

GETTING ACTIVE IN IRELAND'S ANCIENT EAST

A toolkit for activity providers

Front cover: Trim Castle
This page: Loughcrew Cairns

This Toolkit is for everyone involved in Activities Tourism in Ireland's Ancient East. It provides information and ideas to help you get on board with Ireland's Ancient East and take advantage of the opportunities it offers.

We want to make Ireland's Ancient East the most engaging, enjoyable and accessible cultural holiday experience in Europe – and Activities providers have a really important part to play.

We look forward to working with you!



Jenny De Saulles
Head of Ireland's Ancient East at Fáilte Ireland

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ABOUT IRELAND'S ANCIENT EAST

WE ARE MAKING A NEW PROMISE TO VISITORS:
COME TO IRELAND'S ANCIENT EAST AND YOU'LL FIND ...

5,000 YEARS OF HISTORY

IN LUSH GREEN LANDSCAPES

WITH STORIES TOLD BY THE BEST STORYTELLERS IN THE WORLD



In a nutshell

The idea is to attract more people to holiday in the East and South – the region stretching from Carlingford to Cork, and from Wicklow to the Shannon.

It's a part of Ireland that's been overlooked by tourists, especially from overseas.

Up to now it's been a region to pass through. Together we're going to turn it into a region to stop in and explore.

We have big plans and ambitious goals. Our aim is to work with you, our partners, to grow the value of tourism significantly – bringing visitor spend into local businesses and communities.



Knockmealdown Mountains

On the ground

We're supporting partners to develop visitor experiences that deliver the Ireland's Ancient East promise – through networking, training, grants schemes, mentoring and other business support.

We're also working with public agencies such as the county councils, OPW, Waterways Ireland, Coillte and the NPWS on things like welcome, interpretation and signs.

Already you'll see county boundary signs with the Ireland's Ancient East branding, and information boards that persuade people to explore more.

Once visitors arrive, they'll be in no doubt that they're in Ireland's Ancient East!

JOIN THE IRELAND'S ANCIENT EAST BRAND

- Look at the experiences you offer – can you help to deliver the brand promise of history, landscape, stories?
- Sign up to our Brand Charter, so you can use the Ireland's Ancient East logo and brand guidelines – email info@irelandsancienteast.ie for details
- Download our [Ireland's Ancient East Storytelling Toolkit](#)
- Make use of the images on [Ireland's Content Pool](#)
- Send your frontline staff on one of our training courses – email info@irelandsancienteast.ie for details
- Get to know the other businesses near you, so that you can grow the volume of business together.

Spreading the word

We're promoting Ireland's Ancient East strongly at home and overseas.

Our **stories-rich website** and our social media channels – from **Instagram** to **Youtube** to **Facebook** and **Twitter**, using #irelandsancienteast – are building excitement about our new brand.

Our domestic advertising and PR **campaign** – “Great Stories Stay with you Forever” – has been very widely seen across Ireland. We're aiming for mass awareness at home, so that Irish people take their holidays here, and the locals champion Ireland's Ancient East.

In international markets, Ireland's Ancient East is already causing a stir.

We're working with Tourism Ireland on digital promotions, TV ads, travel trade fairs and consumer shows. And we're hosting a stream of international travel writers and tour operators.

There's been brilliant media coverage and there are already dozens of Ireland's Ancient East branded tours on sale via the travel trade in international markets.



GET INVOLVED

- Watch our **domestic TV ad**
- Keep an eye out for our adverts in newspapers and magazines
- Follow us on social media – **Instagram, Twitter, Facebook**
- Use #irelandsancienteast in your own social media activity
- Keep us up to date with the new experiences and services you're offering – email **info@irelandsancienteast.ie**

And online, remember that you need to be listed on failteireland.ie to be promoted so:

- New businesses need to get listed on **failteireland.ie**
- Keep your entries on our website updated via **failteireland.ie**
- Make sure you get any new activities listed via **failteireland.ie**

INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

UNDERSTANDING THE TARGET MARKETS AND SEGMENTS FOR IRELAND'S ANCIENT EAST

Hiking trail at Glendalough

Ireland's Ancient East targets people from Ireland and from overseas. Our main target markets are international and come from these two global segments:



Culturally Curious

- They are independent “active sightseers” looking to visit new places
- They are looking for a “feeling” of freedom
- They like to delve deeper into history and culture and consider “how and why”
- They are looking for authentic experiences and will pay for a guide who offers real insight
- They want unusual experiences, but also like a comfortable relaxed pace
- They enjoy exploring landscapes, connecting with nature and wandering off the beaten track
- They will walk, cycle or pleasure boat to explore a new place
- They usually travel in a couple or as individuals and rarely in a family group.
- The age group is 40+

Great Escapers

- They are looking for time out from busy lives
- They go on holiday to recharge their batteries and reconnect with each other
- They want rural holidays in order to connect with nature, but will also visit a castle or landmark
- They want to feel the earth beneath their feet and to soak up the beauty
- They want to get off the beaten track and experience the elements – stars, water etc
- They will take part in more strenuous exploration than the Culturally Curious, but not extreme
- They appreciate peace and quiet between activities
- They want the wow factor, but without too much effort – easily accessible
- Usually couples in their 30s, some with babies or quite young children

These are the four largest international markets who holiday in Ireland:



SNAPSHOT OF THE GB MARKET

- Ireland's largest source market
- 4.7 million Culturally Curious
- 5.5 million Great Escapers
- Visit all year round
- 74% are under 55
- Mostly couples and adult groups, less child focused
- 48% of all the international visitors who come for angling are from Britain
- For golf Britain represents 39% and for equestrian 26% of all international visitors doing these activities

What activities do the British normally do on holiday?



“ The British see Ireland predominantly as a short break destination (72% stay less than five nights) therefore they appreciate a range of easily accessible and unique cultural experiences that set Ireland apart from the UK. They enjoy walking and hiking as the main focus of their active endeavours while on holiday. ”



SNAPSHOT OF THE US MARKET

- Ireland's second largest market
- 12.9 million Culturally Curious
- 36.7 million Great Escapers
- US visitors are the highest spenders
- They stay longer and travel round more
- Mostly likely to travel between May and September
- 68% are under 55
- 48% visit as a couple
- 32% of all international visitors undertaking equestrian activities are from North America
- For golf North America represents 26% and for hiking/walking it is also 26% of all international visitors doing these activities
- Walking has been ranked as an increasingly important activity for Americans

What activities do Americans normally do on holiday?



“ Americans have a strong cultural and ancestral link to Ireland and they are particularly drawn to Ireland's iconic historic attractions. They like easy activity while sightseeing but nothing too strenuous. Walking is becoming increasingly important for the American market. ”

Further details on the global segments and the key overseas markets can be found in the Global Sales section on failteireland.ie



SNAPSHOT OF THE GERMAN MARKET

- Ireland's third largest market
- 7.6 million Culturally Curious
- 16.6 million Great Escapers
- 77% travel between April and September
- German holidaymakers are young - 52% are under 34
- 43% visit as a couple, 18% as a family and 22% with other adults
- 14% of all the international visitors coming to hike/walk are from Germany
- For cycling Germany represents 12% and for equestrian it is 7% of all international visitors doing these activities

What activities do the Germans normally do on holiday?



“ The Germans are attracted to Ireland's unique coastal seascapes but are also looking to experience both traditional and contemporary Irish culture. They enjoy physical activity in nature and want more energetic pursuits – primarily walking, hiking and easy cycling. ”



SNAPSHOT OF THE FRENCH MARKET

- Ireland's fourth largest market
- 6.7 million Culturally Curious
- 8.3 million Great Escapers
- 80% travel between April and September
- French holidaymakers are young – 48% are under 35
- 40% are couples, 16% are families and 25% travel with other adults
- 15% of all international visitors coming for angling are from France
- For cycling France represents 12% and for equestrian it is 9% of all international visitors doing these activities

What activities do the French normally do on holiday?



“ The French are using their holiday to reinvigorate themselves and are looking to get energised from the landscape and unspoilt nature while experiencing authentic Irish culture. They are attracted to sedate activity on or near water. ”

VISITOR EXPERIENCES

HOW TO DEVELOP MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES IN IRELAND'S ANCIENT EAST



More than sightseeing

Today's tourists expect more than just sights to see.

They're looking for experiences that will deliver benefits such as: health and wellbeing, indulgence, relaxation, learning, renewal, challenge and adventure.

And many visitors want to feel a connection with the places they visit – through the people they meet and the experiences they have.

Activity providers are well placed to meet these expectations.

You can give visitors engaging, immersive experiences that connect them to Ireland's Ancient East.

It is these experiences that will create memories that last long after they return home, and make them more likely to return, and to recommend the region to others.

CHECKLIST

An engaging, immersive experience is memorable because it:

- ✓ **is authentic** – true to place
- ✓ **is hands-on** – with opportunities to learn and do
- ✓ **stimulates the senses** – not just sights, but sounds, smells, tastes and textures too
- ✓ **connects** – the visitor to the place, to the local community, and perhaps to other like-minded visitors
- ✓ **inspires** – can provide a personal sense of achievement and open up new horizons
- ✓ **feels special** – is not widely available, mainstream or mass market.



Sailing, Wicklow and Bray

CASE STUDY: DEWARS IN HIGHLAND PERTSHIRE, SCOTLAND



These people are on a whisky tasting and whisky blending course! First, white-water rafting on the water the whisky's made from, past the distillery. Then an expert tutorial in tasting and the chance to blend your own – by a roaring fire of course.

It has a great mix of ingredients for an engaging and memorable experience: an adrenalin challenge, experiencing the elements, hands-on learning, and bonding with like-minded people.

Photo credit: Splash White Water Rafting



From brand promise to real experiences

Pause for a moment. Think about what you offer visitors and ask yourself:

- Is it authentic?
- Do your visitors feel inspired?
- Do they get to chat to the locals?
- Will they leave feeling they've engaged in something special?
- Will they have a great memory to talk about when they get home?

Consider how the promise of Ireland's Ancient East – whether it's the history, the stories or the landscape – can be used to develop the experiences you offer, for example:

If you're in the walking or cycling business ...

your visitors will travel through lush green landscape and along pilgrims' routes and ancient ways: but do they know what's around them? Without turning it into a list of facts, you can give them a sense of travelling through time.

Hint at history with the name for a route, and the focal points and stopping places you recommend – from ancient sites and local legends to castles and big houses, to emigration routes and famine roads.

If you're an equestrian business ...

think about a new experience that shows the landscape at its best: perhaps a trip ending at sunset so your visitors can enjoy the views as the light changes.

As the sun goes down the talk could turn to the Sport of Kings, legendary riders such as Fionn mac Cumhaill and his warriors racing across the plains, and the Irish bond with horses.

If you're offering coastal activities ...

can you share from your own experience what it is like to live and work on the edge? You may be able to introduce them to people whose lives are lived in rhythm with the sea.

Why not end the day with a beach bonfire and a tale or two about epic storms, shipwrecks, lighthouses, traders and invaders, Vikings, Normans, emigrants and deportation – the comings and goings of the Maritime Gateway.

If you offer physical challenges ...

you could make connections to the legendary endeavours of High Kings and Heroes and stories about races, running, climbing, boating, swimming. Can your visitors try a similar feat? The farthest, the biggest, the longest ... giving visitors a memory to savour of their attempt to match the heroes.

If you're providing activities on inland waterways ...

think about what would turn a trip into more of an experience. Look for inspiration from the ancient legends about the Shannon and the Salmon of Knowledge, early Christian monks seeking refuge on lake islands, Vikings using rivers to raid and trade, and more recent history of waterways for commerce, trade, travel and leisure.

Perhaps welcome your visitors with an authentic breakfast from the times of these early travellers to set the scene for their day on the water.



Graiguenamanagh Eco-Trail

From experiences to stories

Market research shows that history and landscapes are not enough on their own to motivate people to visit this part of the world.

Potential visitors think other places are equally rich in heritage and natural beauty – if not more so.

But put history and landscape together with our stories, and the promise comes alive.

That's why we are promising visitors “stories told by the best storytellers in the world” ... because stories are the key to making Ireland's Ancient East stand out in the crowded travel marketplace.

And Activities providers can play their part.

No matter what visitors are doing – whether hiking across mountains, paddling up a river, boating across a lake, cycling a Greenway, trekking through forests, landing a fish, rock-pooling, foraging, learning to surf or tee-ing off – there are stories to be told.



Brennanstown Riding School

CHECKLIST

We don't expect everyone to create their own written stories or to want to tell stories face-to-face to visitors themselves. You could build stories into your business by:

- ✓ Asking a member of staff who has a lovely story-telling style to talk to visitors about your business or the local area
- ✓ Using an authentic guide ... someone who can speak to visitors from the heart about the skills involved, or the history of the business or the place
- ✓ Drawing on local history or legend to theme an event or series of activities
- ✓ Using images: of course stories aren't just told in words. Old posters and black and white photos on the wall or on your website could tell the story of how things started, or the history of your location.
- ✓ Thinking about the “touchpoints” in your business – for example booking confirmations, registration forms, information sheets and briefings, or follow-up emails – can you give any of your customer information a “story” feel?

Here's an example from the food industry – a paper place mat at a fish restaurant, with a “storified” mention of a supplier:



SOCIAL MEDIA

- Content is still king – keep it fresh, live, interesting and creative
- Humour works (if appropriate!)
- Think about your tone of voice – not too heavy ... holidays are fun
- High-quality images, (very) short videos and carousels/galleries add interest
- Tag your posts – highlight things to see and do in your area. Think beyond just your own business. Why would someone want to visit your location? What can they do when they're there? Location tag images on Instagram
- If posting about a business, place, person or brand, make sure to "mention" them in the post by using @ and tagging the relevant page
- Watch other channels – follow, like, engage, comment and share
- Use #IrelandsAncientEast in your posts
- Use # for location and trending topics or events where relevant – join in with trending conversations
- Use our Twitter handle where relevant @ancienteastIRL
- Link to www.irelandsancienteast.com from your channels
- Social media is a major driver of traffic to websites – so always make sure there's a link from your profile to your website



Cavan Burren

CASE STUDIES



Every business has stories to share. Here are three different types of stories, and examples of how businesses can turn information into stories ...

Stories about the place and its legends:

Some say the mysterious Motte Stone, high on a hill looking across the famous Vale of Avoca, is Fionn mac Cumhail's Hurling Stone; or that it's a missile narrowly dodged by Cuchullain. Of course, the huge white granite boulder could simply have been deposited here by a receding glacier at the end of the last Ice Age.

But whatever the truth, you'll want to channel both your natural and supernatural powers fatbiking up to it with Ian and crew at **Fatbike Adventures**



Stories about the skills & crafts involved in the business:

Have you heard about the boats that starred in Game of Thrones? Traditional Kerry Naomhóg currachs from the community boatyard of Meitheal Mara in Cork are handcrafted using age-old methods of steaming and bending oak to give the ribs strength, with spruce gunnels to make the framework. Perfect for the Iron Islanders to use. And now you can experience your own Game of Thrones, too, paddling a Kerry Naomhóg from the show on a guided tour of the Boyne Canal with **Boyne Boats**. *Tour independently operated by Boyne Boats - not sponsored, endorsed, or affiliated with HBO or anyone associated with Game of Thrones.*



Stories about the people behind the business:

Lifelong surfer and former Irish Surf Team rider Billy Butler has chased waves from the Canary Islands to Australia and Indonesia. But the special rush he gets from pride in his local community, and environment has always brought him back home.

That's why he set up **Freedom Surf School** – Bilingual Adventure Education Centre based in the family cottage where he was born and grew up by the beautiful beach in Tramore, County Waterford. It's where you too can catch the free spirit of surfing and adventure.





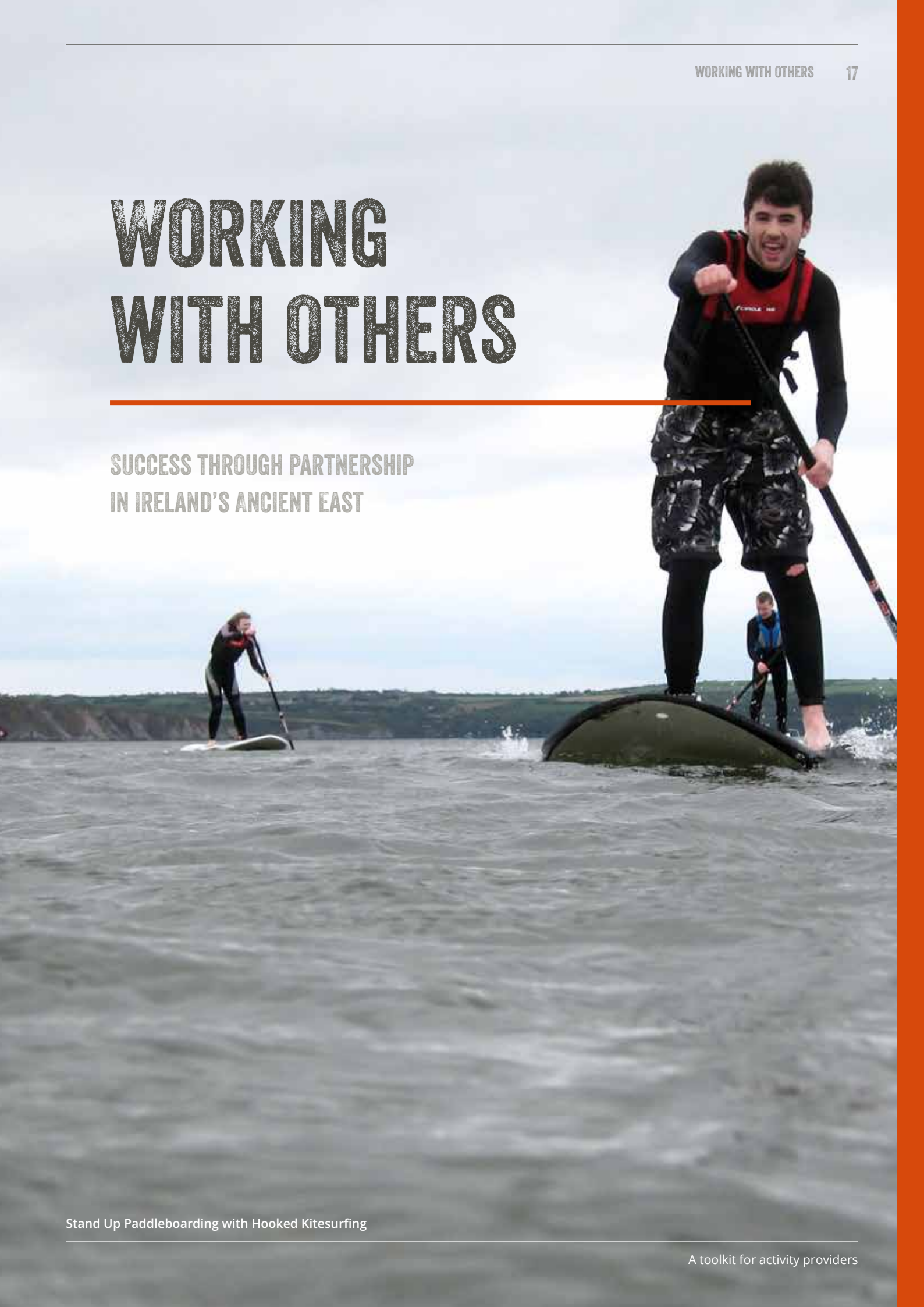
TELL YOUR STORY



- Do you have an old family business? Why not speak to your family and see what stories they have to tell about how the business started and how things were different in their day. You could include photos of the family who started the business and the story behind it on your website.
- Have you always been based where you are, or is there a story behind why you are here? What did the building used to be for – is there an old photograph of how it used to look? Or if you have a new business is there a story behind why you started, or why you opened it where you did?
- Is there a story to be told about when a film or TV programme was filmed nearby? Were you involved? Or was there a time when someone famous came to town?
- Is there somewhere that you feel time can stand still? What does it feel like, and why is it so special? Share this experience with your customers.
- Visitors love to know about what goes on behind the scenes. What ancient and modern skills do you or your team use that you can share with them?

WORKING WITH OTHERS

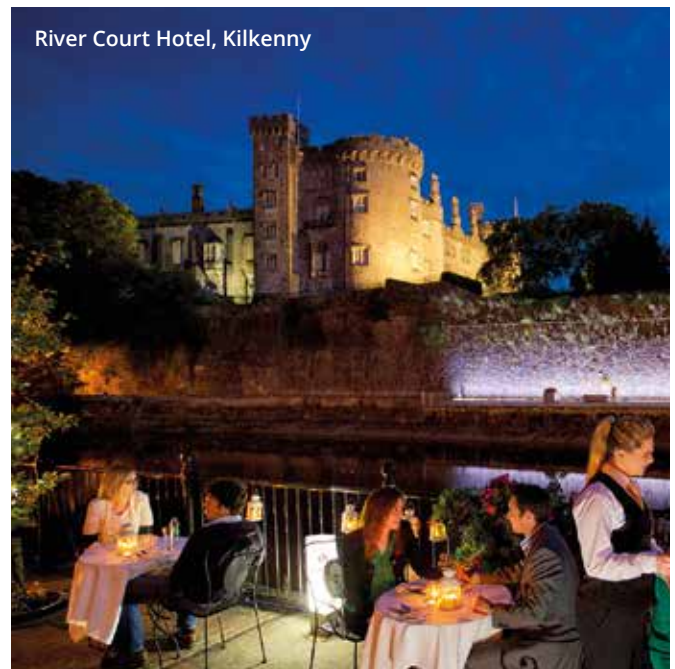
SUCCESS THROUGH PARTNERSHIP
IN IRELAND'S ANCIENT EAST



Activity experiences are part of a much larger holiday mix that includes accommodation, attractions, food and drink, engaging with locals, the arts, nature.

It makes sense to link with the tourism experiences that fill the rest of the visitor's day in your area. Think about:

- joining a local tourism network
- seeking out partners or becoming part of a package
- working with food and drink producers and providers to offer an activity-plus-food experience
- working with a heritage attraction to find a new way of experiencing it – perhaps from the water, or viewing it from a hill to see where it fits into the landscape before visiting it
- working with local fishermen and including a visit to the harbour to see the fishing boats come in and hear the latest tales
- partnering with your local birdwatching group to find out if there have been any interesting sightings you can tell your own visitors about
- becoming advocates for other activity experiences in your area – actively cross-selling and promoting each other so that the visitor stays longer



CHECKLIST

- ✓ Don't underestimate the power of cross-selling.
- ✓ Work with partners to encourage visitors to stay longer – cross-sell others' activities, attractions, accommodation and places to eat and showcase more of what is on offer in your area.
- ✓ To help you to cross-sell, there is information online from organisations such as:

Ireland's Ancient East

Irish Association for Adventure Tourism

Association of Irish Riding Establishments

Irish Trails

Coillte

Fishing in Ireland

Golfing Union of Ireland

CASE STUDIES



Here are some examples of companies working with others:

Kilkenny Cycling Tours

On their website, **Kilkenny Cycling Tours** lists useful cycling-related sites such as the Waterford Greenway and links to accommodation businesses and visitor attractions. They provide ideas for other activities, such as canoeing with a nearby activity operator.

They have linked up with other businesses and popular offers include free tea and coffee in Murphy's Bar (to encourage them in for food and increase their footfall) and a discounted pizza and pint deal at Sullivans Brewery at the end of each tour.



Waterford Camino Tours

Waterford Camino Tours invite visitors to walk in the footsteps of Ireland's ancestors along the Waterford Greenway, the Comeragh Mountains and the Copper Coast. Their website lists not only accommodation providers but also a local bike hire company, providing visitors with ideas for extending their stay in the area.



Hook Head Adventures

Hook Head Adventures is an Eco Adventure Tourism Company based on Wexford's Hook Peninsula. They offer a range of outdoor adventure experiences such as sea kayaking, cycling and stand up paddle boarding. The 'Proud Partners' section on their website includes Ireland's Ancient East, the Irish Wildlife Trust, Green Tourism as well as their local tourism network, Hook Tourism.

Partnerships can give businesses added credibility, and local tourism networks can provide visitors with information about where they might stay or eat during their visit.



CHECKLIST

- 1 Think how your business and the experiences you offer fit into Ireland's Ancient East - 5,000 years of history, in lush green landscapes, with stories told by the best storytellers in the world.
- 2 Do the experiences you're offering help visitors to feel a strong sense of place ... somewhere that's really different from home?
- 3 Will visitors feel it was really worth making the journey, because they could only have had that experience in Ireland's Ancient East?
- 4 When you design your visitor experiences, think about all the senses – what will visitors see, touch, smell, taste and hear as they experience Ireland's Ancient East with you?
- 5 We are a storytelling people – think about what great stories you have to tell. What is your treasure trove of stories?
 - People – what stories can you tell about yourself, who started the business, the people you work with? Who in the team is great at telling a story?
 - Places – what stories are there to tell about where you work, and why?
 - Skills – are there any special skills you have, or make use of, to deliver great experiences – especially traditional skills?
- 6 Visual storytelling is hugely important to convey an experience: think about what images to use at your place of business and online.
- 7 Go in search of any old photos you have of the family, the location or the activity that helps tell the story of the experiences you offer.
- 8 Think about how you can use any great feedback from customers to tell a story about the experiences you offer.
- 9 Share your stories and customers' experiences on social media.
- 10 Cross-sell other activities, attractions, accommodation, places to eat etc.

We hope you find this Toolkit useful. If you have any questions, please do get in touch with the Ireland's Ancient East team – email us at info@irelandsancienteast.ie

For further useful information and inspiration don't forget to visit these websites:

Ireland's Ancient East

Discover Ireland

Failte Ireland

Tourism Ireland



Kilkenny

