



# GROWING GREENER EXPERIENCES TOGETHER

The Sustainable  
Tourism Toolkit

Your guide to helping make  
Northern Ireland a sustainable  
tourism destination.



tourism  
northernireland

Your guide to helping make Northern Ireland a sustainable tourism destination



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# INTRODUCTION

## EMBRACE A GIANT OPPORTUNITY

Whether you're offering somewhere to stay or somewhere to play, anyone involved in running tourist attractions, holiday experiences or activities sees the impact we all have on the environment every day.

Right now, the world is telling us that we must take action. Businesses everywhere are adopting more sustainable practices and tourism is no exception. This is something we cannot afford to ignore.

Northern Ireland has it all. From our big-hearted welcomes to our breath-taking surroundings. Our natural resources, rugged landscapes and our generous hosts are the reasons people come

here. Helping our visitors to embrace sustainability is one more way we can delight them.

Our air, our water, our natural environment and our cultural heritage - all the elements that make for a better quality of life flourish here. Our job is to share them with our visitors in a way that protects those resources for the future, while delivering the best of experiences for everyone.

Happily, there are few places which can do that more effectively than Northern Ireland.

Just look around you. You'll find we've already begun.



## WHAT'S IN THE GUIDE?

**Sustainable tourism is one more giant promise we want to make to our visitors.**

This guide will help you identify ways to make your business or experience more sustainable and so attract more customers.

It looks at how to carry out a sustainable business audit, create website content, grow the experiences you already offer and more.

## WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM?



The UN World Tourism Organization says sustainable tourism is:

*“Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”*

It's about more than energy saving and recycling – important as those are. It's about visitor management, supporting your community and helping your guests to do their bit, whether they're with you for an hour or two or a week or two.

Caring for the environment begins with us, in our homes, workplaces and communities.

So every time you suggest a green experience, offer greener options or nudge visitors towards greener actions, you're promoting sustainability, giving yourself a competitive edge and making Northern Ireland an even more attractive destination for tourists.





## WHO IS A GREEN TOURIST?



**Here's the good news - it's everybody. Sustainable experiences and getaways are where tourism is headed.**

It's a thoughtful way of travelling and experiencing our surroundings that protects our environment for the future. It means understanding the impact that you have on the places you visit, and why supporting sustainable enterprises matters.

These tourists are after the hidden gems. They want to spend time with the artisan food producers, seek out the local culture and experience the uniqueness of our natural surroundings.

That desire to recharge, rebalance and reconnect with nature has never been greater. So this is not a niche market. It's a global trend. A choice that more and more people are making. We're here to help them do it.

## WHAT INSPIRES OUR GREEN TOURISTS?



- Feeling part of local culture
- Meeting ordinary people who go the extra mile
- Exploring unexpected and unspoilt territory
- Getting the inside track from local guides
- Discovering a taste for local food
- Starting new adventures
- Enjoying some distinctly Northern Ireland wit and humour
- Being warmly welcomed in locally run accommodation



## WHAT THE MARKET SAYS:

**75%**

of travellers want to make responsible holiday choices

2012 Travel Foundation Study

**66%**

want an easier way to identify green holidays

Forum for the Future research study (2012)

**69%**

are now looking to travel companies to provide more sustainable options.

**58%**

of Condé Nast Traveler readers surveyed choose a hotel based on whether or not it gives back to the local community and the planet.

**53%**

are actively considering reducing their waste and/or recycling their plastic when travelling.

**72%**

of millennial respondents would pay more for products or services with a positive social and environmental impact. A 55% increase since 2014.

Global Sustainable Destination Index, 2016

Booking.com have seen increased searches for green experiences – hiking (94%), clean air (50%), nature (44%) and relaxation (33%).

## IDEAS AND INSPIRATION



**Follow in the footsteps of Northern Ireland's trail-blazing sustainability heroes.**

### CASTLE ESPIE WETLAND CENTRE

*"We're committed to resource efficiency and creating a circular economy. We strive to eliminate, reduce, reuse, or recover waste through composting and recycling. We try to think differently too, not to see materials as waste, but as opportunities to repair, use in other ways or share if it's something we no longer need.*

*We also used authentic, locally sourced materials in our building and installed a wind turbine for our electricity. In fact, we now generate more than we need. So the surplus goes back onto the grid for others to use."*

Paul Stewart



When the site had its makeover, the original Castle Espie buildings were insulated and re-used in the new design – saving the energy that producing new building materials would normally use.

In addition, Castle Espie installed solar panels which provide 10-20% of their Plant Room's hot water. Filtered rainwater is used to flush the toilets and the wastewater treatment garden was one of the first to be built in Northern Ireland. Almost 20 years ago.

## GOSFORD FOREST PARK

*“As always when developing green spaces, engaging with the local community was paramount. It was essential that they felt they had meaningful input into the development of ‘their forest’. You cannot overestimate how important connection with the community is. When done right, local people become ambassadors for the project and enhance your visitors’ experience.”*

Chris Scott

For Gosford Forest Park, ensuring both tourists and local people would feel at home there was key. So, as well as sharing initial design ideas with the community and taking their feedback on board, they also took advice on play areas from the real experts – the local schoolchildren. Classroom sessions, walks in the wood and craft days set the children’s imagination loose and inspired the creation of an outstanding inclusive and green family experience.



## OM DARK SKY PARK AND OBSERVATORY

*“The Dark Sky Park has brought the community together and that’s the main thing for me. There’s a pride. It’s also been an economic generator for the region. These facilities weren’t here. Before, people might have stopped off at Beaghmore Stone Circles, but it certainly wasn’t a staycation. We’re now known as a wee mini destination up in the Sperrins and this has all evolved through green tourism and through the Dark Sky Park.”*

Mary McKeown



The only accredited International Dark Sky Place in Northern Ireland, Davagh Forest in the Sperrin Mountains is known for its lack of light pollution. It's now on a mission to get the world to turn down the lights, though that's not the only way they're protecting our world.

An area of outstanding natural beauty, building in the forest had to be sensitive to its surroundings. Planting a sedum roof, using sustainable materials for its Solar Walk boardwalk and an eco-friendly heating system all preserve the nature of the site. While its dark night sky and observatory offer a magical experience to visiting stargazers.



## ERNE WATER TAXI

*“Having spent many great days exploring Fermanagh, sailing, kayaking and fishing, I was inspired to showcase my beautiful homeland and wanted to give visitors the chance to become immersed in the spectacular lake-land landscape of Lough Erne. Now, our new Island Discovery boat offers visitors a silent, all-electric eco-friendly motor experience and is the best way to appreciate the views and hear the distinct sounds of our waterways.”*

Barry Flanagan

Erne Water Taxi gives guests a completely unique experience. An opportunity for visitors to connect with nature and enjoy an outdoor adventure off the beaten track. It inspires travellers to imagine Lough Erne's ancient landscape through stories, told by knowledgeable guides who are passionate about their topic. A fascinating journey that transports visitors back through time in a spectacular setting.





## THE SALTHOUSE HOTEL

*“Our promise is coastal calm in a luxury eco setting, inspired by nature and the best traditions of the area. Our purpose is to connect our guests with the great outdoors, in a landscape shaped by the salt production that gives the hotel its name.”*

Pearse McHenry

A carbon negative hotel, the Salthouse is a stunning example of sustainable accommodation that delivers on every level. They’ve used materials sourced within the region to deliver a perfect escape from the hustle and bustle of modern day living. With natural seaweed baths for total rejuvenation.

## WE'RE STRONGER TOGETHER



Getting to know green businesses and amenities in your area is a great way to share information, learn from each other and find new ways of being more sustainable.

- See what others are doing to make their experience greener. Could you adapt ideas for your situation?
- Can you work with others to develop new angles? For example, could a local restaurant supply packed lunches to your walkers?
- Try pooling resources to deliver new experiences – perhaps combining a fishing trip with a cookery lesson for visitors to enjoy their catch.
- How about buying second hand equipment or selling on something you no longer need?
- Think about developing new adventures and experiences off the beaten track, to encourage visitors to move away from busy hotspots.

After all, the more reasons we can give a green tourist to choose Northern Ireland, the more we all benefit.



# THE TOOLKIT

## HOW TO GROW GREEN

Becoming sustainable is not something anyone does overnight. What matters is that your business or amenity keeps learning, adapting and developing – whatever stage you're at in the process. It is achievable when you take it in small steps.

This section has ways to help you see new opportunities, ideas for simple green practices, suggestions on how to package information and more.

- 1** YOUR SUSTAINABILITY AUDIT
- 2** SET UP A GREEN TEAM
- 3** FIND A GREEN MENTOR
- 4** DEVELOPING GREEN EXPERIENCES
- 5** SUPPORTING YOUR VISITORS
- 6** SUSTAINING YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY
- 7** CREATE YOUR SUSTAINABILITY POLICY
- 8** MAKE THE MOST OF WHAT YOU'VE GOT
- 9** TALKING TO YOUR AUDIENCE
- 10** TOPICS FOR YOUR WEBSITE

# 1. YOUR SUSTAINABILITY AUDIT

Look at how your site or amenity is impacting your surroundings. Then you can start to make the changes that protect the environment, attract more green tourists and often save you money too.

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## Assess what you're already doing

- What impact is your business having on the environment right now?
- What measures do you already have in place to protect it?
- Are you monitoring the impact of visitors on local communities or protected landscapes?
- Do you have a sustainability policy?
- Are you telling your visitors about the steps you've taken?

## What more could you do? For starters, can you

- reduce your carbon footprint. Use the Carbon Trust's calculator to measure your emissions and identify your pathway to net zero by 2050
- reduce the amount of water you use
- turn off lights when not needed or put them on a timer
- have a free water station for refilling bottles
- provide more litter bins and recycling bins
- use water barrels to recycle rainwater
- wash kayaks and canoes before going on the waterways to protect wildlife and vegetation from invasive species
- switch to refills instead of single use containers. Become plastic free or use recycled plastic

## Or, if you have the basics covered, could you

- investigate new eco-innovations
- install solar panels
- offer local sustainable products as gifts or takeaways (e.g. wildflower seeds instead of plastic pens)
- encourage foraging for food such as wild garlic or berries
- switch to a 100% green energy provider
- avoid over-buying to reduce waste and cut your waste management or storage costs

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# 2. SET UP A GREEN TEAM

Creating a sustainable experience takes time, but the benefits can be huge. If possible, nominate a green leader or set up a green team within your business. They can be the focus point for all sustainability matters – from research to training to implementation and verification.

# 3. FIND A GREEN MENTOR

Think about getting a green mentor to help you on the journey. It could be somebody local who's been where you are now. So they'll understand the issues and have lots of experience to share.

## 4. DEVELOPING GREEN EXPERIENCES

- Design with sustainability in mind, whether you're starting from scratch or developing what you have.
- Offer your visitors the chance to get involved with ethical experiences. For example, Paddle with a Purpose invites you to gather up sea-trash while out on the water.
- Work with the surrounding landscape and, if possible, re-purpose existing structures or materials.
- Point out local examples that combine old and new, such as restoring damaged boundaries with dry stone walls.
- Employ local crafts people to carry out the work. Using traditional building methods or practices makes a great story to tell your visitors.
- Think about sustainable purchasing. Could second-hand or reconditioned outdoor furniture or equipment work for you?
- Consider providing charging points for electric vehicles
- Make sure to have adequate toilet facilities for groups. (Perhaps this is a chance to use recycled rainwater?)

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## 5. SUPPORTING YOUR VISITORS

- Have a visitor management plan in place. It will give your visitors a better experience and protect your surroundings too.
- Provide suitable car parking and, if necessary, have an overflow plan.
- Give people information on green transport options.
- Encourage visits at off-peak times. It cuts down congestion and shows you're thinking of the local community.
- Find helpful ways to educate your visitors. If this is a new experience for them, clear tips will help them to protect the landscape and its nature.
- If your visitors are lucky enough to be in an Area of Natural Beauty, tell them what that means, so that they can really appreciate and look after it.
- Help them enjoy a richer experience with information about local green initiatives or attractions.
- Green tourists love an authentic taste of local life. So involve them in local events. Take them to matches, spend a day on a farm, invite them to volunteer days.



## 6. SUSTAINING YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY

- Additional traffic can be very disruptive for your neighbours. Could you team up with a local bus company to offer a shuttle service for visitors?
- If your site has a café or restaurant, don't bring in a big international chain to run it. Perhaps a local café could do the job or set up a new venture for you.
- Try to engage local people. Maybe you need a tour guide or someone to help maintain a mountain trail? Keeping it local creates jobs and income which sustain your community.
- Could you sponsor a local team or support a local charity? If you get your visitors involved, they'll be leaving something meaningful behind them.
- Be open with the community about your plans. Being part of the decision-making gives everyone shared ownership, helping things run more smoothly.



## 7. CREATE YOUR SUSTAINABILITY POLICY



### Document what you're doing to be more sustainable

Include the steps you're already taking to protect our environment, no matter how small.

It could be anything from going paperless, to using sustainable materials, to planting a wildflower meadow or installing a bee hotel on your land.

### Develop a Visitor Manifesto

Help your visitors to be considerate travellers. Tell them how you'd like them to treat the people they meet and the places they go on their journey. Encourage them to:

- Leave no trace
- Treat the local community (their hosts) with respect
- Treat any animals they encounter with care
- Respect the biodiversity of an area
- Be kind to our natural world
- See how they can offset their carbon footprint
- Carry on their green practices when they get back home

### Get your suppliers on board

Look at what sustainability policy your suppliers have in place.

Can they commit to ethical procurement or using sustainable materials? Ask them - you might be surprised by what they're already doing. It could inspire you too.

### Look for accreditation or verification

See what training courses you can do or check out organisations who can help you grow more sustainable. This provides the proof that your green customers will look for. Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful and Leave No Trace are good places to start.

## 8. MAKE THE MOST OF WHAT YOU'VE GOT



Sometimes simple additions make all the difference. For example, depending on your location, could you

- factor a beach clean into the day
- create a Nature Treasure Hunt to help children get to know the local trees and flowers
- invite your visitors to leave their mark in a good way – perhaps by planting spring bulbs or other seasonal activities

It's in everyone's interest to protect our land for the future and no one can do it alone. Tourism touches all of us – visitors, local residents, landowners and anyone working in the industry.

**So it's worth remembering we're all in this together.**

## 9. TALKING TO YOUR AUDIENCE



When you're writing your blog or updating your website, it's all about how you make your visitors feel – relaxed, restored and revitalised. So talk about the benefits. Show how the experience will add to their wellbeing with a nod to its impact on the planet's wellness too.

Never greenwash. Make it meaningful and honest. If in doubt, just keep it simple, brief and genuinely green.

everyday life with all its quirks. So tell them all about the farm walks and festivals, local characters or local sports.

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### Stay local, local, local.

Green tourists are here to connect with their warm, generous hosts. They want to spend time with local everyday heroes, and experience

If you can help your visitors to immerse themselves in your community, you'll give them precious memories to take home – and to keep them coming back for more.

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## 10. TOPICS FOR YOUR WEBSITE



### Your Sustainability Policy

Once you've firmed up your policy, this is where it belongs. Ideally, just one click from your home page.

This is information your visitors and potential business contacts need. You're probably already doing great things. Telling people all about it is just as important if you want to succeed as a sustainable enterprise.

Remember, too, it's not written in stone. As your sustainability practices evolve, so can your policy. That will be more good news to tell your visitors.

### Practical Information

Include anything that can make your visitors' time more enjoyable for them and the community around them. Add useful stuff, such as:

- Local activities like walks, water sports or other outdoor pursuits
- Nearby green experiences and attractions
- Restaurants and cafés serving local produce
- Public transport routes and times
- Local bicycle hire shops
- Parking spots
- Bathroom locations

## Make a Giant Difference

Sign up to Tourism NI's pledge to [Make a Giant Difference](#), and invite your guests to do the same.

## Take care of each other

1. I will care for myself. I will regularly wash and sanitise my hands.
2. I will keep a safe distance. I will avoid crowded areas and choose quiet open spaces.
3. I will be responsible. I will wear a face covering when required and will act immediately if I feel unwell or present symptoms.

## Take care of the land

1. I will guard its natural beauty. I will love the place by leaving no trace behind.
2. I will be outdoor smart. I will plan ahead, park responsibly and respect local rules.
3. I will not disturb the land. I will respect people around me. I will keep dogs on a lead when needed and leave gates as I've found them.

## Take care of local businesses

1. I will support the local business community. I will enjoy local attractions and culture and choose to support local produce, food and drink.
2. I will plan ahead. I will book ahead to help places prepare for my visit and I will be patient as we adjust to longer waiting times and new guidelines.



3. I will respect guidelines. I will stay informed about current travel restrictions and local government guidelines and I will respect the wishes of businesses that are following them.

## Talk to your own community too

Green tourists are thoughtful travellers. So they are good news. Be an advocate for them within your community and an advocate for your community with them.

Share stories of how sustainable tourism is benefitting the local area. Could you include news of local events that welcome green guests? Supporting each other pays off for everyone as together we grow a greener future from the ground up.





# DOs

## **Do keep it light.**

Our visitors are here to enjoy themselves. So sell the experience first. Then add the green sparkle.

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## **Do be clear.**

Let them know how the activity, experience or location you offer protects the environment. People want to make sustainable choices and you can help them do it.

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## **Do talk about the benefit.**

A night under the stars or a walk in the woods is a chance for guests to recharge. Use words like restorative and relaxing. It's not just the environment we're looking after here. It's people too.

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## **Do be authentic.**

Going green is a process. Be honest with your visitors about what you've already achieved. They'll appreciate the efforts you're making.

# DON'Ts

## **Don't overload them**

Too much information can be confusing. Environmental protection is a big, big topic. Focus on the simple steps you and your visitors can take together to make a difference.

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## **Don't overdo the green**

Keep it natural. Green ways of living are second nature to us here. So you want your guests to feel it's part of the experience, not lobbed in on top.

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## **Don't greenwash**

Green tourists know their stuff, so don't over promise on what you're offering. Keep it real.

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## **Don't forget the fun**

It is a getaway, after all.



## GETTING STARTED



You're the expert on your business, so you'll know best what changes will be most effective for you. Here are some ideas to keep you moving towards sustainability, whatever stage of the journey you're at.

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### 6-Month plan

Take small steps such as:

- using the toolkit to complete your sustainability audit
  - creating your Sustainability Policy and sharing it with your audience
  - investigating greener energy suppliers
  - providing a free water refill station for your visitors
- 

### 12-Month plan

Make plans for further down the line:

- start working towards accreditation with a recognised body
- source local food providers and learn their stories (so you can tell your guests all about them)
- provide bicycles and electric vehicle charging points for your visitors
- start your journey to net zero carbon emissions. [See more here: SME Carbon Footprint Calculator | The Carbon Trust](#)



### 18-Month plan

With the ground work done, you can really look to the future:

- install solar panels for your energy needs
- if you're thinking about building works, look for recycled or locally sourced materials
- aim to be completely plastic and paper free
- see what green partnerships could work for you long-term, either with local sustainable businesses or by sourcing new suppliers

## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Here are some useful links to help you on your journey to sustainability.

1. [Home - Leave No Trace Ireland](#)
2. [Welcome to Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful](#)
3. [Climate Action Plans & Business Sustainability | The Carbon Trust](#)

4. [Make A Giant Difference \(tourismni.com\)](#)

5. [Sustainable development | UNWTO](#)

Or you can get in touch with us at [info@tourismni.com](mailto:info@tourismni.com)





**tourism  
northernireland**

Your guide to helping make Northern Ireland a sustainable tourism destination

This guide is designed to be kind to the environment, in a minimal style that avoids using full page images which use more energy to download.