

Experiential Tourism

A business toolkit to help you develop
an Experiential Tourism product

EXPERIENCE
WEST SUSSEX

All on Board

Develop an Experiential Tourism product

Forget what you think you know about selling tourism. Experiential Tourism is not about products, services or packages. It's about participation, connection and long-lasting memories. It's about authentically engaging with a place through the local people and stories.

West Sussex is perfectly positioned for the Experiential Tourism market. *"It has a wealth of stories to tell, interesting characters to meet, landscapes to explore, food and drink to taste and a myriad of wildlife to encounter,"* says Jo Williams, Experience West Sussex's Partnership Manager. *"In short, Sussex is ripe for the development of immersive experiences."*

But what is Experiential Tourism? It's a unique and compelling visitor experience usually made of four key components: resources, products, services and local stories and people. These components are tied together by a story that runs through all parts of the experience, elevating it above a traditional package or bundle.

The greater the differentiation of the experience, the higher the price. For example, a vineyard selling its grapes as bottled wine turns a higher profit than simply selling grapes. Add in wine tastings and the yield increases again. But if that vineyard introduces visitors to the winemaker on a behind-the-scenes tour and teaches them to pair wine with food, it's creating an experience that's unique, real, memorable and worth a great deal more – to the vineyard and to visitors.

This is a great time to get involved with Experiential Tourism, which has been on the rise for some time. As tourism business advisor, experience maker and founder of Unmissable England Chris Brant notes, *"I've seen a change before Covid-19 and as we come out of lockdown in the types of activities both domestic and inbound visitors are now looking for. Visitors want to get beneath the surface of a place, connect with local people, hear their stories and have a hands-on adventure."*

This toolkit is largely based on an experience development workshop held by Experience West Sussex with Chris Brant from Unmissable England in early 2021.

Experiential Tourism is about telling a story that forges connections, engagement and memories tied to a place.

Case study



It's a case of collaborating

Anya Frampton of Mulberry Marine Experiences devised a green-and-blue ecology-themed experience. Five businesses collaborate to make it work.

Day 1 takes place in Selsey, with a Mulberry Marine Ecology Activity Walk in the morning and a Mulberry Marine Snorkel Session in the afternoon. Lunch is by Potters, a local family-run business specialising in locally and sustainably caught crab and lobster.

"The story was that local fisherman are as endangered as some of our marine life – they face misunderstanding and often get grouped in the same lot as the big super trawlers. Including them allows people to see and sample sustainable produce and learn about Selsey's rich fishing heritage."

"The whole day is designed to let people experience marine ecology, the ocean, have fun and hopefully take a new perspective away with them," says Anya.

On Day 2, Marmalade MTB picks up visitors by minibus and bike trailer for a full day guided mountain bike ride on the South Downs.



The key components of a tourism experience in West Sussex

1

Resources

Resources are the unique places visitors can go, and West Sussex is packed with them. Outdoor spaces such as the South Downs AONB and RSPB Pagham Harbour. A coastline scalloped with beautiful beaches from West Wittering to Worthing. A string of award-winning gardens. The network of cycle routes. Heritage gems such as Arundel Castle, Cissbury Ring and Standen House and Gardens. An historic city and charming towns and villages steeped in stories. We could go on!

2

Local stories and people

Local stories and people are an important part of what makes an experience unique. Authentic interactions with local people and the stories that flow from them are invaluable in creating those unforgettable 'wow' moments. Think Selsey's fishing heritage, the county's respected winemakers and brewers, ancient landowning families and West Sussex's welcoming pro watersports community.

3

Products

Products are the places to stay, eat, drink and the individual activities that make up a visit. West Sussex has a glorious range, encompassing Goodwood, Butlins, glamping and camping; vegan cafes, luxury restaurants, friendly pubs and familiar high street chains; boat trips, kitesurfing lessons and falcon handling sessions.

4

Services

Services are the nuts and bolts of the tourism industry: the public transport infrastructure, equipment hire, tour guides and bike hire. These need to run smoothly so the rest of the experience can be as memorable as possible.

4

Experiential Tourism

Who's your audience?



Before you develop, price and take to market your experience, you need a clear picture of your audience.

Who do you want to book your experience? Domestic or international visitors? If international, the North American market, European or elsewhere? Your answer will have a *big* impact on lead-in times, price points and pre-existing knowledge of the area. Private groups, mixed groups, families or groups of individuals? How is your intended audience most likely to book?

Will your story appeal to the audience you're targeting? VisitEngland has some useful research on England visitor segmentation.

VisitBritain travel research from 2019 showed that 65% of the UK domestic market book an experience before leaving home. We know that international visitors book online in advance too. These figures are from 2019, but as the pandemic makes pre-booking standard practice, it's more important than ever that your experience is bookable online.

Breakout ideas



Experiential West Sussex

The experience development workshop included a breakout session to identify some of the things that help make West Sussex unique.

Participants were asked to talk about the county's expected and unexpected stories and discuss how to tell a relevant story using three elements: people, places and activities.

To help inspire your story, here are 5 of West Sussex's unexpected stories pinpointed during the workshop:

1. The forest around Horsham had the last dragon in England!
2. The world-class watersports activities and community, and the unique view of the South Downs from the sea
3. Selsey's fishing heritage
4. Fishbourne Roman Palace has Britain's earliest example of a formal/landscaped garden; it was created by the Romans
5. The chance to have an adventure in nature within easy reach of London, perhaps amid the rewilding at Knepp

How to start

Start with the story, an overarching theme that unites every part of the experience. Like any decent story, a brilliant experience needs a beginning, a middle and an end. There should be anticipation, unexpected plot twists, memorable moments and likeable characters.

An introduction – to the story, to the guide, to each other and to what visitors can expect from the experience – is a good beginning. In the middle could be one or more hands-on activities and some

local food and drink. The more multi-sensory you can make it, the more memorable the experience will be. Wrap it up in a suitable place, perhaps over a pint in a quintessential pub or a noteworthy beauty spot. A small, relevant keepsake is a lovely full stop to the experience. It doesn't have to be much. A cocktail recipe card if it's a gin-themed experience or a painted stone from a beach to remind visitors of their first kitesurfing experience, for example.

Keep up the narrative throughout the experience. The places you go, the people you meet, the activities you

HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT?

Like any good story, a brilliant experience needs a beginning, a middle and an end.



MAKE IT MEMORABLE

Top tips



Include at least two Instagrammable moments tied to the story. It's great for peer-to-peer marketing.



Incorporate something a visitor can't do by themselves, such as a behind-the-scenes tour.



The story is everything but don't overcrowd the experience. You'll risk overwhelming your visitors.



Before you go to market, be a guest on other and your own experiences.



Access is important. Comfortable and reliable transport helps create the space for magical memories to form.



Make sure *all* elements are included in the cost. No hidden extras mean no awkward moments.

Marketing Magic



How to take your experience to market.

You could simply place your experience on your website but you'll reach more potential visitors through one or more of the following options:

- Online travel agents (OTAs) are online marketplaces that aggregate and market experiences. They can be international, such as TripAdvisor Experiences and Airbnb, or more localised and specialised, such as Unmissable England.
- Experience West Sussex, your area's destination management organisation (DMO), will list your experience and promote it to VisitEngland, VisitBritain, regional and national media, and direct to consumers, for free.
- It's also worth investigating business-to-business distribution platforms such as Beyonk and TXGB.
- Smaller business may want to look at more niche booking and management systems, such as eola, which is popular with adventure sports operators.

Each route to market has pros and cons, so consider which is best placed to reach the people you want to book your experience. OTAs will take around 10% to 25% of the guest price but try to think of any costs as part of your marketing budget.

When writing your marketing materials, list every single item that comes with the experience – apart from a few. A (good) surprise or two will make your experience even more memorable.

Find out more

[!\[\]\(bd3b31712ad9bab5a241210fa6925cdd_img.jpg\) Watch the original Experience Development Workshop recording](#)

[!\[\]\(0fb13ad0bfa3d86868cdd3883e5665b3_img.jpg\) Unmissable England](#)

[!\[\]\(799877f5c2f906134441300079881630_img.jpg\) Experience West Sussex's 'Understanding your local DMO and what it can do for you' toolkit](#)

[!\[\]\(41aea2746216b27a6939d696d8e035da_img.jpg\) VisitEngland's visitor segmentation information](#)

[!\[\]\(7bc43b319a082987e20f7bf78f4bab80_img.jpg\) Experience West Sussex's Grow your tourism business toolkit, for collaborating to create memorable visitor experiences and grow your tourism business](#)

[!\[\]\(e50091943b385fe16d3277389202856f_img.jpg\) Coastal Tourism Academy, for in-depth information on taking your experience to market and checklists](#)