

# A New Strategy for Sustainable Tourism: EXPERIENCE Best Practice Guide

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EUROPEAN UNION  
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Development Fund

Interreg   
France ( Channel  
Manche ) England

EXPERIENCE  
European Regional Development Fund

# Contents

This guide is organised into five strategic themes. Case studies and best practice tips are included to provide insights, learning and impact from across the project. More detailed case studies and advice on developing your own experiences can be found in '*Designing and Marketing Low-Season Tourism Experiences: EXPERIENCE Best Practice Companion Guide*'.

01

Actor engagement & training to meet demand  
p. 11

Case studies p. 12 – 15  
Best practice p. 16



02

An experiential tourism offer using unique natural & cultural assets  
p. 17

Case studies p. 18 – 20  
Best practice p. 21



03

Low season tourism infrastructure  
p.22

Case studies p. 23 – 25  
Best practice p. 26



04

Experiential tourism marketing & distribution  
p. 27

Case studies p. 28 – 30  
Best practice p. 31



05

Evaluating & improving sustainability within a new low season tourism offer  
p.32

Case studies p. 33 – 35  
Best practice p. 36



Introduction to experiential tourism

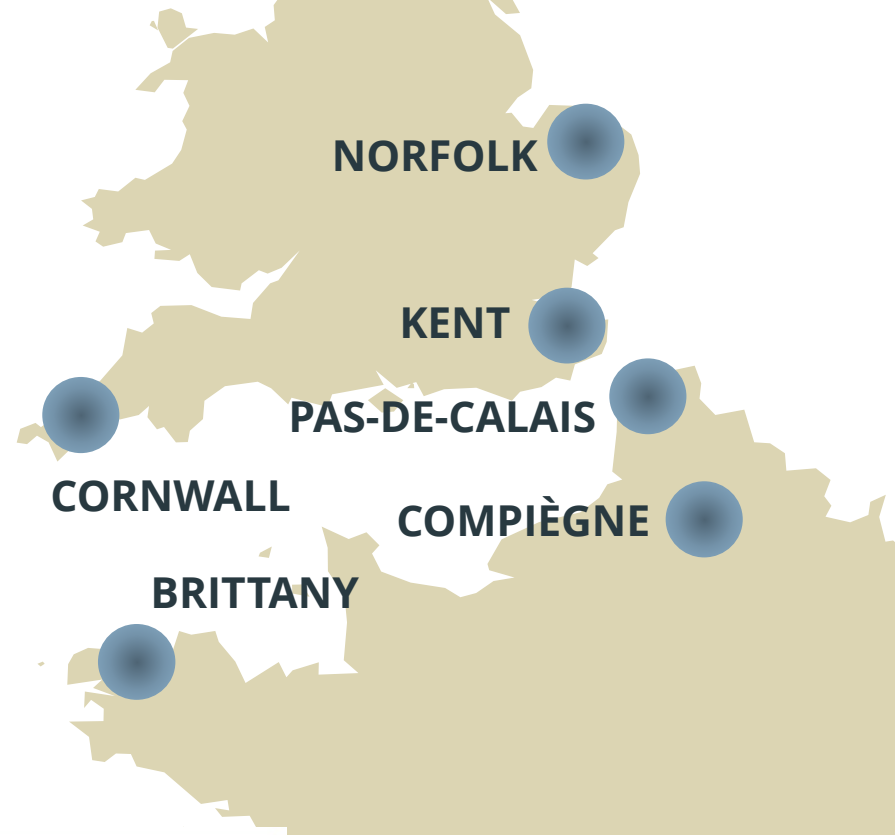
p. 3 – 10

EXPERIENCE project outcomes

p. 37

EXPERIENCE recommendations

p. 38



# 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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A scenic photograph of the Petit Minou Lighthouse in Brittany, France, during a sunset. The lighthouse is a tall, cylindrical stone tower with a red lantern room, situated on a rocky outcrop. A stone bridge with an archway connects the lighthouse to a grassy cliffside. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of orange, pink, and blue. The ocean is visible in the background, and the foreground is dominated by lush green vegetation.

## What is the purpose of this guide?

*We want to share our learning and outcomes to inspire any organisation, region or country that is looking to develop experiential tourism and generate innovative and sustainable growth in their area.*



## Why is a new tourism strategy needed and what will it achieve?

*EXPERIENCE was proposed as a project to address the growing recognition that there were common issues facing tourism in the FCE region and to develop a new and innovative tourism strategy. The EXPERIENCE tourism strategy addresses three issues and sets out a new approach to tourism.*

### Seasonality

- Tourism imbalance with far fewer visitors in the low season.
- Lower visitor spending and high levels of seasonal employment across the sector.
- Visitors did not travel between October – March as there was no tourism offer.
- Infrastructure was not available or adapted for use at this time of year.
- Businesses will not open if there are no tourists.

### Engagement

- Dependent on peak season, destination-based tourism approach.
- Travellers losing interest in mass-market tourism.
- Growing trend towards experiential tourism based on regional uniqueness, authenticity and looking to try something new throughout the year.
- Covid-19 accelerated shift from mass-market locations as visitors began to seek out and demand a new type of tourism.

### Sustainability

- Existing tourism model relied on the consumption of natural and cultural assets.
- Traditional tourism approaches were outdated and potentially damaging to host environments and communities.
- Success of tourism industry was measured by economic impact alone.
- Metrics for environmental and social impact were under-developed and less tracked than those for economic impact.

## Covid-19: Relevance and opportunities

*The pandemic was a pivotal moment across the sector and a catalyst for change. With challenge came the opportunity to re-build the tourism industry using a new model and choose a more sustainable future for our regions.*

Covid-19 represented an unprecedented global health, social and economic emergency which brought the world to a standstill. The first lockdown in March 2020 coincided with the start of the spring tourism season, traditionally marking an increase in visits following the low season (October to March). Widespread travel restrictions and the closure of airports and national borders meant that tourism and the travel trade were the worst affected out of all major economic sectors<sup>1</sup>.

Pre-COVID, travel and tourism contributed 9.2% to Europe's economy<sup>2</sup>. However, in 2020, revenues declined by 47%, causing the contribution to drop to 5.2%. In 2021, the sector rebounded by 28%, with increased spending from international visitors and domestic tourists.

Employment in the sector rose by 1.6 million jobs compared to 2020. The UK had 40% growth rate in travel and tourism, exceeding the overall economy and the European sector. Domestic visitor revenues drove this growth, but travel restrictions and the Omicron variant limited recovery. Inbound arrivals from the USA and France (the UK's two largest source markets in 2019) significantly declined, impacting the UK's tourism.

Three years on since the pandemic, worldwide leisure and business flight bookings have exceeded pre-Covid-19 levels, with around 1.5 billion more passengers flying in 2022 compared to 2021<sup>3</sup>. At their destination, travellers spend more on experiences than souvenirs, 34% above 2019 levels.

Europe's travel and tourism sector is expected to recover rapidly, with a 31.4% growth rate in 2022, nearing pre-pandemic levels by 2023<sup>2</sup>. From 2022 to 2032, the sector is projected to grow at an average annual rate of 3.3%.

The EXPERIENCE tourism strategy offers innovative actions to shape ongoing recovery and growth; to reinvent our model of economic development to be more respectful of people and place. Sustainability and lasting benefit for communities and the environment are central to building a new, improved future and development of a new approach has made a very real and significant impact towards bringing about this change.


<sup>1</sup>UNWTO, 2020; <sup>2</sup>WTC: Travel & Tourism Economic Impact Global Trends 2022; <sup>3</sup>Mastercard Economics Institute, "Travel 2022: Trends and Transitions".

# What is experiential tourism?

*Tourists want active participation in daily life and involvement in host cultures and environments, experiencing local foods, social events, and arts to create vivid and lasting memories.*

Experiential tourism is a new and growing trend as globalisation impacts on the modern tourism industry. Within the FCE region, this new market in underdeveloped and there is opportunity to deliver new economic growth, harnessing this trend to extend the tourism season and bring greater sustainability to regional development.



A photograph of four people sitting on a grassy field, meditating. They are seen from the back, looking towards a bright sunset. The person on the far left is wearing a grey cap and a dark vest over a light blue shirt. The person next to them is wearing a plaid shirt. The person in the center is wearing a yellow top and a red patterned shawl. The person on the far right is wearing a light-colored jacket. The background shows trees and a bright sun low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow.

## Why is experiential tourism important?

*There is increasing demand for high-quality and personalised ways to enjoy new destinations, with deeper connections to people and places.*

Experiential bookings grew by 125% in 2017<sup>1</sup>. This emerging trend is influencing the behaviour of multiple market segments, both domestic and international. Target market profiles are defined by interest – experiential travellers have an ability or desire to travel at different times of year, try new things and place greater importance on ‘to be’ rather than ‘to have’<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>TripAdvisor.com; <sup>2</sup>Treksoft Travel Trend Report, 2018.





## How to deliver experiential tourism

*An experience should aim to stimulate the five senses – **sight**, **hearing**, **touch**, **smell**, and **taste** and arouse positive emotions – **happiness**, **fun**, **surprise**, **joy**, **contentment**. To design such experiences, you need to be clear what you want your customers to experience when they are with you.*

The EXPERIENCE tourism strategy capitalises on a new audience willing to explore outside of traditional tourist destinations by developing new solutions to attract this market and therefore address seasonality and sustainability. This new model is about doing tourism differently and requires a shift in thinking from traditional tourism to being more responsive to the needs and the emotions of visitors or tourists alike.

Equally, EXPERIENCE is about adapting and responding to the urgency of climate change and creating more sustainable options. The focus is on encouraging visitors to explore their local regions and tourists to travel off the beaten track.

# EXPERIENCE identified six distinct challenges to address:

FCE region focused predominantly on traditional, destination-based pre-packaged tourism.

Tourism infrastructure was designed for peak season use and not adapted for or did not maximise potential for use during the low season.

A lack of diversity in tourism actors and targeted support for non-traditional tourism actors and/or traditional tourism actors trying to 'do different'.

FCE region not known for experiential tourism. Assets are underdeveloped or not promoted.

Lack of an inclusive and accessible tourism offer for visitors during the low season.

Focus on economic success, at expense of environmental and social parameters.

OI

## Actor engagement & training to meet demand

*Establish a bottom-up approach, unite traditional and non-traditional actors. Support/enable them to engage in tourism, develop their unique potential, become part of a new strategy.*

Across the pilot regions, we engaged with hundreds of local traditional and atypical actors, providing them with tailored training and support to develop tourism products aimed at the growing experiential and sustainable travel markets.

Uniting actors into networks inspired the creation of low season, experiential themed itineraries, formed from over 1200 activities across the 6 pilot regions.



## Case study 1

*“We united organisations with overlapping interests to develop low season tourism potential through bespoke training and networking events.”*

We organised a series of interactive networking events where local businesses could get peer feedback to help improve their experiential offer and meet with other businesses to explore opportunities for collaboration. 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.

As a local authority, we worked with local Destination Management Organisations to deliver experiential networking events. It was important to use venues that supported sustainable experiential tourism so we could dedicate part of the day

for the owners to host a tour of their venue and share insights about how they developed their low season sustainable experiential products.

An important part of the networking was a Business to Business (B2B) session where businesses were able to present or demonstrate their experience, giving them an opportunity to test and get feedback on their offer. This was followed by group discussions to support improving the current experience: explore targeting new markets, increasing visibility in the marketplace, pricing structures, making the offer more experiential, potential collaboration opportunities, etc.

The networking day was rounded off with a speed-networking session so everyone could speak to fellow businesses / local organisations and have a chance to develop contacts and begin to think about collaboration.

### Top tip

Have B2B sessions integrated into other events you are holding. It does not take long and can be very informal.

It is easy to fall into the trap of holding events in central locations, but it is worth exploring the potential of more rural/remote locations to attract different types of businesses.



## Case study 2

*“We developed unique accommodation on our farm.”*

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 we have been bespoke built by local craftsmen and now allows us to share our unique landscape on the Romney Marsh.

Whilst Romney Marsh Shepherds Huts has benefited from being part of the Produced in Kent initiative, the Interreg 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 do want a bit of hand holding to be able to have the best experience during their stay. For example, the Marsh Safaris visitors are able to 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 together to provide unique insights to our visitors that leave them with great memories.

### Top tip

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



## Case study 3

*“We offer a well-being break in the countryside in favour of a more sustainable tourism.”*

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

The estate is also a lively place of exchange as I work with local craftsmen and actors to offer various workshops: local and eco-responsible products, cocooning workshops, beauty advice, training, local shopping, sustainable food, etc.

I developed my business in the context of the pandemic and I felt alone in my project. Thanks to the Interreg EXPERIENCE project, I was able to register for training courses. They allowed me to exchange with other service providers and to improve my skills. For example, I updated my website and improved my photos.



### Top tip

Take every opportunity to attend training and meetings organised in your area (for example by the Tourist Offices or Chambers of Commerce and Industry). The advice, support and new perspectives for development you gain is worth your time.



## Case study 4

*“We diversified the type of clients we get through becoming visibly cycling friendly.”*

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.

Through the one-to-one support from the Interreg 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 use live storytelling so that visitors can learn about our local history.

### Top tip

Cyclists can travel all-year round. Don't hesitate to add information on your website so cyclists 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!



Cyclists welcome at The Locks Inn Community Pub | Norfolk, UK

A group of people, including a woman in a white jacket and a man in a suit, are engaged in conversation at what appears to be a networking event or conference. In the foreground, there are several bowls of food, including a salad and a bowl of dips. The background shows other attendees and a sign that partially reads "MODERN GOLD IS NOT TO".

## Best practice

Identifying and engaging with local organisations that already have good local connections to help strengthen new or existing networks and enhance impact.

Invest time to understand the needs and skills gaps of your businesses and use this to inform your training programme. A business training expert can support the process from skills analysis to delivery.

It is useful for businesses to hear success stories from other businesses or external experts about their approach to sustainability. Make sure these are examples that local stakeholders can identify with.

Provide training materials in variety of formats (bite-sized videos, toolkits, presentations, etc) to help reach more people.

Consider the accessibility of your training. An evening session or online training could allow people with carer responsibilities, or those in full time employment, to attend a workshop.



# O2

## An experiential tourism offer using unique natural & cultural assets

*Create a new approach to tourism based on a defined regional identity and developing authentic experiential tourism products.*

The FCE region had abundant low season assets that were not being used to their full potential: experiential tourism is a recognised way to use those assets and increase low season visitors. The new strategy uses the special characteristics of each pilot region to develop experiences that can capitalise on the growth in experiential tourism and attract experiential visitors during the low season.

Visitors are looking for unusual, interactive experiences and authentic insight into a daily life different to their own. New tourism products must feel genuine, unique and immersive to attract visitors October – March. Through a bottom-up approach we worked with both traditional and atypical actors understand and recognise regional strengths, opportunities and challenges. We will develop unique activities and events that would bring low season landscapes and culture alive.

These new activities were packaged into themed itineraries (e.g. Forest Magic; Vitamin Sea; Eco-Explorer) to target different interest groups and create different options for length of stay. Itineraries are showcased on bespoke platforms in each region, giving the visitor the option to choose a ready-made itinerary or to create their own by selecting from the hundreds of activities on offer.

Ongoing collaboration alongside feedback from stakeholders and the public throughout the project allowed us to apply ongoing learning to each pilot region, working with local networks to drive innovation in the new tourism offer and develop new, competitive and sustainable tourism activities.



## Case study 5

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

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

Following an excursion with an expert guide in the Compiègne forest, we decided to explore the idea of creating excursions that would highlight the unique discoveries that can be made in our local natural environment during the low season.

The forest of Compiègne, the fourth largest forest in France, is a real treasure trove of biodiversity just

waiting to be discovered and interpreted in a playful way. The range of experiences that we offer goes from "forest bathing with friends" to "botanical treasure hunting with the family" to "discovering the culinary flavours of wild plants".

With each season offering a specific set of accessible wild plants and unique surroundings in which to set different experiences, the forest offers a wealth of opportunities perfectly aligned with our desires to return to a deeper connection with, and understanding of, nature. By highlighting the particularities 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" excursion, we provide a guidebook with plant cards to help them in their research, with a few blank pages at the end to record the guidebook's "secret" recipes.

### Top tip

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



## Case study 6

*“We adapted our experience to make it accessible.”*

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.

Extensive restoration of the site has taken place since it reopened as a museum in 1993. 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.

### Top tip

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.



## Case study 7

*“We make our site accessible to all thanks to new arrangements to our unusual accommodation.”*

Domaine de Treuscoat has an experiential offer that focuses on accessibility from a mobility, intergenerational and inclusive perspective. Our offer allows visitors on any budget to enjoy our site and activities. Our leisure facilities and unusual accommodation offer an exceptional setting in a preserved environment accessible to all.

From the outset, our guiding principle was to operate the estate in a sustainable manner. By developing the potential of these 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 the Covid-19 lockdowns to raise investment in accommodation and accessibility of the park. Since its opening, the Tourist Office of the Bay of Morlaix has supported us and advised us on the development of infrastructures so that they are compatible with a range of disabilities, to acquire the Tourism and Disability label in the future.

During lockdown we identified opportunities to develop new and varied activities that could be enjoyed by all. For example, signposted interpretation trails, horse-drawn carriage rides and mini-golf.

Our inclusive approach is reflected in our pricing policy by offering accommodation with leisure rates for seniors, people with reduced mobility and students as well as an annual pass for local residents.

With the implementation of these 3 approaches: accessibility, intergeneration and inclusiveness, the take up of activities has tripled and we are already seeing an exceptional customer return rate.

### Top tip

Anticipate accessibility requirements at the start of project development. This will help avoid the need for expensive changes later on.



## Best practice

Work in partnership with other local stakeholders to pool experience, expertise, and resources for more impactful experiential tourism development.

Set clear assessment criteria to ensure that your new sustainable and experiential offers align with your tourism strategy.

Be prepared to invest focussed 1-2-1 support and resources when helping businesses to adopt a sustainable approach to experiential tourism.

To create a truly inclusive offer and keep costs low for your visitors, experiential tourism should be a mix of paid and free activities.

A mix of activities marketed in clusters, gives people options to stop and spend more time in a particular area.

Create itineraries across a range of themes and locations to create broad appeal and ensure there is something for everyone in your offer.

# 03

## Low season tourism infrastructure

*Tourism infrastructure goes beyond car parks and gift shops.*

Place-making infrastructure combining functionality with iconic design can become a tourism attraction in its own right. Capitalising on regional assets increases desire to visit, work and live in the area. It leverages the power of natural and cultural assets to build character and quality of place to drive transformative economic growth. Isolated, scattered or poorly conceived infrastructure works will not meet visitor expectations.

Place-making is not just about creating new infrastructure. Upgrading existing assets to provide inclusive access will add value and interest to existing facilities.

This innovative place-making approach is integral to the new tourism strategy and successful FCE region season extension. Infrastructure holds the power to bring nature and culture alive and within reach of many.



*“Radius”* by James Tunnard. Sculpted bench engraved with local poems | Kent, UK

## Case study 8

*“We invest in our local heritage to provide our visitors with an extraordinary experience.”*

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

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" accommodation options, one in the lighthouse keeper's house on Île Louët and the other in the former school on Île Callot.

Today, it takes only 8 minutes for these to be booked up after reservations open. We wanted to

replicate these successful models in the lighthouse on the Île Noire, which is still operational.

By restoring the Île Noire lighthouse, Morlaix Communauté and the Community Tourist Office will offer a unique visitor experience right in the middle of Morlaix Bay. An old building, a terrace with a breathtaking view of the Château du Taureau and the sea, with only oyster farmers and nesting birds as neighbours.

The site will become energy self-sufficient thanks to the installation of photovoltaic panels and a wind turbine. A water de-salinator will allow the recovery of sea water for the bathroom and an innovative sanitation system will be installed.

Visitors to the Île Noire will have the opportunity to participate in the monitoring of the bay's bird populations, using the binoculars and naturalist's notebook provided. Information on the local flora and fauna will also be available to visitors to raise awareness about the fragile ecosystem in and around the bay.

### Top tip

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

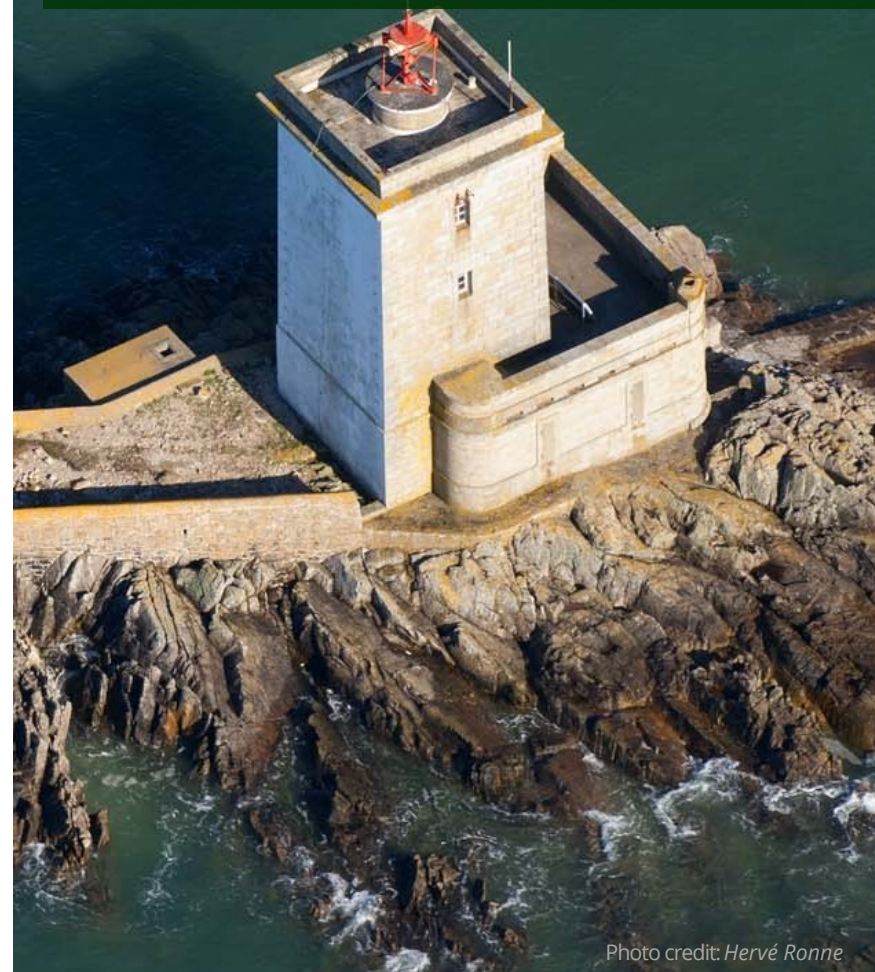


Photo credit: Hervé Ronne

## Case study 9

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

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

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. This enchanting phenomenon is rarely seen,

but is occasionally uncovered at very low tides. Each sculpture was tailor-made to support the measurements and poses of over 600 residents who contributed ideas on how they would like to sit or stand whilst pausing along the coastal path.

To create long-lasting place-making, as part of the art commission, the artist ran an ambitious engagement programme within the local community, including talks, open studio events, foraging and woodworking workshops.

Contributors to the designs included residents, students, community groups and individuals who responded through an open call. Once installed, each participant was sent a map with a number showing the location of ‘their’ sculpture along the trail.

Our unique approach has ensured the artwork’s long-lasting legacy and created a sense of ownership within the local community.

## Top 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.



Photo credits: Mike Newman



## Case study 10

*“We upgraded a 9-mile path to encourage sustainable travel, provide access to nature, and link businesses with customers.”*

As outlined in our current six-year business plan, “Together for Norfolk”, we effect an approach to Norfolk’s economic development that is socially inclusive, innovative, and sustainable. In doing so, we continue to ensure that the distinctive Norfolk environment is cared for and explore new ways to make our countryside as accessible as possible, whilst respecting the sensitivities around certain natural landscapes and sites.

The EXPERIENCE refurbishment of the Bure Valley Path (managed by Norfolk County Council on behalf of Broadland District Council) delivers improved accessibility to The Broads and encourages sustainable forms of travel for residents and

tourists alike, contributing to the council’s plans to cut carbon emissions and support nature recovery.

The team has extensive knowledge of the route and worked closely with EXPERIENCE to ensure funds were used in areas that would provide most benefit to the public and local businesses. We worked in collaboration with local organisations and businesses to widen and resurface the path, add railway heritage features, and introduce planting to support habitat creation to promote environmental net gain within Norfolk’s natural capital assets.

The refurbishment delivers on many of Norfolk’s Environmental Policy key goals advocating sustainable travel and connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing, as well as supporting the Norfolk Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Plan to link people to jobs, homes, local amenities and connect business with customers.

*“These improvements will entice more visitors to The Broads and showcase the railway heritage of the Bure Valley Railway. Developing new experiences draws in visitors all year round and extending choices for attractive nature walks or cycling can help avoid the overcrowding at some of the more popular tourism spots at busy times of the year. This type of sustainable tourist offer, for both local people and visitors to our lovely county, will help to support Norfolk businesses and contribute to our ambitious target of becoming carbon neutral as an authority by 2030.”*

*Councillor Lana Hemsall, NCC Member Champion for Sustainable Transport*



## Best practice

Infrastructure improvements are an opportunity to simultaneously enhance biodiversity and local nature recovery efforts and could serve as a template for similar schemes in the future.

Reaching local communities/underrepresented artists early on, through surveys and focus groups, helps shape the vision for infrastructure projects.

Early commissioning of local experts and groups brings valuable project management support and sets a solid foundation for works when implementing infrastructure projects.

Consider how you can make artist procurement more inclusive to reach new or underrepresented artists. Allowing multimedia submissions generates fantastic responses from artists.

Contribute to a circular economy by utilising local skills, materials, and businesses when creating diverse structural enhancements and interventions.

# 04

## Experiential tourism marketing & distribution

*Branding and marketing are central to creating sense of place and changing the way visitors interact with their destination.*

Today's travellers are searching for travel inspiration online and strong marketing is key to drive successful season extension using experiential tourism. The strategy moves away from traditional techniques of promoting isolated activities or locations with stock photos to sell an experience. Engaging, creative, and interactive digital content and events deliver a message that customers are interested in.

A demand-driven digital presence using social media platforms and impactful storytelling campaigns will promote the experiences of a region (not destinations). The use of emotive imagery and strong content rather than lengthy text communicates a sense of place.

Regular review and refresh of directed marketing campaigns will engage the right audiences at the right time; on the right channel; with the right message.



Photo credit: Zain Lambat

'Muslim Hikers Coastal Trek' award winning marketing campaign for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, The Travel Marketing Awards 2023 | Kent Downs, UK

## Case study II

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

We offer a range of sailing and historic cruiser experiences as well as ‘Learn to Sail’ holidays in the Broads National Park. We needed to find ways to generate additional income to extend our current fleet and finance refurbishment of a new 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 redesigned our summer experience of afternoon cream tea and adapted it to the cold winter months. We embraced what comes with the autumn and winter (the cold, wind and rain) but also its cosiness, the beautiful landscape and wildlife

that are unique in these seasons. We turned these into features to offer a warming experience, including mulled wine and afternoon tea in a heated cruiser cabin.

We also worked on our imagery with a local photographer who took pictures that depict colder weather, showing people in woollen jumpers and winter hats to reflect a low season feeling.

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.

### Top tip

Ensure your marketing reflects the autumn/winter so visitors can identify with the experience they are about to book on to.



Afternoon tea aboard a cruiser with Eastwood Whelpton | Norfolk, UK

## Case study 12

*“We adapted our existing product to fit a different coastal area of Cornwall.”*

The Rock Pool project is a not-for-profit community interest company (CIC), passionate about connecting people of all ages and backgrounds to the incredible wildlife found around our coastline. We currently run our rockpool safaris in Falmouth and Plymouth and have been looking to expand our offer to attract new customers in another coastal location in Cornwall.

The support from EXPERIENCE allowed us to adapt our offer, connect with other businesses and develop new activities.

We took part in a product testing session to create a new or adapted experience. As part of this session, we discussed initial obstacles to setting

up the safari in a new location, one major challenge being to obtain the necessary permissions.

We gained permission to test out the session at The Great Hogus Reef, in Mounts Bay. Home to an ancient underwater volcano, this unique site is accessible at low tide on Marazion beach. We were then ready to invite local businesses and individuals to test this new rockpool safari,

giving valuable consumer feedback that would help us adapt and enhance the offer.

### Top tip

If you want to expand your business in a new location, seek out the local networks. By engaging with these groups, you will create new partnerships and collaborations. Facilitate those contacts early to establish good working relationships with landowners and other businesses close by.



## Case study 13

*“We adopted an influencer-based marketing strategy.”*

Thanks to the Interreg 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.

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, EXPERIENCE also enabled us to work with a number of influencers on social media. From there we created itineraries, using all of the 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 strategy has been hugely impactful. Our feature content is now the most viewed area of the Visit Kent website, with 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, because the content has been targeted to their needs and wants at a particular time.

### Top tip

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.



Photo credit:  @gid.aboutkent

## Best practice

Initial research is useful to understand the interests and expectations of low season experiential tourism market segments and ensure new tourism products meet consumer demand.

Widen the reach of your public engagement by getting your networks to disseminate through their distribution lists.

You are embarking on new approach to tourism so make sure you engage the right expertise to ensure your marketing strategy and offer aligns with the sustainability ethos.

Encourage visitors to explore less traditionally popular areas by showcasing tourism products that benefit local suppliers and producers.

Provide as much information as possible in your marketing so visitors can make informed decisions about whether an experience meets their particular accessibility needs.

The use of social media, vlogs, travel podcasts to create awareness and pre-visit interest will reach wide and diverse target audiences.

# 05

## Evaluating & improving sustainability within a new low season tourism offer

*Resilient and thriving economies, environments and societies are intertwined. It is not possible to have robust economic growth without thriving environments and communities.*

The strategy takes a new approach to measuring the success of the tourism industry, developing key performance indicators to measure economic, environmental, and social sustainability performance.

Regular analyses of evaluation data inform decision-making to work towards long-term benefit that avoids the over-exploitation of regional assets rather than short-term gain associated with destination-based tourism approaches. Visitor numbers alone do not indicate sustainability, lasting impact, or value for money. True sustainability must benefit economy, environment, and society.





## Case study 14

*“We assembled diverse partnerships to create an event that enticed thousands of visitors into the city, boosting local investment during the low season.”*

Our vision to bring people together, attract low season visitors, nurture the evening economy, and create an experiential activity for locals and visitors aligned with EXPERIENCE objectives. To deliver a festival of this scale we worked with local authorities, retail, businesses, educational, community and cultural organisations, enabling engagement with wide audiences throughout the region.

We organised a trail of light installations, light and fire performances and community engagement projects – a commercial offer to stimulate the evening economy. We concentrated on sustainability and environmental impacts, important themes for our next festival in 2024.

We featured 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”.

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.

*“First time we’d been out for an event in the city since the pandemic began. We don’t live in Norwich and came especially. Loved the buzz and variety of the installations and events.”*

*Visitor, Love light 2022 Survey*

*“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. 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.”*

*Fiona Roberts, Creative Lead and Project Manager for Love Light Norwich*



## Case study 15

*“We use video tools to make a protected island accessible.”*

Thanks to a simple webcam, we give a new dimension to a long distance hiking path, the GR34 route between Mont-Saint-Michel and Saint-Nazaire. With this device, hikers will be able to access images of the Île aux Dames, in the Bay of Morlaix, to observe the quiet life of a colony of cormorants from the coast.

Île aux Dames is one of the islets that make up the ornithological reserve of the Bay of Morlaix, managed by the association Bretagne Vivante. In partnership with them 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, due to breeding birds in the middle of their nesting period, so the installed camera will give visitors and residents the opportunity to see the colonies in a natural setting (cormorants, gulls, egrets, terns, etc.).

As well as offering people a glimpse of the secret life of birds, the camera has an educational role, and will improve awareness of protected and sometimes fragile species. It will also be used by the Bretagne Vivante association to monitor the bird populations present on the island without having to physically visit, which can be a source of disturbance for the birds and their chicks.

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

### Top tip

Your natural heritage is a real asset that should be valued for tourism development, so identify the places that could be valued in your area. An interpretive trail that is innovative or different from what can be seen elsewhere will capture the attention of visitors and make them aware of issues specific to your area.



Photo credit: Yvon Créau

## Case study 16

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

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, productive work in the local community, the 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.

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

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 shop 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.

### Top tip

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. 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 Fifth Trust supports adults with learning disabilities | Kent, UK

## Best practice

Define key performance indicators (KPIs) that give a value to compare against current performance. Collect, manage, and analyse data to monitor, evaluate and learn.

Be clear about data needed to evaluate the success of your tourism approach. What can be measured? How will data be collected? How will you use this information?

Investing in talent or external consultants will make sense of your data and provide specialist knowledge of different/comparative data across the tourism sector.

Improve economic impacts by serving the needs of local markets by providing offer targeted to residents and day visitors. Gain loyalty through consistent, reliable service.

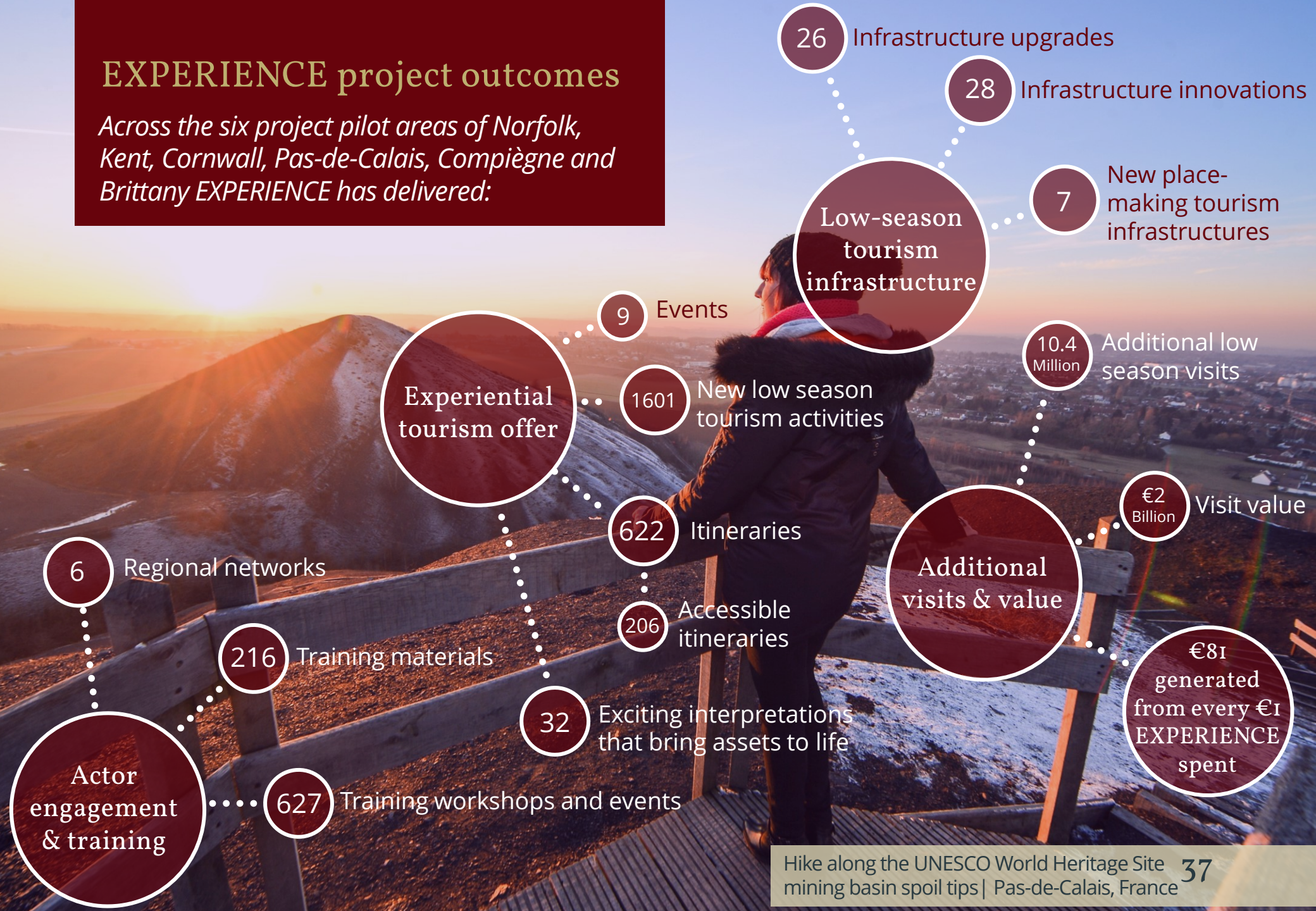
Improve environmental impacts by reducing carbon – buy and sell locally, promote low carbon travel, offer carbon-free activities.

Improve social impacts by designing activities, space and infrastructure to benefit visitors and locals and survey regularly to monitor that tourism offer satisfies demand.

Photo credit: A. Lamoureux

# EXPERIENCE project outcomes

Across the six project pilot areas of Norfolk, Kent, Cornwall, Pas-de-Calais, Compiègne and Brittany EXPERIENCE has delivered:



Low-season tourism infrastructure

26 Infrastructure upgrades

28 Infrastructure innovations

7 New place-making tourism infrastructures

10.4 Million Additional low season visits

€2 Billion Visit value

Additional visits & value

€81 generated from every €1 EXPERIENCE spent

Experiential tourism offer

9 Events

1601 New low season tourism activities

622 Itineraries

206 Accessible itineraries

32 Exciting interpretations that bring assets to life

6 Regional networks

216 Training materials

Actor engagement & training

627 Training workshops and events

## EXPERIENCE recommendations

Based on data analysis collected during this project in all six pilot regions, policymakers and Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) can design better policies for a more sustainable tourism offer in both low and high tourism seasons. Some recommendations that emanate from this analysis propose:

Overall, policymakers and DMOs should prioritise the well-being of local communities and the environment when developing tourism policies and strategies. By promoting sustainable tourism practices and engaging with local residents, tourism can continue to provide economic and social benefits while minimising its negative impacts.

### Develop a comprehensive tourism plan...

...that includes strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism while maximising its benefits. This plan should be developed with input from local residents and other local stakeholders to ensure that their needs and concerns are taken into account.

### Promote responsible tourism practices...

...among tourists, such as reducing waste, conserving water and energy, and respecting local customs and traditions. This can be achieved through public awareness campaigns, educational programs, and regulations.

### Diversify the tourism offerings...

... to attract different types of tourists, such as cultural tourists, nature enthusiasts, and adventure seekers. This can help reduce the pressure on popular tourist destinations and spread the economic benefits of tourism to other areas, especially during the low tourism season.

### Invest in infrastructure and services...

...to support sustainable tourism, such as public transportation, waste management facilities, and visitor centres. This can help reduce the negative impacts of tourism, reduce carbon footprint, and mitigate the effects of tourism on the environment and local communities.

### Balance tourism development in low and high seasons...

...to reduce the negative impacts of over tourism in peak seasons and to support the local economy throughout the year. This can be achieved by promoting tourism activities that are more seasonal in nature, such as skiing in the winter and hiking and cycling in the summer.

# Acknowledgements

More detailed case studies and advice on developing your own experiences can be found in 'Designing and Marketing Low Season Tourism Experiences: EXPERIENCE Best Practice Companion Guide'.

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- Cornwall Council
- Cycling UK
- L'Office National des Forêts
- Morlaix Communauté
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