and services, and share the marketing effort and risk.

**A word of caution:** When you combine services with another supplier and you sell them together, you need to check whether your joint service falls under the new European Package Travel Directive (2018), which protects European tourists when two or more of the following services are sold together: transport of passengers; accommodation; car and motor rental; and other travel services, like excursions, guided tours or museum visits. It does not apply to those services that are part of another travel service, such as accessing on-site facilities such as evening entertainment within a hotel. But it may apply to, for example, creating a murder-mystery weekend or allowing third party suppliers to offer services within your own premises, unless they are sold as separate services.



# We have created a premium niche experience combining animals and well-being.

Laetitia Caignault is director of the cercle hippique du Compiégnois and a certified equestrian sophrologist (FR).



### Our Tips:

Have an equestrian centre capable of hosting this type of service and with a nature area nearby. Spend time thinking about how you will market such an offer as it will be for a very niche clientele.

### What we do:

This is a first-of-its-kind experience in Hauts-de-France offering participants a real break to relax and let go in the forest. Laetitia is a qualified riding instructor and also a certified sophrologist. Participants will be able to discover equine sophrology through an evocative forest walk in the Compiègne region. This outing is made up of 3 main parts: an initial body-reading session, during which the rider will concentrate on his or her own state of mind, an ascent to full consciousness and a final free session to close the session (sunbathing, for example).

It will be open to the general public and will be promoted throughout the Hauts-de-France region. It is worth noting here that the strategy of the Hauts de France regional committee is to develop wellness tourism.

### How we do it:

This offer is marketed directly by the Tourist Office who organise ticket sales as well as promoting tours through their traditional communication channels. The offer is also promoted on our own social media and blog as well as on the Week-end Esprit Hauts de France platform, which allows tourists to purchase holidays including accommodation and activities.





# We are highlighting our local crafts with a new service.

## Laurence Jeandot is an entrepreneur and craftswoman at Voilerie Jeandot (FR).

### What we do:

In October 2021, we opened the doors of our workshop so the public could discover the craft of sailmaking. The participants were immediately put to work making their own bag from old sails, supported by a local, experienced craftsperson. Following the success of this event, we developed the format to offer 4-hour workshops in the low season. This was further developed by working in partnership with other local crafts people to integrate the making of Pomme de Toulaine to give an even more marine touch to the bags.

### How we do it:

Trained by Ewen de Kergariou, master sailmaker in Carantec in Finistère, our job is to design, make and repair sails. Since 2004, we have been making made-to-measure sails for caravels, racing boats and houseboats. We have since diversified our work by giving sails a second life; recycling them to make bags, poufs, hammocks, deckchairs, etc.

Today, our day-to-day work takes place on a 9 x 6 metre raised floor, specially designed for cutting and assembling the sails.

Most of our work is done in the spring and summer - the tourist season, but also the offshore racing season. We took advantage of the Semaine du Tourisme économique et des savoir-faire, initiated by the Brittany Region, to open our doors to the public. For our atypical activity, the winter season is the ideal time to offer these workshops, with participants sheltered in the calm of a special space that is nonetheless open to the horizon. They learn to design objects using materials specifically designed for the world of the sea, some sails being donations from the biggest regattas and ocean races in Europe, such as the Vendée Globe. They can also enjoy some of the best teas on offer from local producers when they take a break between cuts.



### Our Tips:

Enthusiastically go out and meet people with other areas of expertise. Exchanging ideas will bring in new ideas and encourage you to develop your creativity. There's no risk in stepping out of your comfort zone and opening the doors of your business. Meeting new people, while remaining humble, is the key to advancing and developing your projects. Without others, we are nothing.



# We increased revenue in the low-season by promoting winter experiences at Samphire Hoe.

Paul Holt is Samphire Hoe site ranger (UK).

## What we do:

Samphire Hoe Country Park is the newest part of England built from the spoil of the Eurotunnel in 1997. Our nature reserve looks straight over the channel to France. It experiences great extremes of weather and is an award-winning nature setting that hosts complex chalk grassland, grazing animals and many migratory and resident birds including the world's fastest bird, the Peregrine Falcon. We now offer winter experiences to encourage visitors to Samphire Hoe at what is normally a quiet time for us.



## How we do it:

We attended the Experience Maker training provided through the EXPERIENCE project. This led us to identifying our strengths and to think about what unique offer we could make to visitors. Paul Holt, our site ranger, is a renowned wildlife expert and bird specialist. We devised a winter bird watching experience centred around his knowledge and expertise.



## Our Tips:

Identify your strengths – and remember some of the best wildlife experiences are in winter. Look at your product and think creatively about what features of it could be better in the low season!



# Tap into people's yearning for a meaningful experience.

## Tailor experiences around wellness, self-discovery and purpose.



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To turn a product or service into an experience, you will need to find a way to make it resonate with your potential customers' needs.

Here are five very different options to inspire you:

**The bucket list.** Everyone has their own bucket list with out-of-the-ordinary experiences they want to live at least once in their lives. Do not hesitate to design some 'extreme' and/or weird and wonderful experiences that will, at worst, entice the most adventurous customers and, at best, catch the eye of curious potential visitors.

**Reconnecting with nature.** The pursuit of modern life has, paradoxically, created a strong desire for some urbanites to reconnect with nature. The Covid-19 pandemic has supercharged that desire to the extent of reversing the rural exodus. Happily for rural tourism venues, nothing can reflect the diversity and appeal of seasonality better than nature. Let it take the centre stage in your offers.

**Going back to simpler things.** Some of your customers will have a desire to leave behind all noise and hyper connectivity when going on holiday.

Sometimes, creating a meaningful experience can be as simple as creating the right conditions to allow that to happen. Offer no internet zones/sites, replace the microwave with a fire pit, provide hampers with fresh local produce and a cooking guide rather than ready meals.

**Learning traditional savoir-faire.** In a world of digitalisation, the possibility of learning long-forgotten crafts can provide your guests with an experience unique to your place and give people a sense of belonging. Give them an opportunity to learn how to spin wool or identify which wild plants to use to make their own herbal infusions.

**Self-discovery.** Whether it is through wellness, meditation, sport or experiences that will bring people out of their comfort zone, a holiday is the perfect opportunity for people to take the time to look after themselves and some will seek to turn it into a personal journey of self-discovery. While you cannot offer it all, it is all about offering the option and space to do this to some degree.



# We offer a unique experience: ice swimming, a winter sport on the beach.

Isabelle Quere, Director of Falaises d'Armor Tourist Office (FR)

## What we do:

Winter sports by the sea! The only one of its kind in France, a competition and an unusual spectacle of swimming in cold water, in February, without a wetsuit, wearing just a swimming costume and a swimming cap. This slightly frosty sporting challenge, which comes from Northern Europe, was being organised at the heart of a weekend of "Sea, Cold and Wellbeing" weekend in Plouha.

## How we do it:

In 2020, the Falaises d'Armor Tourist Office approached the French Swimming Federation about organising this event. The result was the 1st national Ice Swimming competition at sea, which today welcomes around a hundred swimmers from France and abroad to compete over distances ranging from 50 to 1,000 metres. This unusual competition requires complex organisation and involves no fewer than 70 volunteers to ensure the safety of the swimmers at sea.

The organisers welcome beginners and experts alike, on presentation of a medical certificate. After validation by the doctors, the swimmers start the session with a gentle muscle warm-up and a long relaxation and breathing session. A mental challenge before a physical one.

When they get out of the water, they feel good, proud of themselves and clear-headed. A hot drink and a sauna help to restore your energy levels! The wellbeing village is also an invitation to share, with introductory workshops in ice-swimming, massage, yoga, sauna and water-walking, as well as lectures, films and tastings of local produce. From spring to autumn, the Tourist Office also offers other ways to take a "different look" at its magnificent unspoilt coastline, through coasteering, canyoning along the cliffs, or wild swimming, a guided and supervised course. There are several different levels of experience to suit families and sports enthusiasts alike.



## Our Tips:

- The essential ingredients are
- an awareness of the rich playground offered by your area's natural assets, even in winter,
  - imagination and daring,
  - preventive measures to avoid any impact on the environment,
  - good partners
  - and a Tourist Office to promote the event.



# We share our passion for birds.

## Laurent Thébault is founder and guide of Roscoff Birding Nature (FR).

### What we do:

Set off to discover the world of birds in the Roscoff region. To get closer to nature, always be on the move with it. This desire to be on the move often leads us to exceptional sites, often of great beauty, where we can meet species of ordinary biodiversity, species that are emblematic of Brittany or have a high heritage value.

### How we do it:

A curious mind ready to experiment, a willingness to share, bringing together small groups to improve the chances of birdwatching in good conditions, a respect for our sensitive areas.

The main idea behind the creation of Roscoff Birding Nature is linked to a passion for birds that goes back to childhood. Thanks to the EXPERIENCE project and the support of Brittany Ferries, we are encouraging interaction between individuals to create a unique and often unforgettable experience.

It's also a movement that brings people together with customers, business partners and people who are passionate about nature and its conservation in Finistère and Brittany.

We offer everyone, including people with a disability or illness (see the Ailes de Perharidy poster), the opportunity to discover the world of birds.

It's a fast-growing economic niche, but one that's still very much in its infancy in France, whereas it's widespread in Germany, the USA and the UK. These countries send many visitors to the Brittany region, which accounts for over 30% of Roscoff Birding's customers.



### How we do it:

Don't hesitate to manage a deliberately simple and agile structure with all the attributes of a real company.





# Translate emotions into experiences.

Certain emotional states are associated with seasons: translate those expectations into live experiences.

To do this, accessorise your experience to make it winter-themed. Christmas, in particular, is a time for nostalgia and a sense of belonging, so decorate your venue to encourage return visits, create a winter cocktail to encourage higher spending, organise a workshop to make your own Christmas decorations to encourage larger parties. Here are four themes to try:

## **Cosiness (or the Scandinavian practise of Hygge).**

Autumn and winter are seasons of contrasts that make us think of wet, cold and dark outside, for which we compensate with warm and light inside. Whether it is a hot cup of tea or hot chocolate after a long walk, an evening by the fireplace with a good book or listening to old vinyl, or just a lazy sleep under a warm blanket.

**Timelessness.** With the natural elements being unpredictable and shorter days, it is harder to pack the day with activities. This gives a golden opportunity to approach time differently by offering experiences in which time is not of the essence. For example, create activities that allow your customers to learn how to paint or draw what they see out of the window, or spend the morning cooking with a chef, or try their hand at some new craft.



What do your potential customers expect winter to be like? You can choose to fight their negative perceptions or, instead, you can play into the positive meanings and associations this season may have for them. Sell the dream and make it a reality.

**People.** Sometimes what you remember best of your holidays are the people you spent them with; the unexpected laughs, the deep conversations, the shared experiences. Enable those connections by offering the suitable space and time for them. Market holidays as time for yourself and your loved ones.

**Adventure.** It's not all about nostalgia! For some, the low season is also a time for exploration, pushing your own limits and going out of your comfort zone. Why not offer winter surfing or an autumnal overnight hike to a refuge?





# We created a new way for visitors to experience a natural, annual wild goose spectacle on the North Norfolk coast. Norfolk County Council EXPERIENCE Project Team (UK).



## Our Tips:

Businesses get very busy at different times, especially during holidays. Schedule your initial contact wisely to make sure they have time to consider what you're offering and how you can help. Don't give them too much paperwork so they don't stress about the commitment.



## What we do:

We developed a new water-based offer, taking people into the salt marshes in a sustainable goose friendly way. This new eco-friendly tourism product showcases and utilises the wild bird movements that Norfolk is famous for.

## How we do it:

We combined elements of existing offers with something that did not previously exist locally, combining nature and history. Before birdwatching became popular, Wells-next-the-Sea was famous for its wildfowling with local people acting as guides for wildfowling such as Sir Peter Scott.

This rich history mixed with information about the life cycle of the pink footed geese forms the basis of a guided journey into the salt marshes around Wells. This brand-new bespoke tour was created to include components that complemented what bird watchers to Norfolk might want to experience, but from a completely new and unique viewpoint and location.

Fresh local food and drink, served on the boat while watching the geese, help make this trip memorable and even more experiential. This new 'Wild Goose Chase by Boat' offer allows people to experience something different as they journey through the salt marsh creeks, searching out the geese and watching them from a safe distance.



# Get a calendar.



## Identify unique opportunities every month of the year and celebrate them.

The examples below are generic but you can add specific opportunities local to you.

### Halloween.

Finish October with a bang; this festivity is increasingly important for customer expenditure, in activities, food and costumes. The market for higher end tailormade experiences is growing fast.

### The market for pre-Christmas office parties.

From dinners out to team building days or weekend experiences, use November and December to target the office party market. A sustainability/authenticity themed team building experience gives that otherwise "samey" annual party a new sense of adventure.

### Christmas shopping.

Here's your chance to sell unique gifts particularly quality, locally made goods. From participation in workshops where you make your own personalised gifts to purchasing luxury, expertly made crafts, gifting experiences has massively increased in recent years.

### Christmas and New Year holiday.

Decorate your premises to add a sense of luxury, develop special menus for food and drinks. Offer themed Christmases - family ones focused on Santa's elves, or adult ones focused on a particular theme of music - jazz Christmas, folkloric Christmas. Alternatively, consider

non-Christmas christmasses - targeting people who don't want to celebrate it or of alternative faiths.

### Between New Year and Valentine's Day.

Promote your experience as a Christmas gift for family members to buy each other and you are likely to get these vouchers cashed in during January and February.

### Snowdrop walks.

Incentivise January and February visits to your destination by creating and promoting snowdrop walks, in the same way that you can create bluebell walks in May. Start and end in locations where customers have access to toilets and refreshments.

### Chinese New Year.

As a 16-day celebration, with seven days considered a public holiday, the Chinese New Year is an excellent opportunity to celebrate Chinese culture and to generate sales, which is often overlooked.

### Lambing season.

New-born lambs signal the start of spring and yet most tourists are not aware you can already see them in March. Promote an Instagram campaign to photograph early lambs at your destination.

Do you have offers specifically designed for each and every one of these dates? If your offer is always the same, there is no incentive for your customers to book now and your competitors who offer something different will do better.



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Brainstorm the different opportunities available to you each month and how you can use them to develop timely offers.



# We organised a forest event in the autumn.

## Sarah Colas-Matuska is Head of Environment and Visitor Services at the Office National des Forêts (FR).



### What we do:

ARC and ONF, partners in the EXPERIENCE project, teamed up with the association "Le Festival des Forêts" and the SPL le Pôle Equestre du Compiégnais to organise an event with the aim of enabling all visitors, whether they were with family or friends, to discover forest experiences in the heart of the forest, decked out in its most beautiful colours. The event, 'Experiencing the Forest in Autumn' took place over the weekend of 15 and 16 October 2022.

### How we do it:

The event took place over a weekend where visitors could take part in a variety of activities, both free of charge and with a small (voluntary) fee. The programme included sports activities (mountain biking, orienteering, Nordic walking), science activities (workshops and discovery of the fauna, flora and forest management) and well-being activities (yoga, musical siestas), artistic activities, cultural activities, etc.



### Our Tips:

- Maximise the communication channels via different media (posters, press articles, radio articles, leaflets, websites) and get partners to share with their networks so that the information spreads as widely as possible.
- Increase the number of reception sites so that visitors can clearly identify a major point and choose a location that is suitable for their mobility needs (easy access on foot or by bike).

The event took place at three major sites:

- Grand Parc equestrian stadium (in the immediate vicinity of the Compiègne national forest), where horse-related activities are organised as well as a variety of forest-related activities (puppet shows, edible forest plant cooking workshops, wood carving, exhibitions on forestry trades, handicraft workshops, etc.).
- Saint-Pierre en Chastres site for relaxing experiences : musical siestas, concerts, yoga, etc;
- Saint-Pierre ponds, where we held science and educational workshops on flora and fauna.

The event was a true collaboration as all the activities on offer brought together the various local partners working for the forest (associations, scientific bodies, tourism operators, etc.).



# Create your own events.

Creating unique events can help to generate demand in low season.



Events can encourage repeat visits by customers who may otherwise think your product is the same all year round. They can also attract visitors who have a special interest in the event and might not, otherwise, consider your venue.

Creating your own event can be a fantastic way to bring together your local community, highlight your businesses values, strengthen your brand identity, and increase your visibility.

Find below a non-exhaustive list of event types:

- **Art festivals** (music, cinema, theatre, culture)
- **Exhibitions and shows** (hosting community groups and local dance or music schools)
- **Food** (street food events, buying locally sourced and delicatessen produce, learning how to cook)
- **Shopping** (pre-Christmas markets, artists' open homes, make your own gift events)
- **Societal events** (historical event, local celebrity, political movements)
- **Entertainment** (festival of light, carnival, Halloween, shows)
- **Trade events**
- **Unusual/exclusive/one-off events**

It would be hard to create new experiences for the whole low season, but you can use events to generate sufficient demand over a short period of time to justify additional staffing and resources. This can create enough confidence for other businesses in your area to do the same. Use these events to raise awareness of the resources available and, year on year, to expand your low season offering.

Through local collaboration, one organisation provides the venue, another gives the knowledge or experience, another, the marketing know-how and access to new customers; this co-creation of an event spreads the risk and provides opportunities for shared learning and business development.



# We created an event that enticed thousands of visitors into the city, boosting local investment during the low season. Fiona Roberts is project manager for Love Light Norwich (UK).



## What we do:

We organised a series of events including a trail of light installations, light and fire performances, community engagement projects, commercial offer to stimulate the evening economy and a thought leadership symposium, which focussed on mental health and the arts. We concentrated on sustainability and environmental impacts, important themes for our next festival in 2024.

## How we do it:

We held an open call for local, national, and international artists to create light installations and performances. We featured 7 emerging artists from a support programme we developed with the Norwich University of the Arts.

We teamed with EXPERIENCE partner Cycling UK to organise the Glow Ride Event, that saw 150 participants decorate their bikes with lights and cycle around the city. We engaged hard to reach groups including the D/deaf, migrant, aged and LGBTQ+ communities. We had autism friendly performances and a 'Wall of Love'.

The month-long commercial offer included a food trail; 42 restaurants offering themed food and drink and 15 Norwich market stalls with extended hours. Stores experienced significant increase in sales when compared to their other locations in the UK. In total, there were 17 commissions, 215 artists and specialists, and 32 educational sessions were held. City footfall increased by 20,000. 86% of people visited hospitality providers and shops during their festival visit, with 50% of businesses experiencing more than 25% footfall increase. Businesses rated the importance of the festival in attracting more tourism associated economic value to the city, as of 4.68 out of 5. EXPERIENCE helped us to deliver a fantastic event and gave us the opportunity prove to future funders that Love Light Norwich can deliver a low season event that thousands of people will attend.



## Our Tips:

Create partnership with many stakeholders, including local authorities, retail, businesses, educational, community and cultural organisations, enabling engagement with wide audiences throughout the region.



# Lessons learned:

## Strategies for Creating Memorable Experiences. Harness collective efforts, partnerships, and innovative approaches.

Embracing new approaches through collective workshops, innovation techniques and networking can help businesses stay ahead of evolving visitor demands and drive long term success, particularly in today's dynamic and competitive landscape.

Workshops serve as platforms for exchanging ideas, collaborative working and cultivating innovative thinking. Individual coaching can be a successful complementary approach to workshops.

Embracing co-creation and creative thinking is essential for envisioning future partnerships and generating innovative ideas. By collaborating with other businesses, tourism businesses can pool resources, expertise, and creativity to design unique and memorable experiences that go beyond individual capabilities.

To stay abreast of industry trends and challenges, learning from other businesses' experiences in developing new visitor experiences is crucial. Building relationships with local businesses not only opens up opportunities for collaboration but also creates additional revenue streams through cross-promotion and joint initiatives.

Engaging with industry best practices and seeking support from the broader ecosystem helps businesses tap into valuable resources, knowledge, and networks that drive innovation and success.

Continuous evaluation is vital to ensuring the effectiveness of your tourism offer. By assessing what works and what doesn't, businesses can make timely adjustments and improvements. This iterative process allows for collective learning and optimisation of offerings, ensuring visitors are provided with a diverse array of exciting and captivating experiences that leave a lasting impression and inspire return visits.



# Task 4:

## It's cold, wet and dark: what shall we do?

Work with the seasons, not against them.

By now you are aware that too many companies hope to sell the products that work well in their peak season throughout the year, and this will not work. Does this apply to you? Here is how you can think differently.

List your three top selling products or services in winter.

Now write down what makes them different to your summer products.

Are the differences positive, such that you want to enhance them, or are your best winter products a poor version of your summer product? It may be better to increase your offering, i.e., provide additional benefits to consumers, rather than simply reduce prices.

It's time to brainstorm ways to enhance your products to become appealing winter experiences:

- **Theme it:** decorate for Halloween, Christmas and then Chinese New Year, so your customers always find something new.
- **Make it longer:** mix indoors and outdoors by adding extra activities such as an Autumn leaves family hunt and collage.
- **Make it unique:** tempt customers with small gifts such as a small drink or food tasting.
- **Make it special:** promote beach walks with your dog, which are not possible in peak season.
- **Increase the size of the group:** incentivise past customers to bring a friend.
- **Share it with another business:** Bring in an expert on a certain topic who needs a venue (or offer your expertise to different venues).
- **Share it with the community:** have an open day for schools, care homes, community groups.
- **Other ideas?**



# 05

## Time for marketing and storytelling.



**Journalists and social media influencers seek novelty and you are likely to get public media coverage opportunities in the winter that would not be available in the crowded summer market.**

Customers want to enjoy holidays during the low season but they don't know about your new experiences. Getting known in the market requires a lot of marketing effort and you may need new skills and partnerships.

Learn how to story tell and how to use social media, and consumers themselves will share the message for you.

The good news is that truly innovative experiences that are communicated well are likely to go viral. There are few competing experiences in the low season, which means you have a better chance to stand out and be seen.

All the marketing skills you experiment with in the next low season will be second nature to you for the subsequent high season, when you will be too busy to learn new tricks.



# Invest in low season marketing resources.

You will need to work harder to attract autumn/winter, rather than spring/summer, customers but the efforts will pay off all year round.



Many tourism businesses dislike having to market themselves and avoid spending much time doing so.

## Identify online publications in need of content.

Travel blogs and magazines need content so if you have a unique experience, invite journalists to try it out and pitch a story to them, in the hope they will write about you. It's a lot harder to get featured in high season, when there is more competition, than in the low season when these magazines have fewer options available.

## Enjoy autumn and winter photography.

Sadly, most businesses have a very poor collection of photographs to promote themselves and they hardly ever include low season photos, apart from the odd snowy landscape. Yet customers want to be able to picture themselves in the photography you use in your marketing efforts. Autumn and winter photography of cosy interiors and fireplaces, and beautiful landscape or scenery can be compellingly evocative and inviting.

## Update your website regularly.

Your website today needs to show what your business, and its surroundings, look like at the time that your customers expect to visit you. There is no point in showing pictures of people in t-shirts and gardens with flowers if you want customers to book for autumn or winter. The same can be said about the 'things to do' that you offer; prepare website content that is season specific and rotate it throughout the year.

## Market onsite to encourage repeat custom.

Produce a leaflet to give to visitors at the entrance or exit of your venue, saying 'what's on this month' and, on the reverse side, 'what's on next month'; this can prompt more repeat visits. A coffee table photo book showing your gardens throughout the year or photos on your walls showing beautiful autumn or winter landscapes near your property, can remind visitors that it's worth returning at different times.

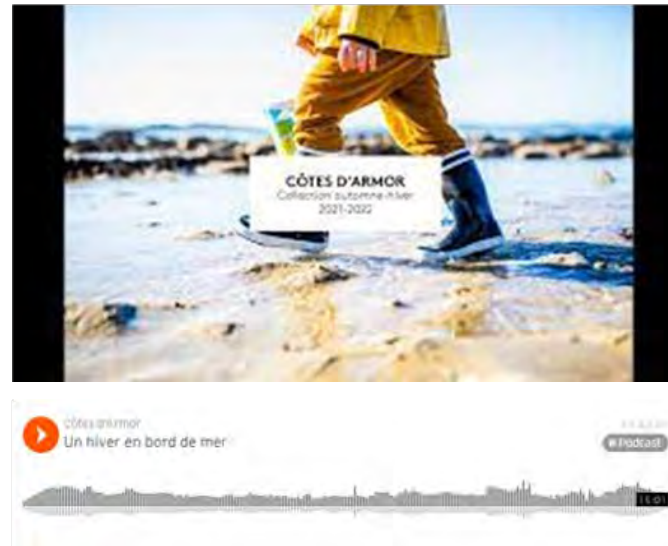


Search online for 'ten things to do in winter in my area', 'winter wedding venues', 'autumn days out' or the equivalent for whatever you are offering. Understand what those suppliers of experiences do that is different to your offering and figure out how you can pitch for your business to be included.



# We offer sound immersion in the destination.

## Anais Grall is a territorial marketing consultant for the Bastille agency (FR).



### What we do:

We co-constructed a scenario with Côtes d'Armor Destination and the Centre du Son for soundscapes which were representative of the area in the low season.

### How we do it:

First of all, we had to think about the sounds that could be used to differentiate the area and the season. Then we had to define the places where these sounds could be captured: the seaside, boats, shells, etc. Before the field recording, we selected a local service provider, the Centre du son de Cavan, which has a perfect knowledge of the sounds in the area.

When editing, we had to be aware of the need to possibly enrich the sound if, on listening, it seemed to lack humanity, for example. The aim was to show the uniqueness of the area, its changing voice, sometimes calm, sometimes more rhythmic, which can attract the curiosity of people listening to it.

We then worked on disseminating these sounds. In addition to the audio platforms and the Côtes d'Armor Destination website, we proposed mini-formats for posting them on social networks. All the sounds are also available on YouTube. The point to emphasise is that this content is timeless, that it won't age.



### Our Tips:

The human voices in the distance help to embody and show that there is life in the area. The soundscapes can be used to show or convey the portrait of a destination to a blind or partially sighted audience.



# Harness the power of social media.

## Create a social media plan and follow it systematically.



**Set yourself a target.** Figure out what you want to achieve and why it matters to you.

**Learn about your customers.** Use social media analytics to learn more about the profile of your followers, so you can rework your social media posts to meet their needs. Learn from your competitors. Identify 3-5 businesses similar to yours that are more successful in social media and learn what they do differently.

**Learn what already works for you.** What's different about the social media post that had the highest number of likes or shares, compared to your 'average' post? Is it the time of day, the fact it has a better photo, the language you use, or that the content was funny rather than factual? Whatever it is, learn from it so your new posts will be more like it.

**Create a social media content calendar.** Set up a posting schedule, for example with Hootsuite, so your posts are spaced out and they are released at the time of maximum engagement for your audience.

**Each social media channel has a purpose.** While Facebook and Instagram outrank all other channels in communication with customers, the purposes of YouTube or TikTok are very different, and you need to know what each channel can be used for.

**Set up social media competitions.** Provide incentives to your customers to post about you, whether this is by offering them a free coffee per post (when they buy a cake) or running a competition of who gets the most likes on posts that you are tagged in (then the prize needs to be larger).

**Get professional help.** Identify micro influencers that will want to test your services and invite them to speak honestly about you. While micro influencers with few followers may be happy to provide free reviews in exchange for free use of your facilities, the people that are more established in social media will require a payment - you are not only buying their time, but also their endorsement.



Most small firms do not dedicate enough hours to their marketing activities, which they fit around other tasks, particularly when it comes to social media. Rethink your approach and block out regular time to plan and deliver your marketing strategy.



# We distribute new experiential content with the travel trade.

## Bob Russel is CEO of AC Tours (UK).



### What we do:

Established in 1999, AC Tours offers ad-hoc, special interest, series and incentive leisure group tours and individual services. AC Tours offers leading bespoke luxury travel operations. We offer a one stop shop, multi-channel booking solution for accommodation, services, transport and unique travel experiences found throughout Great Britain, Ireland and France.

### How we do it:

Through our partnership with Visit Kent in the INTERREG EXPERIENCE project, we have been given excellent access to a wide range of brand-new tourism products and experiences. This has given us a unique opportunity to include these new experiences in our activity, all of which have come with quality imagery and audio-visual material. This saves time and helps us to immediately transform these activities into our range of itineraries which we have promoted to USA, Canada, Benelux and Germany, all who have a strong demand for new sustainable products and experiences that give people to opportunity to escape for the larger cities in favour of experiential, rural activities.

We developed four new themed itineraries featuring many recommended experiences, with booking flexibility and combing experiences as part of our bespoke overlapping itineraries. The detailed itineraries were curated by our in-house travel experts which include in-depth descriptions, imagery and links to hotels and attractions. These are effective tools for showcasing the experiences and are being shared with our extensive partner network. To do this, we have an extensive client list of around 10,000 industry professionals from our destinations, each with their own substantial contact portfolios, who have received dedicated emails spotlighting one of the dedicated itineraries.

Our dedicated sales team at AC Tours also interact with hundreds of clients around the world including Travel Counsellors, Avanti Destinations and Audley Travel to name a few, designing trips for customers and contracting product for specific itineraries. These itineraries are now proactively being introduced and recommended to our clients for inspiration and booking in 2024 and beyond. The quality imagery and audio-visual material made available to us has made it quicker for our travel experts to turn around these quality itineraries and get them out to our network in time for the 2023 and 2024 seasons.

### Our Tips:



Work closely with local DMOS who have the expertise and knowledge that can help travel trade companies in developing new low season products rapidly. Seize the opportunity to partner with innovative projects that support businesses in unleashing their potentials.





# Become a storyteller.

Connect and inspire so that your prospective customer feels something.



Storytelling is the art of communicating so that your customers care about you. You are creating an emotional empathy, which means they trust you because they find your message relatable. Contrary to traditional marketing that focuses solely on features and benefits, and balances quality versus value and functionality versus luxury, experiential marketing acknowledges that customers are both rational and emotional beings.

**Sensory experience:** engage your audience with visual content such as pictures and videos. Vision accounts for more than 50% of purchase intention. Sounds, smells, taste, touch can also improve advertisement effectiveness.

**Emotional experience:** create emotion-inducing stimuli such as happiness (more shares), sadness (more clicks), fear/ surprise (more loyalty), anger/ disgust (viral content).

**Problem-solving experience:** engage your audience with creative thinking and make them curious about your offers.

**Physical/virtual experience and lifestyles:** focus on the virtual experience of interaction with both products and other individuals since action-oriented advertisement communicates motivation and meaning.

**Ideal self:** embellish customers' appeal for self-improvement and their desired impressions of the social context, for example, through social media and influencers.



Storytelling uses a combination of techniques to generate a narrative around your products/services, to inspire your customers to purchase. It is strongly embedded in the social and cultural context you are targeting. Knowing your audience is the essential first step to increasing the effectiveness of your marketing campaigns.



# We adopted an influencer-based marketing strategy.

Jim Dawson is Head of Creative Digital and Marketing for Visit Kent (UK).



## Our Tips:

Use your research and analytics to understand when your audiences are seeking out certain content. Build long-term relationships with influencers. Plan your content in advance to produce high quality outcomes.



## What we do:

Thanks to the EXPERIENCE project, we benefited from research that led to the creation of four audience profiles. This research helped us to steer our content strategy, creating highly targeted feature content which we have been able to promote to each of the four key audiences through a programme of digital campaign activity.

## How we do it:

We worked with our marketing, research and partnerships teams to map out key seasonal themes. Then, we identified the content which would be relevant to our four audience groups and ensured this was promoted on the best channels to engage new visitors.

In addition to improving the relevance of the content we create, INTERREG EXPERIENCE has also enabled us to work with a number of influencers on social media. From there we created itineraries, using all of the new visual content gathered from the new Experiences across Kent keeping in mind that audience's interests.

In the last two years alone we have hosted 25 influencer trips, allowing us to showcase our destination to new audiences in an engaging way, using the influencer's own voice and impressions to create a new and authentic picture of our destination. The shift in our content strategy has also been hugely impactful. Our feature content is now the most viewed area of the Visit Kent website, with our audience-led features helping to generate an average dwell time of around two and a half minutes. These numbers indicate that consumers are not only landing on our content, but they are genuinely interested in it, and this is because the content has been targeted to their needs and wants at a particular time.





# Involve your customers in your storytelling.

## No one says it better than the people who have experienced it for themselves.

Customers trust other customers more than they trust you. Your marketing budget and reach can be multiplied if you empower your customers. But your customers won't just promote you because they like you, you need to think about what's in it for them. Why would they find your posts interesting and why would they tell others about it?

Create discussions, not just adverts. If the entire purpose of your digital marketing is to push your product, you will have limited followers. Less than 50% of your content should be advertising, the rest can be promoting local activities or events, talking about things to do near you, highlighting seasonal events, showing support for local charities... all of which indirectly create a desire in people to visit you. These type of posts are more likely to be shared or liked than any advert that you post.

Rather than trying to put yourself in your customers' shoes to create relevant content on your communication channels, provide them with a dedicated platform such as:

- A live Instagram feed with a hashtag of your creation.
- A blog with guest contributions.
- A participative digital campaign.
- A contest for the funniest videos, the most unusual pictures or the most beautiful images of your site/venue/area.

Encourage your customers to create user-generated content about their experiences at your property or destination. Use video and encourage your customers to do the same. Then use their posts to create conversations.



Reward your customers for providing content that shows you, or your local area, in a good light. Run the occasional competition where you reward those users that get the highest number of shares or likes. You can run a small competition for the best ten things to do in winter near you, or the ten best cakes, or the ten most picturesque places in autumn colours... all of which create traffic and show other customers that there are exciting things to do nearby.







# We develop atypical communications to make our local experiential offers attractive.

## Meriem Gherbi is Head of Communications at Morlaix Bay Tourist Office (FR).

### What we do:

The Morlaix Bay Tourist Office has always had a communications approach that goes against the grain of what is traditionally done in the world of tourism. As the first Tourist Office to be grouped together in Brittany, our structure has forged this DNA through the synergy of our skills and the uniqueness of our region. The EXPERIENCE project and its promotion was a challenge we were determined to take up, surfing on the "made in" Baie de Morlaix touch.

### How we do it:

The Morlaix Bay Tourist Office's communications department aims to promote and sell the offers of its local partners through various channels such as our website, our social networks, the press and our tourist information centres. We are targeting a wide range of customers: tourists and day-trippers visiting our region, as well as local visitors, secondary residents and local residents.




At the start of the project, it was important to define the skills needed to develop a communication campaign specific to the EXPERIENCE project. We were able to draw on our experience and expertise to devise an atypical promotional strategy that reflected the diversity of the offers created as part of the project. To make the strategy all the more impactful, we chose to work with local agencies for specific skills, such as creating a graphic charter and producing a promotional video.

To develop our strategy, it was important to draw on our knowledge of the region, our partners and our customers. On this basis, we built our communication campaign in a spirit of consultation, involving the entire team and relying on specialist agencies. Drawing on our strong local identity, we have succeeded in our challenge of getting the word out and getting people talking. A competition to take part in one of the programme's offers was created during a launch event at one of our partners' premises. Our partners adopted our graphic charter. Local residents and visitors were able to identify with the video and voted for it. The press and the general public shared our content, which was broadcast on our various channels.

Today, our strategy is based on the promotion of our off-season offers, the creation of web and print content, the broadcasting of offbeat videos, our distinctive graphics (meaning, elements, traditions, etc.), and press relations.

**Our Tips:**  
 Never be afraid to go to local professionals. By working in a network, your new offers will be more relevant to travelers because they will feel integrated into a strong local community.





# We diversified the type of clients we get through becoming visibly Cycling friendly.

## Christine Pinsent is manager at The Locks Inn Community pub (UK).

### What we do:

The flat country roads of Norfolk are an ideal place for cyclists to pedal and discover the rich wildlife and beautiful landscape that are especially unique in the UK in autumn and winter. We offer a cosy resting place to cyclists where they can safely lock their bikes and warm up on colder days.

### How we do it:

Through the one-to-one support from the EXPERIENCE project, we have been successful in securing Cycling Friendly accreditation from Cycling UK. This provided us with some free cycling equipment, including a pump, tools, a puncture repair kit and a first aid kit. In addition, free publicity via Cycling UK's 71,000+ membership base and their Cycle Magazine with a readership of 86,000.

We now also get increased visibility and recognition, with a listing on Cycling UK's 'Cyclists Welcome' online directory.



This allows us to welcome a greater number of cyclists to the pub to enjoy our local food and ales as well as to experience traditional music and storytelling. EXPERIENCE has helped us to promote what is different and what stands out from other similar venues, folk music, storytelling and promoting sustainable travel as well as utilising the fantastic cycle routes in the area.

To support us extending our reach to new visitors, and not just to locals, we also looked at focusing our offer to what is traditionally Norfolk. Throughout the year, on Wednesday and Thursday evenings and every Saturday and Sunday local musicians play all kinds of toe-tapping and haunting folk music and at 'Tales 'n' Ales' so visitors learn local history through live storytelling.



### Our Tips:

Cyclist can travel all-year around. Don't hesitate to add information on your website so cyclist learn about cycle routes around your business, are aware that they can lock their bike safely, that their muddy boots are welcomed or that there is a space for them to dry their clothes if needed!



# Lessons learned:

## Driving Success in Tourism Marketing.

Create strategic partnerships and engage your audience.

Strategic partnerships with businesses, stakeholders and Destination Management Organisations create opportunities to pool resources and expertise for maximum results.

Adapt your marketing calendar to low season booking patterns to create a distinct tone of voice and identity.

Use feedback from businesses and visitor research to help to shape effective marketing strategies.

Focus group testing will give valuable feedback to help you to refine strategies and improve communication with potential customers.

Identify gaps in your own expertise; working with external experts can be invaluable in shaping and delivering successful marketing strategies.

Good quality photos are crucial for increasing visibility.

Familiarisation trips can play a significant role in campaigns to reach new audiences and improve engagement levels.

Packaging and promoting new products under one overarching campaign will raise awareness and improve the campaign's effectiveness.



## Task 5:

# Adapt your marketing effort to the different value you gain from different customers.

Use your time and resources smartly.

Let's assume that you are the type of business that has a customer database. How do you use it to make marketing decisions? Do you send the same message to everyone, with the same offer, irrespective of the value that customer has to you? If different customer groups have different needs, then surely your marketing needs to be targeted differently too.

Let's assume you can break down your database in the following way:

Group 1. Most valued customers. If you are a cafe or restaurant, they may come weekly. As an accommodation business, they may come two or three times per year. You get the gist. Group 2. Regular customers.

Group 3. Occasional customers.  
Group 4. Once in a lifetime customers.  
Group 5. Enquiries that did not convert into customers.

Your marketing efforts need to be proportional to the value of that customer group and the message you send should be relevant to their last experience with you. Typically, with every group you want them to move up to the higher group, e.g., for those in Group 5, you would like them to buy for the first time (becoming a Group 4 customer) and you may need to offer them a discount to do so. With Group 4 customers, your aim is to get them to visit again (becoming a Group 3 customer) so you will need to tell them that your experience has improved or that there is more to do. And so on.

Try to show your appreciation for Group 1, and market to them sensitively and show that loyalty goes both ways. Rather than trying to get them to buy more from you per se, you can have a personalised and generous offer to encourage them to bring family and friends, or to stay for longer, or to spend more by packaging multiple services.

Your task is to identify which sustainable experiences you are willing to offer to each group to tempt them to book with you next time, based on the principle that the more valuable the group, the more you should be willing to spend to keep them.

# 06

## Monitor and evaluate the benefits you generate.



Visualising the results you want to achieve will help you have the determination to make changes and deliver great benefits for your destination.

We hope you have found the ideas in this manual of use. An investment of your time and effort, and taking the risk to make changes, can bring you worthwhile rewards.

It's now time to decide which changes to implement in your organisation or destination, how to measure these changes, and how you will learn from the process.



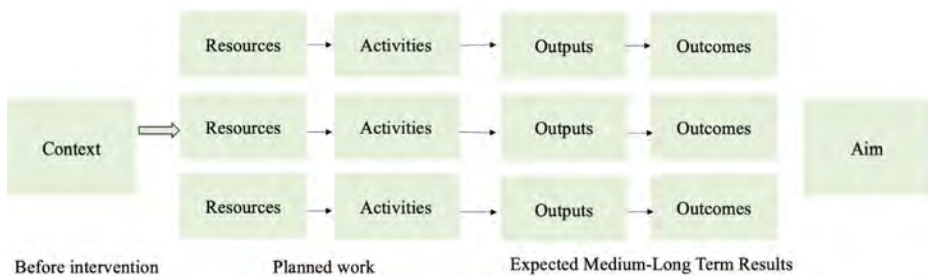
# Plan what impact you are trying to create.

## We designed a shared vision of change and mapped out how project resources and activities would be implemented to achieve desired results.

To evaluate the EXPERIENCE project, we designed a shared vision of change and mapped out how project resources and activities would be implemented to achieve desired results. Theory of Change is a diagram that maps out causal connections between project resources, activities and outcomes. We designed a Theory of Change for EXPERIENCE for two reasons:

- It helped us summarise the project’s overall aim, main activities and outputs into one visual document. This made it easy to communicate the project externally too;
- It helped us monitor change as an ongoing process to ensure that project resources and activities were bringing about expected change.

You don’t have to be delivering a project to apply the Theory of Change. Any business can use a similar principle to map out and monitor desired outcomes. Having conversations at the early stages of project implementation about what success looks like and why project activities would lead to desired change was crucial to determine how we would evidence the wider unseen and unheard project impacts, beyond visitor numbers and trainings delivered.



*Mapping out a clear strategy and deciding early on what success looks like and how to measure it is pivotal not only to ensure a project succeeds in delivering desired change, but more importantly to gather the necessary evidence that proves it!*

In addition to the project-wide Theory of Change, we developed six regional versions, which provided a more contextualised understanding of how EXPERIENCE was being implemented in each project pilot region and was more specific about the resources and activities taking place locally. EXPERIENCE pilot regions used the regional theories of change to inform the project’s regional evaluation reports and to monitor progress of project activities and outputs.



# Improve your economic impacts.

Businesses and destinations alike will benefit from the increased and more regular revenue streams that come from reducing seasonality.

**Serve the needs of your local market.** Generate a new income stream by providing activities and attractions targeted to residents and the day visitor market. They may have different interests and requirements than tourists. Something that can excite a tourist may not be attractive to locals. Then, when you know them better, you will be able to market your products and services to them. In this way, not only you support your local community but can also bring new customers.

**Provide a consistent service.** Extending your season allows your business to set service standards and professionalise its service. Consistency helps you to build a relationship with customers and create a positive experience for them.

**Increase loyalty.** Extending your season will help you to gain more repeat customers as they favour businesses that are reliably open. Being open during low season is a good opportunity to improve your competitiveness and accessibility in comparison to closed rivals.

**Be more creative.** Open in the low season to give yourself the chance to experiment with changes in your products that you might find too risky or time consuming in high season. Low season could be a good time to test and revise your creative ideas using customers' feedback.

**Improve the quality of your service.** Create year-round jobs to give your business the opportunity to retain talented staff and to reduce your recruitment and training costs. The quality of service will be increased as staff have more training and opportunities for development than seasonal employees.

**Maintain your mid-season prices.** Open all year round to able to increase the quality, variety and attractiveness of your offers instead of reducing price, which is time consuming and involves risks. Good quality offers could lead to consumer satisfaction, retention and loyalty even support premium price.



For every new activity, set yourself a main objective that you can easily measure.



# We re-marketed experiences that were better suited to low-season tourism creating a steady income all year.

The Shoebox Experience is a Norwich-based social enterprise (UK).



## What we do:

Located in the vibrant heart of Norwich city centre, our members' hub provides a welcoming space for people to connect, offering a wide range of groups and community spaces. Our vision is to lead the way in creating inspiring, supportive and entrepreneurial solutions to build resilient communities and empower local people to make their mark on the world.

The Shoebox Experiences offers fun and memorable experiences within this historic and unique space to create revenue which we plough back into our hub and supporting community projects.

## How we do it:

Norwich is full of rich history and underneath our hub we have the remains of a hidden medieval street with its 15th century buildings and architecture.

We've been creative in using the 'hidden street' in different ways to generate revenue and give customers an amazing and unique visitor experience.

Guests can make great memories together with a 'Hidden Street Tour', a 'Lantern Light Underground Tour' with just a lantern to lead their way as we weave our way through dark stories from Norwich's history or play a thrilling underground escape game.

Joining the EXPERIENCE training workshops helped us realise the potential of low season business for our experiences. We identified some experiences that are better in the low season, for example our Lantern Light tour is particularly popular over winter, allowing us to make the most of the spooky, cold and dark nights. EXPERIENCE training also helped us rethink how we market our experiences to reach new audiences.



## Our Tips:

Think carefully about your unique selling proposition and which features of your product make attending in Winter better, that way you can attract visitors year-round and ensure a steady revenue stream even in shoulder months.





# Improve your environmental impacts.

## Break down your strategies to lower the impact of your organisation or destination.

### Demand.

- **Target more local markets.** The greatest environmental impact of tourism is often the carbon footprint of their transport to the destination. Off-season tourists are typically more local than high season tourists, so you will naturally do well without much effort.
- **Increase length of stay.** Reduce the carbon footprint per guest/night by promoting an increase in length of stay.
- **Promote public transport.** In some locations, the use of public transport by visitors' low-season subsidises it and guarantees its existence for locals.
- **Promote travelling in larger groups.** Incentivise "full cars", since the carbon impact of travelling two or four people is pretty much the same- tables of four rather than twos in your restaurant, "bring a friend" campaigns for hotel stays...

### Supply.

- **Promote sustainably certified businesses.** Certified businesses typically have a 20% lower than average energy, waste and water footprint.
- **Buy and sell local.** Showcase local suppliers that generate a sense of place, and reduce the food and souvenir miles.
- **Offer carbon-free activities.** Rent bikes, leave bus timetables in every hotel room, provide walking maps from the front door of your establishment, promote walks with pub lunches from the bus stop or rail station... all of which will nudge visitors to leave the car behind.



Every survey says that customers want to be environmentally friendly, but that tourism suppliers need to make it easy, convenient, attractive and competitive for them. Nobody will be sustainable when it's a hassle, of lower quality or less value for money.



# We got a cycle-friendly accreditation to attract more cycle visitors to our social enterprise café.

Ricky Marley is CEO of a Kent-based charity that supports adults with learning disabilities near Canterbury (UK).

### What we do:

The Fifth Trust's day care services are offered at two skills centres at the Elham Valley Vineyard and Barham, located close by each other in an area of outstanding natural beauty.

Through enjoyable and productive work in the local community and in our Vineyard Garden Centre and Vineyard Café, complemented by a broad range of creative and educational activities, our students develop essential life skills and the confidence to make their own choices, both large and small. This approach applies equally to our staff, and we encourage them to develop their own skills and experience.

### How we do it:

To raise additional revenue to fund the quality and breadth of services we seek to deliver, we have developed our own social enterprises.



### Our Tips:

Build infrastructure specifically designed to be accessible to all and resilient to the impacts of climate change where possible.

Choose local suppliers and make sure to include the needs of your residents as well as those of visitors to ensure you maximise impact.



The Vineyard Garden Centre and The Vineyard Café are both limited companies owned by the Trust. We serve homemade meals with vegetables grown in our garden centre and produce only from local suppliers. From our gift show you can buy arts and crafts made by our students and our own sparkling and still wine made from the Vineyard overlooked by the café.

Through EXPERIENCE we have achieved the Cycling UK accreditation of cyclist friendly café. The accreditation and training we received allows us to attract more cycle visitors. Any surplus generated by the two operations is reinvested to support our work with students.

Importantly, both provide work opportunities for students, as well as selling what they make and grow.





# We use video tools to make a protected island accessible.

Bastien Blanc is a project manager at Bretagne Vivante (FR).



## What we do:

Using a simple webcam, we're adding a new dimension to an interpretation trail on the GR34 route. With this device, walkers will be able to access images of Ile aux Dames, in the Bay of Morlaix, to observe the quiet life of a colony of cormorants from the shore.

## How we do it:

Ile aux Dames is one of the islets that make up the Baie de Morlaix ornithological reserve, managed by the Bretagne Vivante association. In partnership with the association and the Conservatoire du littoral, Morlaix Communauté plans to install a webcam on the protected islet. The island is closed to the public between March and August, because of the nesting birds. The camera installed will give visitors and residents a glimpse of the colonies present (cormorants, gulls, egrets, terns, etc.) and their lives.

As well as being a tourist attraction, the camera will also have an educational role in raising public awareness of protected and sometimes fragile species. It will also be used by the Bretagne Vivante association, which will be able to monitor the bird populations on the island without having to visit the site, which can be a source of disturbance for the birds and their chicks.

Outside this nesting period, the camera will be able to turn its attention to the monuments in the Bay, in particular the Château du Taureau, and the setting sun.



## Our Tips:

Your natural heritage is a real asset that should be promoted for tourism development, identify the places that could be promoted in your area.

An interpretation trail that is innovative or different from what is seen elsewhere will capture the attention of visitors and raise their awareness of the issues specific to your area.

Tourists and locals alike will take up the subject and become ambassadors for your region.



# We are moving away from an economic-centred approach to tourism towards a new approach to sustainability.

## Vincent Corre is Tourism Development Officer at Cotes d'Armor Destination (FR).

### What we do:

By integrating the social and environmental dimensions into tourism evaluation through the EXPERIENCE project we're laying the foundations for sustainable tourism by giving a voice to all stakeholders (local people, professionals, tourists, etc.) in a completely transparent way.

### How we do it:

The EXPERIENCE project, which aims to develop experiential tourism in the off-season, limiting its impact on the environment, led us to broaden the fields of evaluation of tourism in the Côtes d'Armor.

To take account of these new dimensions in our evaluation tools, we have worked with the University of Surrey and the partners in the EXPERIENCE project to experiment with new evaluation systems.

We have assessed the impact of tourism on the population (satisfaction of local residents, acceptance of tourism, negative and positive impacts linked to the development of tourist activities, etc.) using surveys of a panel of Breton residents, twice a year, in summer and winter, for 4 years.



### Our Tips:

Have common bases and methods to be able to compare between regions. The analysis tools provided by the University of Surrey and Paul Peeters have given us a better understanding of our activity and its impact. In this way, we can ensure that we make informed decisions that contribute to the sustainability of tourism while respecting local people and future generations.

We measure the satisfaction of users of the tourist services developed as part of EXPERIENCE and in general in the regions. How are the experiences in the Côtes d'Armor perceived? What are their strengths and areas for improvement? To answer these questions, an analysis of online customer reviews was launched in autumn 2022 by specialist consultancy TCI RESEARCH.

Thanks to the sharing of the carbon footprint measurement tool developed by Paul Peeters from the University of Bréda, we were able to estimate the carbon footprint generated by tourism activity in Brittany (travel, accommodation, catering, activities...) and compare it with the other partner destinations in the EXPERIENCE project.





# Improve your social impacts.

## Any plans to disperse tourism need to improve residents' quality of life.

Residents will resist extending the tourist season, if they are unhappy with the impacts that tourism causes in their locality.

### Which residents are most satisfied with tourists?

Research shows that the residents that are most satisfied with tourism in their town are younger, newer to the community, not living in the centre of the tourist destination, with someone in their direct household employed in tourism, and feeling involved in community activities.

- **Be a good neighbour.** Provide meaningful year-round jobs to locals, directly or by buying their goods and services
- **Involve residents in tourist activities.** Give residents a chance to get involved, share their local knowledge with visitors and feel proud of the place they live in.
- **Design spaces and infrastructure to benefit both visitors and locals.** Do not assume that visitors and locals need to inhabit different spaces. Look at your infrastructure and re-evaluate how it can best-serve both. This will keep your residents happy and provide visitors with opportunities to blend in with the locals.
- **Incentivise accessibility.** Offer training sessions that encourage your local businesses and experience providers to rethink accessibility of their offer and how they advertise it. Locals and visitors with different access needs will both benefit from this.



Visitors are increasingly demanding more 'live like a local' day experiences. Working with your residents to design and offer local experiences will increase the authenticity and memorability of your tourism offer. Take the low season as an opportunity to experiment and be creative with the promotion of more personalised experiences.



# We have trained knowledgeable locals into volunteer tour guides.

## North Downs Way Ambassadors Programme (UK).

### What we do:

We trained Ambassadors to deliver engaging, safe, experiential walks. North Downs Way (NDW) Ambassadors provide sustainable walking and experiential tourism activities centred around the 153 mile NDW National Trail. They bring local knowledge and connections, taking visitors beyond simply seeing places but immersing them in the landscape and local life, including food and drink.

### How we do it:

We appointed an expert training delivery partner (Richard Betts from Pied-a-Terre Adventures). We recruited Ambassadors through adverts on social media, Kent Down AONB website and via mail. Over 100 applications were received and 40 were selected based on their interests and skill set.

The Ambassadors attended an initial introductory webinar to learn about the training programme and understand the obligation and commitment of becoming a NDW Ambassador.

A day-long training session followed on how to deliver engaging, safe walks and where ambassadors had the opportunity to network and discuss their unique experiential walking ideas. The training included learning about the history, geography, management, key characteristics, and features of the North Downs Way.



Practical assessments took place at five locations on the NDW. Templates were provided to help the Ambassadors plan their walks and to encouraging them to include special features and cultural highlights. There were also templates for the risk assessments and accessibility. All training material and templates are available as a tool kit. The Ambassadors are listed on the Kent Downs AONB website under “Find a North Downs Way Ambassador”. While some offer walks and experiences as part of their business, others are volunteers offering free walks and participating in events such as walking festivals.



### Our Tips:

Establish a network for the Ambassadors on Facebook and/ or WhatsApp. This gives a platform for discussion, exchange of ideas and requests of help and support. Through this network we showcase what the Ambassadors have been doing thus keeping up the momentum of the programme.



# Lessons learned:

## Effective Measurement and Evaluation Strategies.

Key considerations and practical approaches to measure, analyse, and learn from the EXPERIENCE project outcomes.

Project partners tell us that often you only really know what you want to measure when you finish the project, by which time it is too late.

**Set baseline data.** You need to measure what the situation is like before you start, in a quantifiable way. This needs to be part of your business case to make the investment in your organisation/project. The more substantial the project, the more thorough the data needs to be but even small firms need more than intuition, if you want to eventually measure success.

**What does success look like?** Visualise what you want to change, with a single objective at a time. Trying to achieve too many things that aren't clear from the outset may make you lose focus. Is improving customer satisfaction, increasing volume of repeat sales, or increasing the length of stay of your visitors the priority? Then that's what you will measure, and other aspects of your project become the means to this end.

**Keep measurement simple.** Find the most natural, cost-effective way of measuring success, with data you are already collecting for other purposes. If your organisation already collects financial data on daily takings, or has a people counter on a path, or a machine that issues car parking tickets, then use that as a proxy for your data.

**Estimate.** Use the information you have to estimate how performance will happen elsewhere, or at a different point in time. For example, if you do a survey one week at different times of day to find out how many people use your footpath, and then you install a people counter, combine data from both to get more cost-effective results.

**Transfer your learning.** Talk to organisations/businesses like your own to share lessons on what works, but also what doesn't. You can save each other a lot of time.

For every new activity, set yourself a main goal that you can measure cost-effectively. Ideally, link the project you've developed to improvements in a Key Performance Indicator that is understood and prioritised in your organisation. This will give you a better business case to implement the action, and to monitor the results.



# Task 6:

## Make space to think creatively.

It's time for you to prioritise what you will take away from this guide and use it in your business/organisation.

Before you opened this manual, you already knew many of the things we said, but there's always a reason why you don't get around to do it. We hope that seeing them in black and white, with case studies to inspire you, gives you the motivation to make changes. You know that your organisation will benefit from it, and that you'll get a greater sense of achievement for having done something innovative.

1. Consider the list of objectives below and rank the items from most to least important:
  - Year-round income
  - Better quality of your service
  - Reliably high mid-season prices
  - Consistent service
  - More creative
  - Better customer loyalty
2. Reflect on your work practices. Write down the last innovative things you have done, identify which of the six objectives above these innovations contributed towards, and how successful they were.
3. Now identify one example from the previous case studies that you can adapt to your business to achieve the benefits that matter the most to you. Aim to replicate the easiest example, that requires the least amount of effort.

Only once you've succeeded, move to the second easiest, and so on.

4. Make a list of tasks that you need to do, in order to replicate that example. Write down how long you think each task will take, and whether they are recurring or one off-tasks.
5. Schedule time in your calendar for these tasks, at times that you can clearly protect to do them. Make this a realistic plan to minimise the chances of deviate from it. If you fail to do something once, get back on track and never miss twice.
6. Share your plan with someone else, and it's important that make a commitment to that person that you will stick to your plan, and that they hold you accountable to it. Check in with your "innovation buddy" weekly or monthly, to share your progress.



# Checklist.

## What will you do differently after reading this manual?

We hope the ideas and examples in this manual have made you think. Now it's over to you. Here's a quick memory aid to what we hope you will do differently after reading each of the sections above:

1. Products, make way for experiences.

Which are the senses you have been appealing to? How will you help your customers to engage with your offering with all their senses?

2. Different seasons, different markets.

Have you identified the different types of customers you want to attract and have you understood whether your current offering is adapted to their needs?

3. Appreciate your resources and improve your infrastructure.

Have you researched what resources and activities take place near you, and have you understood how they can be of interest to your customers? Have you adapted your equipments and infrastructure?

4. Let's design innovative experiences.

Have you designed any new experiences that make the most of these local resources, and have you contacted organisations you can collaborate with to deliver them together?

5. Time for marketing and storytelling.

Have you set up a cost-effective marketing plan, learned new skills and set aside time regularly to tell your story?

6. What are the benefits you can expect?

Have you visualised the results that you want to achieve and used this vision as an incentive to keep working?

# Acknowledgements

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