



THE ENGLISH NATIONAL PARK EXPERIENCE COLLECTION

*A guide to developing memorable
and authentic visitor experiences*



**The English National Park
Experience Collection**

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VISITORS TO ENGLAND'S NATIONAL PARKS ARE LOOKING FOR AUTHENTIC AND QUALITY EXPERIENCES

Our National Parks represent the pinnacle of landscape and natural environment in England, with the highest level of environmental protection.

Unlike National Parks elsewhere in the world, England's National Parks are living working communities with shared histories, cultures and traditions. They represent the pinnacle of landscape and natural environment in England, with the highest levels of environmental protection.

The English National Park Experience Collection has been designed to attract overseas consumers, initially from Australia and Germany. The Experience Collection can only be appreciated from within the National Park landscapes allowing visitors to delve deeper into rural English life and connect with local people, history, culture, food and drink. The Collection harnesses our diverse and quintessentially English National Parks to create a persuasive proposition that will be marketed to the travel trade giving visitors a distinctive and compelling reason to visit.

Authentic visitor experiences are an opportunity for tourism businesses to go beyond delivering conventional tourism products based on goods and services. This means rethinking the traditional approach and offering visitors immersive experiences to connect with places and gain a deeper understanding of where they are visiting.

How can this toolkit help your business?

This toolkit is a resource created to give you ideas about how to develop, deliver and promote new and memorable visitor experiences. This toolkit will enable you to create business opportunities from the current market trend for experiential travel.

It provides you with information on:

- how you can adopt the National Park Experience Collection style for your marketing activities
- how to move from selling tourism products to providing engaging and memorable experiences
- tips on promoting your experiences



WHAT IS AN 'EXPERIENCE'?

An 'experience' actively involves visitors so they can feel special and have the opportunity to engage with local culture and connect with a place and its people.

Experiential tourism is about three main elements: the people, the place and the activity. Experiences should be unique and individual for each visitor, matching their interests, providing a sense of personal achievement and creating their own lasting memories.

Contemporary travellers increasingly want to do more than simply 'see' a place; it's about what they did while they were there; they want to live it, breathe it, touch it, become part of it. Visitors want to learn how to do new things and to be immersed in cultural activities, interact with local people and actively participate in local life wherever and whenever they can.

The Rise of Experiential Travel:

A recent study by Skift and Peak Adventure Travel Group "The Rise of Experiential Travel" highlighted a rising demand from consumers for more authentic and engaging travel experiences. Top travel brands are developing their services to answer that demand, and that's driving the evolution of adventure / active travel and interest in local cultural immersion.

The report proclaimed that "arguably the most significant, systemic trend in worldwide tourism today is the demand for experiential travel".

THE ENGLISH NATIONAL PARK EXPERIENCE COLLECTION

The English National Park Experience Collection offers exceptional experiences in our most outstanding landscapes. It will strengthen English National Parks as international tourism destinations. Our story encapsulates why the Collection is special, what it offers, and how it feels.

Our Story

A collection of magical, memorable experiences set in places that are truly extraordinary – telling the story of our unique landscapes and the people who look after them.

Our Brand

The Experience Collection makes a promise, has a personality, and evokes a set of emotions. Our three key pillars/ values of the experience collection are:

Extraordinary:

This is the lead value, as it covers both the uniqueness of the National Parks and the (extra)-ordinariness of the particular English National Park Experience.

Alive:

A key value as it covers both the experiential feeling and the special nature of the living, breathing communities within English National Parks.

Outdoors:

A key value is the National Park context and setting for the experiences, this is the main commodity of the Collection.

Guiding principles for the English National Park Experiences... to create experiences that will resonate with visitors:

...be deeply rooted in the landscape, character and spirit of place of the National Park.

...be motivators for the target international consumers.

...incorporate and build on the best known and most iconic aspects of the National Parks.

...be extra-ordinary, allowing the visitor to immerse themselves in the everyday life of rural England.

...be full of character and help visitors connect with the people, past and present, who have lived, worked and played in these landscapes for millennia.

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

Canadian Tourism Commission

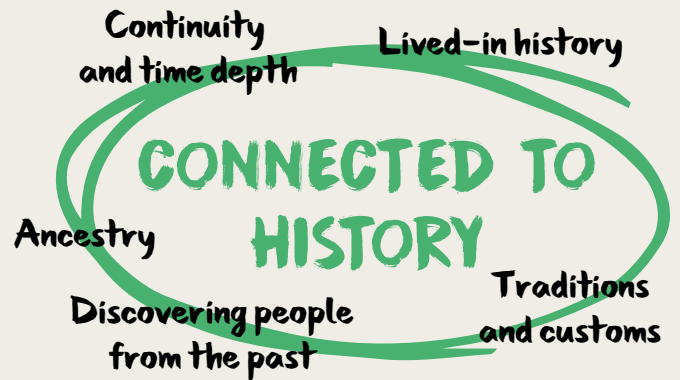
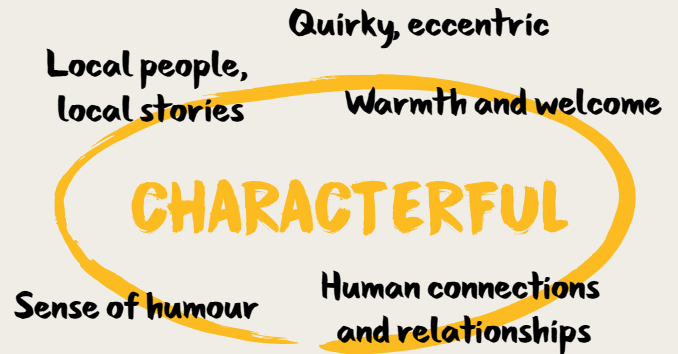
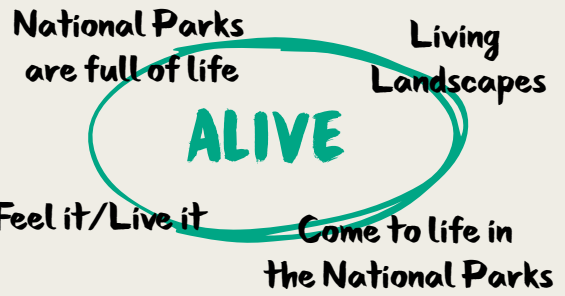


The Inspirers: Aligning the Experiences and the Brand

The English National Park Experience Collection gives visitors the chance to get right to the heart of English culture, to the unique living landscapes and timeless rural life that can only be felt in our National Parks.

Through this Collection, visitors have the opportunity to 'experience England's extraordinary outdoors'. The visitor experience is shaped by their interactions with the National Park landscapes, their engagements with local people, the activities they enjoy and words and images that form their stay.

The English National Park Experience Collection characteristics are:



These characteristics are used as 'inspirers' for the experience framework. The Experiences in all the National Parks must embody these attributes.



Creating Authentic Tourism Experiences

Authentic visitor experiences are an opportunity for tourism businesses to go beyond delivering traditional tourism products based on goods (e.g. rooms or food) and services. Visitors are looking for more than just a packaged sightseeing tour, or an attraction or location.

Both to differentiate the National Parks and to give visitors something to remember and tell their friends about, experiences need to be at the heart of any customer proposition. This will help provide an enjoyable, memorable day out that not only meets expectations, but informs, entertains, educates and motivates by participating in more hands-on activities and experiencing local lifestyles, customs, traditions and culture.

We can do this by giving them the opportunity to:

Learn – Provide visitors with an opportunity to challenge themselves to learn a traditional skill, new things to do, about who we are and how we live

Do – Provide visitors with an opportunity to do as well as watch by being an active hands on participant in an activity

Feel like a local - by being immersed in local places, culture, traditions and connecting with people who will tell and share stories, skills and the community way of life

Your visitor experience must inspire and delight by:

- leaving a lasting memory
- differentiating your product from its competition
- displaying innovation
- standing out as unique and/or special

When deciding where to go, visitors look at the whole picture – accommodation, eating out, shopping, and things to do. Collaboration with other like-minded tourism businesses in established or innovative ways creates opportunities to devise your own authentic visitor experiences. This means making sure your combined experiences can be booked in one place easily, so have an offer that will attract new visitors, bringing them back again and again.

This means you need to have a clear understanding of guests' likes and interests so you can tailor experiences that more effectively meet the needs of your target audiences.

FROM PRODUCTS TO EXPERIENCES

To compete on an international stage businesses within National Parks need to develop genuine tourism experiences that incorporate the best known aspects of the National Parks. This can only be achieved through having a great commodity (the National Park landscape) combined with exceptional products and service (from tourism operators).

Experiences provide an opportunity for visitors to become active participants, for example, by trying a new skill or craft, learning who we are

or how we live, or challenging themselves in the great outdoors. It's about meeting the locals; business owners and staff, farmers, artisans, guides, musicians, storytellers, and people in our communities who have a special skill to share or an interesting story to tell.

Evidence suggests that visitors are prepared to pay a premium for experiences that focus on what is truly unique or memorable about a destination.

Here is an example of a South Downs experience.

Sparkling South Downs

Experience the UK's finest sparkling wines in vineyards born of the South Downs National Park



Commodity

The grapes needed to make the wine



Product

The sparkling wine is produced, it is a consumer product, something that is tangible and available to everyone.



Service

The sparkling wine can be bought at the vineyard, or in a restaurant. You are buying both a product and a service.



Experience

Meet the local wine grower. Hear the stories of people who use the land to make a living and engage in a hands-on experience that connects you to the land and people. Enjoy a dinner with the wine grower at a local restaurant.

Every level of value you add to enhances your visitors' experiences and sets you apart from your competitors. The more value you add, the greater the opportunity to increase your revenue.

Source: The Experience Economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) / The Tourism Cafe: Nancy Arsenault, Celes Davar and Todd Lucier (2011)

Be Inspired – Experience Prince Edward Island

On Canada's Prince Edward Island, Experience PEI wanted to build a business that would introduce the best of the island to visitors, "...rather than leave these memorable experiences to chance, we decided to develop unique exclusive opportunities for visitors to meet interesting Islanders doing interesting things....and experience what life is truly like here on Prince Edward Island." This small tour guiding company custom builds tours for the leisure visitor as well as the corporate market and operators and has partnerships with everyone who can contribute to tours and specialist activities.

www.experiencepei.ca



BE INSPIRED - Tromsø Safari

Tromsø Safari in Norway provides a year-round range of outdoor activities, offering guests an easy way to explore the area "... at the same time maintaining and strengthening local pride and involvement." Tours range from chasing the aurora borealis; reindeer watching; snowmobile and snowshoe tours, through to the midnight sun experience.

The company is locally owned and operated with a philosophy based on maintaining strong local connection by "tight cooperation and involvement" with local land owners, activity operators, guides, and other suppliers (their booking desk, for instance, is in the lobby of the Radisson Blu hotel).

"We strongly believe in contributing to a better tourism destination for our guests and locals, not only for today but even more importantly, for the future."

<https://tromsosafari.no/>



Creating the experience

Exceptional visitor experiences go beyond the time spent in any single activity, attraction or location.

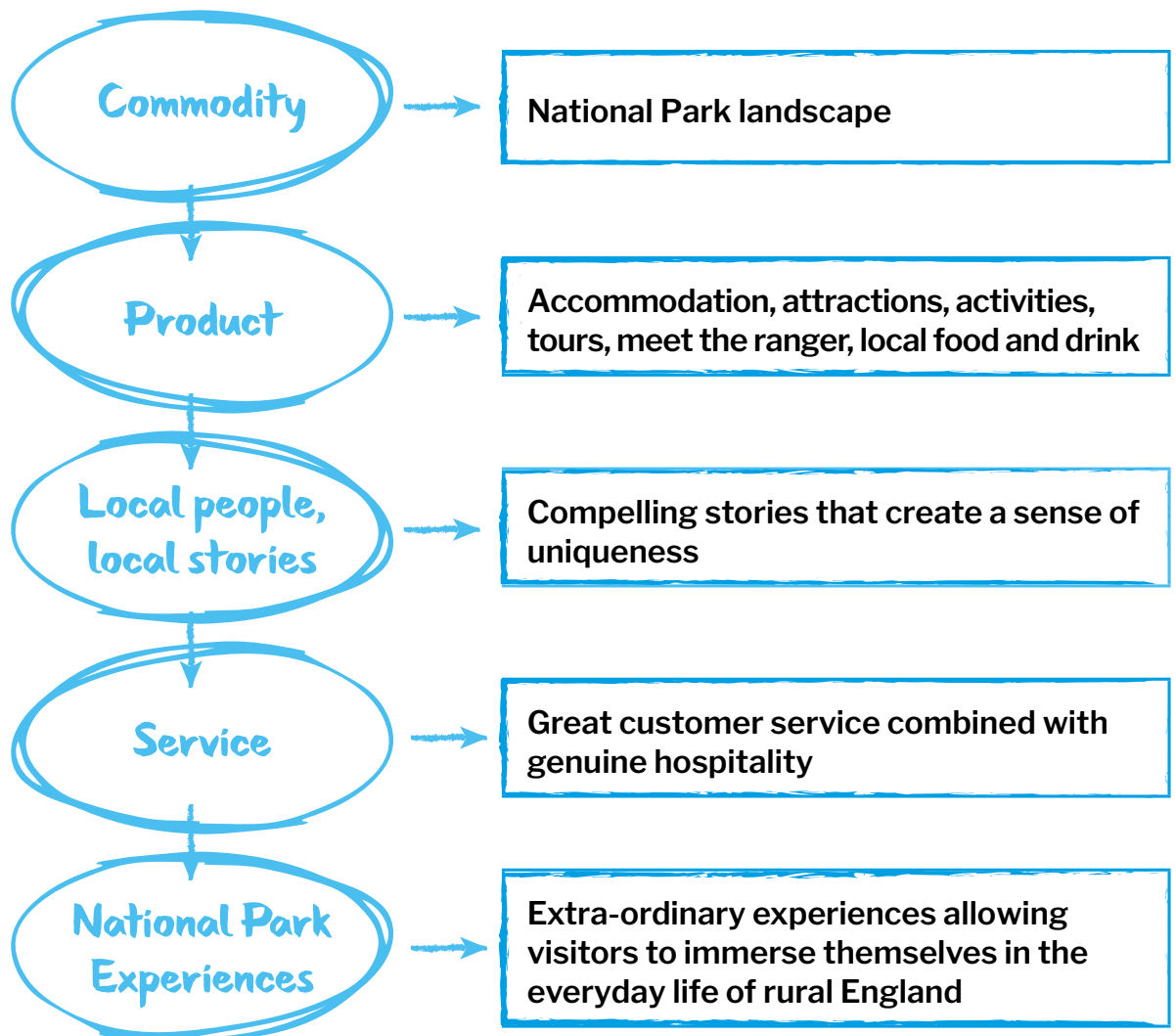
Your visitor needs and expectations must be considered at all stages of the customer journey. Remember – the visitor journey comprises researching and booking before they arrive, to the time they go home and share their stories, photos and videos with friends and family. Arguably, the experience should be designed with this last objective in mind.

When creating a visitor experience, you need to understand and focus on the components that combine to make it memorable and enjoyable.

It is the combination of a unique story or activity, how the story or activity is told or taught to visitors and the service the visitor experiences when they are with you.

This will ensure the visitor has an opportunity to immerse themselves in the experience you offer and take away some lasting memories.

In simple terms, the English National Park Experience Collection will be strengthened by the qualities of the brand and all experiences must embody these. This requires a focus on four interlinked elements including product, local people and stories, and service as illustrated in the diagram:



HOW TO DEVELOP VISITOR EXPERIENCES

Here are some steps to think about when developing your experience:

1. Will the experience really appeal to your target audience? Would visitors want to come to the National Park to be part of this experience?
2. Offer your customers an exclusive opportunity – something not available to everyone, or a benefit that they would not receive if they purchased the components of the experience separately. This might be a cost saving or an inclusive free or special element.
3. Determine the theme of your experience, e.g. culture, history, heritage, adventure, landscape, events, food and wine, and create incentives that make it easy for the customer to take up the offer. Think about and tell the story of your experience and that of your community. Build in as much detail as possible every step of the way. Plan time for interaction, conversation, reflection.
4. Give a name to your experience that will convey the type of experience you are offering. If you are targeting an overseas market, think about how the title will translate into different languages.
5. Determine the target market that your experience will best suit, e.g. outdoor enthusiasts, mature experience seekers. See the market profiles on www.nationalparks.gov.uk/discoverengland. Additional market information is also available on the VisitBritain website.
6. Work out when you will be offering the package, e.g. daily or scheduled departures, and the time period during which your experience will be available, e.g. low season, midweek, weekends.
7. Make it personal and pay attention to the detail.
8. Determine the partners' services and suppliers that you want to build into your experience, such as attractions, accommodation, tours.
9. The total price should reflect all elements of the experience (the goods, services, local partners etc). It is the combination of all these elements that creates a unique and memorable offer that cannot be replicated elsewhere. Make sure you know how many people you need to make the experience profitable and sustainable for your business.
10. Descriptions, conditions and waivers: develop clear and concise information on all terms and conditions affecting the provision of the experience. Any conditions outlining responsibility must be clearly expressed in exact terms and details of any specific insurance requirements are also recommended.

TOP TIPS

- Choose a theme or inspiring story that highlights the unique qualities of your National Park. All good stories have a beginning, middle and an end; your experience should do the same
- Plan your experience/s around how guests can be involved and made to feel special. Include interactive components e.g let your visitors participate in a workshop with local craftsmen
- Develop your experiences to align with the interests of your target market segments
- Images and video are an opportunity to share the true nature of your visitor experience
- Use great images for your brochure, website, media kits and other promotional materials. Highlight the National Park location, show people engaging in activities, enjoying themselves, learning, and interacting
- Help your visitors to share their experiences and create their own stories - give them opportunities to make a memory every step of the way by creating “instagrammable” moments
- Test your experience with friends, family and colleagues - you will gain valuable insight that can be used to enhance the experience and ‘tweak’ where needed
- Getting social: Use hashtags to target visitors and to let them know your location and about your experiences. Keep them short and sweet. The longer they are, the harder they are to understand

TOP TIPS - SUSTAINABILITY

- It's important to minimise the impact of your experience on the sensitive environment of the National Parks. Telling the story of our landscapes and how you help to look after them?
- Have you considered how your experience could impact on the environment?
- Are you a member of the Green Tourism Business Scheme or similar environmental accreditation?
- Are low-carbon / carbon-free activities involved? e.g. kayaking, hiking, cycling
- Are you maximising the benefits of the local supply chain? e.g. use of local produce
- Can you encourage your visitors to leave their car behind and arrive by public transport?
- Do you promote a local visitor giving scheme, or provide opportunities for guests to donate to local environmental projects?



WORK WITH LIKE-MINDED BUSINESSES

Your experience is one of many in the National Parks and no matter how good you are, the visitor's overall experience is partly determined by the sum of all their experiences in the National Park.

That is why it's vital that tourism businesses and other service operators in the National Parks work together as much as possible to provide not only practical and functional links to one another's products but also connections between their experiences, so visitors get a seamless and unforgettable National Park Experience.

Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and microbusinesses dominate the tourism industry so the case for co-operation is strong. For small businesses, collaboration means the opportunity to punch well above their weight. Because visitors look for a range of services and experiences in a destination, SMEs are interdependent on other

tourism enterprises and suppliers as well as independent in their own right; no visitor wants just one operator: they want a bed, food, tours, trails, activities, entertainment, visits, shopping etc. By building business relationships and links with other service providers, tourism operators can work together to test new ideas and develop offers or experiences for visitors and customers, while reducing or managing financial risk by sharing it; for example, through joint marketing.

DELIVERING YOUR EXPERIENCE

You can't expect to see better results by doing the same things. You have to challenge yourself to do things differently. Consider the tourism experience your team is delivering. Start with your customer touch points and highlight areas for improvement. Ultimately you want to be providing the best possible opportunity for repeat business and referrals.

- 1.** Booking: the tourism experience starts from the very first initial contact with the customer on your website, via email or by telephone. It includes the decision-making process and the booking process, which must be as easy and as seamless as possible. Ideally, make sure your experience is easily “bookable” on your website.
- 2.** Website: make sure that your website and booking process include clear and comprehensive information about your business, the local area and the other elements customers can buy into, so the customer knows exactly what to expect and what's available.
- 3.** Help your customers: Are they seeking a family-friendly experience, one close to transport links, or something more adventurous? Helping them chose the right experience will ensure they have a great time.
- 4.** Arrival: create the right first impression by ensuring that all your staff have a positive attitude focused on customer service. Your staff must be enthusiastic and helpful, in person as well as on the telephone or via email.
- 5.** Afterwards: follow up for feedback through a customer satisfaction survey. Ongoing communication also helps, for example, with e-newsletters.
- 6.** In the office: deliver consistent service so that customers know what to expect and feel confident of receiving the same high level of service the next time they visit.
- 7.** Systems and procedures: train your staff in systems and procedures to reduce your administration costs, minimise risk to your business and maximise your customer's experience.

Be Inspired – Airbnb Experiences

The trend towards experiences has been grabbed by Airbnb who now actively encourage hosts to offer peer-to-peer experiences. Since launching a year ago, there are now more than 3,000 experiences across 26 countries. Their approach includes “immersions”, often multi-day tours and activities. But the core offer is the link between Airbnb accommodation providers and different experiences available nearby. These might be mini food or wine tasting tours, painting or cookery lessons, hiking and guided walks, heritage tours, and so on. To list experiences on Airbnb, hosts must demonstrate their exclusive ability to do things the average tourist wouldn't likely discover on their own such as: going to a lesser-known place, meeting a private community, ordering off-menu, going after hours, seeing backstage, etc.

Airbnb's most recent analysis shows that 29% of bookings fall into the food and drink category, including homestyle dinners, speciality cooking workshops, and guided food and drink tours (7%).

www.airbnb.co.uk/host/experiences



PROMOTING YOUR EXPERIENCES

Now you have created and developed your experiences you're ready to start marketing and promoting them to your target audience.

Focus on your key markets, who they are, what experiences are likely to attract them and the decision criteria that influences their choice to buy.

VisitBritain has extensive research available to help you identify your markets.

Firstly, the customer needs to understand the benefits you're offering before they commit to purchase. Marketing your experiences requires passion, storytelling, an ability to spark curiosity and address customer's motivations. Focus on these to sell the experience and then build the details.

ATTRACTING THE CUSTOMER'S ATTENTION:

work with a designer to develop a style for the offer. Think about where the offer is going to be placed: in a brochure, on your website, as a banner ad or perhaps a mixture. Include your branding in the design and think carefully about the words of the offer.

GETTING THE TIMING RIGHT:

some offers may need a longer lead time than others. You may need to start to promote winter short breaks three months or more in advance, whereas a romantic Valentine's offer may only need a few weeks. And remember, if it's an online offer with a dedicated web page, remove the content as soon as the event has passed.

USING SOCIAL MEDIA:

promote your experiences through social media like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. Paid for advertising can help you to effectively target relevant audiences.

LOOKING AT OTHER CHANNELS:

explore other routes to market you can use to promote your offers, bundles and packages e.g. Expedia, Airbnb, Getyourguide.com. Make sure your experiences are bookable products with a single point of contact for visitors and travel trade partners.

MAXIMISING PR:

develop a communications plan to promote your experiences. Consider contacting your local press and media and local tourism organisation with a press release announcing the launch of your experience. Or commission specialist PR support to help you if budget allows.

LINKING UP WITH OTHER BUSINESSES:

work with your partners and suppliers. Let them know about your special deals and offer to keep your customers informed of theirs. The more businesses work together within an area, the longer visitors are likely to stay, spend, and come back.

Be Inspired - Horses for courses

Liberty Trails on Dartmoor offer bespoke horse-riding holidays for all levels, where guests can bring their own horses or hire locally. There are also non-equestrian activities available, such as hot-air ballooning, cookery school lessons, vintage car tours, archery and falconry. Liberty Trails has established a business model in a national park that ensures a wide range of businesses benefit from a collaborative approach. These include Dartmoor farmers, livery stables providing horses, guides, hotels and hospitality businesses. Liberty Trails now attracts new clientele to Dartmoor from Europe, the USA and the Middle East, and has already put £250,000 year-on-year into the local economy. <http://liberty-trails.com>



HAVE A PLAN

Develop an action plan with measurable targets to help you to stay on track. Use the resources readily available to you and work with your team to formulate your plan of action.

If you think you need help, look for some external support. However, it is always better to develop your own plan rather than have someone else do it for you. Plans developed internally have a greater chance of successful implementation, as they are better understood and committed by those working in that business.

Creating a competitive offer

Experiential tourism incorporates goods and services as elements in developing offers that are designed to create lasting memories. As you take the steps from selling tourism products to offering tourism experiences ask yourself the following questions:

- **Who are our visitors** - are we focusing on our key markets, who are they and what experiences do they want?
- **How can we encourage satisfied customers to come back** or refer their friends and family – can we develop a repeat or referral incentive?
- **Will visitors be excited** by the experience we're offering and want to share it with their friends and family?
- **Are we offering** something which is difficult for the visitor to experience by themselves, without our help?
- **Will the experience** be bookable by the travel trade and the consumer?
- **How will we market** to potential consumers (and the travel trade) and what will our main communication with them be?
- **Is the experience unique** and will it draw visitors from around the world to the National Parks?
- **Does our experience deliver** the English National Park Experience Collection characteristics?
- **How are we going to offer the experience?** As a package? Do we need to partner with another local business, service, or attraction to add value to the experience? Who will we partner with?
- **Is the experience attractive**, feasible, profitable, accessible, responsible and sustainable?



NEXT STEPS - MAKING THE MOST OF THE OPPORTUNITY

What are you going to do?

Before you start selling your experiences, it's important to understand how they match or fit with visitor demands. In broad terms, there is potential for every product in every market, but to help determine which markets offer the best potential for your product and those in your local area. These five questions need to be answered:

- 1. Is your experience** readily accessible to potential customers through the appropriate distribution channels (e.g. how good are your relationships with tour operators, is the quality of your website up to scratch)?
- 2. How does the target market perform** for you at present? Do you have an established track record in servicing it?
- 3. Can you capitalise** on or respond to the trends/ growth patterns/ opportunities in the market?
- 4. Do your research** before you contact a tour operator about working with you. Do they feature the National Parks in their programmes? Do they feature similar products and experiences to yours?
- 5. Look for like-minded businesses** and develop collaborative marketing promotions to the target market. Think about how to engage with each other and what they can offer you. How can you work together to benefit all businesses?

SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

Contact the Discover England's National Parks programme team at: experiencecollection@nationalparks.gov.uk, or find out more at www.nationalparks.gov.uk/discoverengland or contact your nearest National Park Authority

NATIONAL PARK	WEBSITE
Dartmoor National Park	www.dartmoor.gov.uk
Exmoor National Park	www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk
Lake District National Park	www.lakedistrict.gov.uk
North York Moors National Park	www.northyorkmoors.org.uk
Northumberland National Park	www.northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk
Peak District National Park	www.peakdistrict.gov.uk
South Downs National Park	www.southdowns.gov.uk
Broads National Park	www.broads-authority.gov.uk
Yorkshire Dales National Park	www.yorkshiredales.org.uk

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