

# EXPERIENCES EXPLAINED

A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING AND DEVELOPING  
MEMORABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCES





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“Offering experiences has given me a much greater profile and greater opportunity to increase my overseas sales. Offering a German Tour Operator bike hire for €15 may not be impressive, but combining bike hire with a visit to a mussel farm, a trip on a real working fishing charter, meeting the local skipper, dining on your own catch and cycling on a 42km traffic free path with fabulous views... now that gets their attention.... That’s the difference between selling product and selling experiences.”

Travis Zeray, Clew Bay Outdoors





Galway Market.

## INTRODUCTION

International tourism is undergoing a transformation in how it is developed, marketed and managed, driven by rapidly changing visitor expectations. The increasing emphasis being placed on 'experiences' by consumers is far more than a shift in terminology or a fad; it is a well-researched and quantifiable trend.

Experiential Tourism is travel motivated by the desire to really connect with a place, its culture and people. It is less concerned with simply seeing or doing things, but rather with immersing oneself in the locale, interacting with people, engaging the senses, and learning the history and stories of the place.

An experience has one strong idea at its heart. It is something which one does, sees or feels which is (ideally) unique and certainly distinctive to a particular place. Experiences help the potential visitor make decisions to go to one place over another by imagining themselves there. It also helps them remember the visit as being special and ensures that they talk about it afterwards.

Fáilte Ireland, as part of its corporate strategy 2014 – 2016 has developed an experience development framework to guide the necessary transition away from delivering tourism products to delivering much more compelling world class tourism experiences.

We recognise that this shift in direction presents both opportunities and challenges for Irish tourism, but the results of making this shift can be significant. The collaborative nature of experience development ensures that the economic benefits that accrue, not only benefit the individual businesses involved but also a much wider community. 'The Greenway' case studies provided at the back of this guide, makes for interesting reading in this regard.

Internationally, an enhanced portfolio of unique Irish experiences, specifically targeted at identified best prospect global consumers segments will serve to further strengthen brand Ireland's competitive advantage and achieve greater 'cut through' in a very busy global marketplace.

The aim of this guide is

- » to help understand the difference between tourism products and tourism experiences
- » to discuss the components of a memorable tourism experience
- » to outline the key considerations when developing new experiences or evaluating and enhancing current experiences

This guide forms part of a range of Fáilte Ireland Experience Development supports for tourism stakeholders; tourism businesses, community groups, festivals and events organisers, local authorities and enterprise support agencies.

Please visit [www.failteireland.ie](http://www.failteireland.ie) or contact your local Fáilte Ireland representative for further information.





## UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM

For today's international tourist, holidays are less about 'doing' something and more about feeling that they are truly immersed in a place or an activity.

A tourism experience is multi-faceted and somewhat hard to define. It's what a visitor gains from the combination of the place, its attractions, activities, the people they meet along the way and the stories they share.

A memorable tourism experience is inherently personal, engages the senses, makes connections on an emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual or social level and creates a lasting memory.

### CREATING MEMORABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCES

Experience development or creating experiences is all about combining natural landscape assets, tourism products, customer service, stories (and the telling of them) to create compelling consumer offerings or 'experiences'.

In essence, creating tourism experiences is about being absolutely consumer-focused, identifying the customer segments with the greatest potential for your business, deeply understanding their needs and motivations, and then offering unique and authentic experiences that motivate and fulfil these needs.

While individually a world class product, story or service can create a memorable tourism experience in its own right, more often, it is the combination of a number of parts that combine to make it a truly memorable experience.

Memorable tourism experience therefore comprise of four core components;

» product » service » story » narration

The combination of the unique story of your place, the various means through which that story is narrated for visitors (e.g. via people, information panels or online) and the service a customer experiences when they are with you, is what will best ensure the your visitor has an opportunity to immerse themselves in the experience you offer and take away some great memories.





## EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The pyramid diagram opposite summarises the core components of the framework and illustrates how the various parts fit together. Each component is informed by the one above it in the pyramid.

While the Brand Ireland and the Key Propositions components are fixed, the Themes, Signature Experiences and Supporting Experiences evolve and change over time to refresh and replenish the Key Propositions in the minds of our target segments in the marketplace. The core components of an Experience, when effectively combined, ensure a memorable tourism experience is delivered.



**BRAND IRELAND** – Our unique international tourism identity that promises visitors spontaneous and engaging experiences. Tourism Brand Ireland comprises five pillars\*.

**KEY PROPOSITIONS** – A key proposition has the potential to stand out in the international marketplace and stimulate demand. Ireland has three key propositions: The Wild Atlantic Way, Dublin and East and South (Culture & Heritage).

**STORIES / THEMES** – Themes and stories that bring the proposition to life for consumers.

**SIGNATURE EXPERIENCES** – Deliver on the brand proposition and serve as a motivator for international visitors. Generally, though not always, they comprise a combination of experiences that can be story-based, thematic or geographical.

**SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES** – Tourism products (e.g. activities, attractions, restaurants etc.) that are also brand aligned. Individually these may not motivate the international visitor in their own right, but are key to immersing the visitor in the signature experience.

**ANCILLARY EXPERIENCE MIX** – The wider tourism offering that must also deliver a memorable and pleasurable experience.

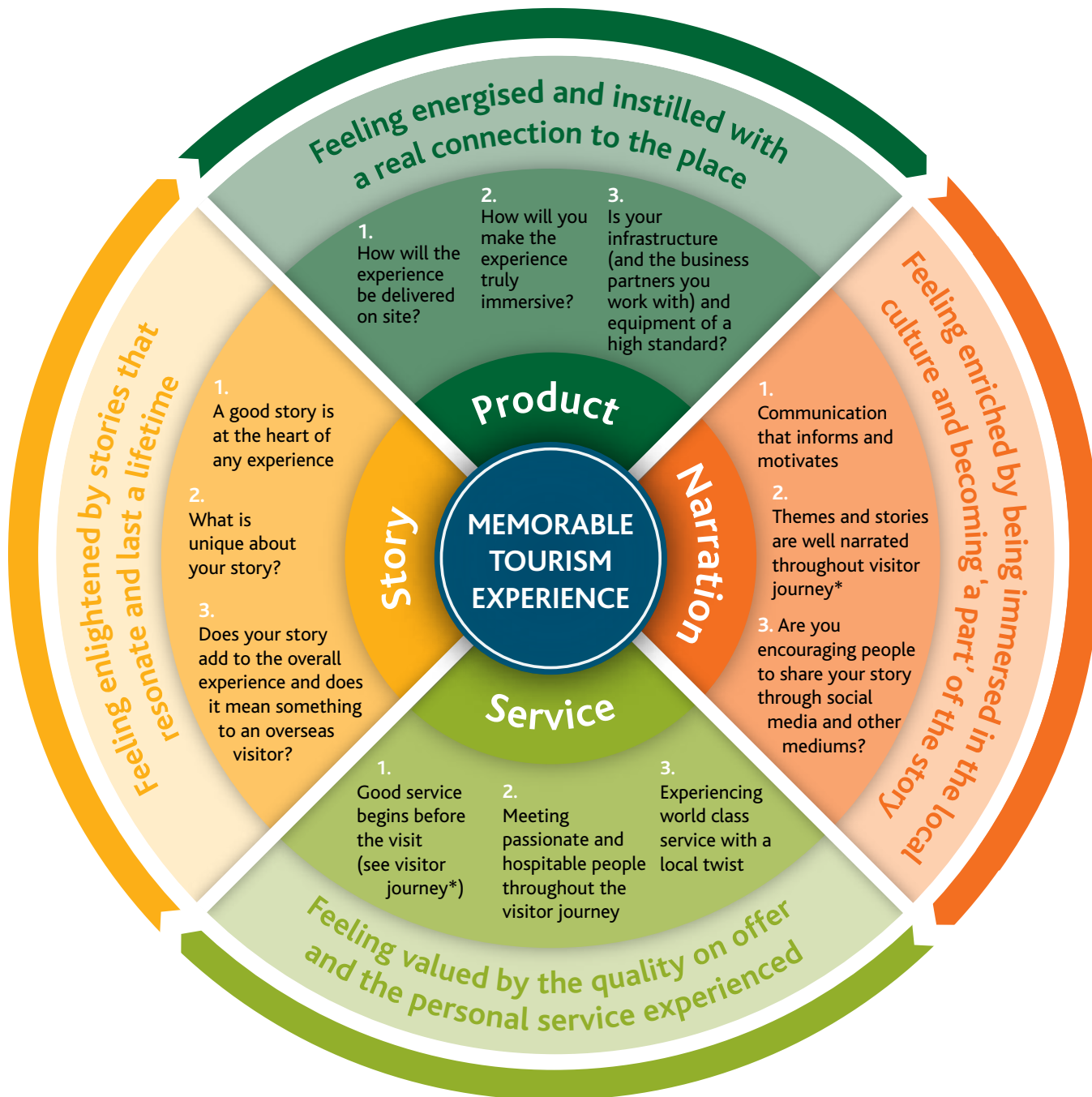
### \*WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE REFER TO THE FIVE BRAND IRELAND PILLARS

Research has shown that five different Irish holiday experiences are highly motivating for international consumers. These are the in essence the promise behind Tourism Brand Ireland. These pillars are:

- » **Vibe of the City** – fresh, exciting and stimulating experiences and attractions in a lively atmosphere
- » **Living Historical Stories** – interesting and informative experiences and attractions in urban and rural areas
- » **Connecting with the People of Ireland** – immersing themselves in Irish culture
- » **Awakening the Senses** – stimulating and profound experiences within natural and unspoiled landscapes
- » **Getting Active in Nature** – revitalising and energising experiences and activities in the spectacular outdoors

# THE EXPERIENCE WHEEL – COMPONENTS OF A MEMORABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCE

The Experience Wheel captures the components that combine to deliver a memorable tourism experience.



\* The visitor journey comprises of the experience from the research and booking phase through to the actual and post visit experience.

The centre layer contains the four components of a memorable tourism experience:

- 1. Product:** attractions, activities, accommodation, restaurants, sites, etc.
- 2. Service:** looking after the customer's needs
- 3. Story:** the story of a place or its people – can be local to the business or area
- 4. Narration:** how we tell the story, pre, during and post.

The next layer captures how you can deliver on expectations for each component. For example:

- 1. Product:** the experience is truly immersive
- 2. Service:** meeting passionate and hospitable people
- 3. Story:** interesting stories of people and place
- 4. Narration:** communication that both informs and motivates

The outermost layer summarises the type of emotions that arise when the experience is positive. So for example the visitor will feel energised, enriched, valued or enlightened. Positive emotions lead to good memories which can lead to recommendations and plans for returns trips.

It is important to remember that creating tourism experiences and adding value is a progressive process. The building blocks must be right. The core product and service offering upon which the experience is built must be nothing less than excellent before real value can be added. All four components – Product, Service, Story, Narration, must function together.

## SO WHAT'S NEW?

Experiences are how a business immerses the visitor in an interesting, engaging story which is narrated or 'revealed' in a number of ways. One of the most significant differences is that experiences offer visitors the opportunity to construct their own narrative. They are part of the experience, they don't simply 'consume', they 'part-take' and therefore creativity, imaginative learning and building in the unexpected become increasingly important.



Surfing at Inch Beach on Wild Atlantic Way



## 1 PRODUCT

The definition of a tourism product is broad. It can be everything from restaurants, hotels and pubs, to beaches, parks and public areas. Product is largely tangible and often termed as 'the hardware'.

Customer requirements must be considered at all stages of the customer journey. Remember – the visitor journey comprises of their experience from the research and booking phase through to the actual and post visit experience.

### 1.1 HOW WILL THE EXPERIENCE BE DELIVERED ON SITE?

Think about the entirety of the visitor journey.

#### REQUIREMENTS

- » Make sure the experience is unique, story-driven, immersive and designed specifically to meet visitor expectations. Does the experience provide the right balance between guidance and autonomy as appropriate? Different segments have different requirements – how well do you know and understand your target customer?
- » Benchmark your experience against best-in-class offerings – learn from those in other destinations and add an uniquely Irish twist. The internet is a fantastic research tool.
- » Continually enhance your products and services.
- » Ensure you are fully compliant with all legal, health & safety, insurance and other requirements associated with the experience.



*I remember clanging the bell at Dunbrody Famine Ship*

### 1.2 HOW WILL YOU MAKE YOUR EXPERIENCE TRULY IMMERSIVE?

Visitors immerse themselves when their senses are engaged – it triggers emotions and creates lasting memories. Does your experience engage the senses from the start of the visitor journey i.e. pre-visit?

#### REQUIREMENTS

- » Memorable tourism experiences are created when the visitor can get involved. Do you offer a hands-on experience? If they catch a fish, will your chef cook it for them for dinner that night? If they visit your heritage centre, can they sit in the chair where the hero ate his last meal before being exiled? If they take part in your food trail, can they meet the person who makes the cheese? If they love the brown bread in your restaurant, will you offer them the recipe?
- » Walk through your experience in your customer's shoes. Are there opportunities for the visitor to get involved and learn something new?
- » How can you bring your story to life?



*I always wanted to play the Bodhran...and now I have!*

### 1.3 IS YOUR INFRASTRUCTURE AND EQUIPMENT (AND THAT OF ANY BUSINESS PARTNERS YOU WORK WITH), OF A HIGH STANDARD?

Visitors expect high quality at every point of the experience – it is important that you and any partners you work with deliver this. Collaboration with these partners and all relevant stakeholders is essential to ensure that the entire experience is delivered.

#### REQUIREMENTS

- » Consult with relevant partners and stakeholders.
- » Ensure that the partners you work with share your vision, so that the experience gets delivered as you want it to.
- » Is access to your premises well explained and easy for a visitor to understand?
- » Is there en-route and local signage?
- » Does the site infrastructure reflect the theme of the experience. Is it bringing the story to life?
- » Are there wifi and internet facilities available?

## 2 SERVICE

Service plays a vital role in the visitor experience and especially in an Irish context where it has proven to be one of our differentiating strengths. People can make or break an experience ... make sure your team help to make it memorable rather than mediocre! Where product is considered the 'hardware', service is considered as 'software' due to its intangible nature.

### 2.1 GOOD SERVICE BEGINS BEFORE THE VISIT. THIS WILL HELP THE VISITOR INTERPRET WHAT'S ON OFFER.

Setting expectations about the service you offer and how you interact with visitors from before they arrive is very important. Not only is it important to closing a sale, but importantly it starts to build a connection with your visitors

#### REQUIREMENTS

- » Are you, your employees and any third parties you work with involved in selling the experience passionate about the offering? Do you all communicate the experience in a compelling manner?
- » Are procedures in place, for example mystery shoppers or surveys, to regularly test the effectiveness of employees in promoting and delivering the experience?
- » Do you work with other products and experiences to create a referral network? Can they recommend the experience in a meaningful way to their customers too?



*I love the fact that you meet the local food producers....and they happily share their stories....*

### 2.2 MEETING PASSIONATE AND HOSPITABLE PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THE VISITOR JOURNEY

Everything either comes together or falls apart at the point of interaction with the customer. To create memorable experiences, you need passionate employees and others who are genuinely interested in interacting with visitors.

#### REQUIREMENTS

- » Do you have the right people on your team? This is crucial regardless of the scale of the experience on offer – it is as important for a small one person tourism enterprise as it is for a five star hotel.
- » Have you invested in training and development to continuously upgrade the skills and knowledge of your employees?
- » Do locals understand what you do and do they understand the integral role that they play in delivering the experience? e.g. if a customer goes to a local shop, do they know about your experience?
- » Are local artists, musicians, artisan producers etc. integrated where possible into the experience on offer?



*I will never forget the fun we had pulling pints at the Guinness Storehouse....and the staff were just great...*

### 2.3 EXPERIENCING WORLD CLASS SERVICE WITH A LOCAL TWIST

Your service must be world class, but it must feel unique to your locality too.

#### REQUIREMENTS

- » Has an agreed service promise, or set of standards, been defined, to deliver on all elements of the experience throughout the visitor journey.
- » Owners and managers of the experience play a leading role in delivering service excellence – don't forget to spend time on the "shop floor", directly engaging with customers and getting to know what it feels like to be a customer experiencing your offering.
- » Are there specific features that are entirely unique to the experience? Does the 'personality' of the service reflect the overall theme, location and ethos of the experience?
- » Is gathering visitor feedback, both during and after the experience, a priority? Are defined procedures in place to measure customer satisfaction?



### 3 STORY

Stories can be the reason an experience will stand out and create a meaningful and memorable journey for visitors. The story very often provides the stimulus that transforms a product into a lasting and memorable experience. Stories are not limited to the spoken word, and may entail visual stimuli that tell the story or history of a place.

Think about your target customer, understand their needs and motivations, be sure that your story delivers what you want to hear and that it is aligned to one of the three key propositions – the Wild Atlantic Way, Dublin or East & South (Culture & Heritage).

#### 3.1 COMPELLING STORIES INSPIRE

The story about the place or the people can stir the emotions, and increase the chances of creating a memorable experience. Good stories engage the visitor's senses and immerse them into the experience. The visitor, should be left with the feeling of having learnt something new ... something more than they expected ... something that stays with them and they share through social media and word of mouth - still the most effective form of promotion!

##### REQUIREMENTS

- » Have you defined the unique and special characteristics of the experience? Have compelling stories been developed and communicated?
- » Are the stories meaningful, authentic and do they have direct appeal to the targeted segments?
- » Is there a clear link between the stories and the overall proposition of the wider destination? E.g. if you are based on the coast in Co. Clare, have you incorporated the essence of the Wild Atlantic Way into your story?



*Making memories...*

#### 3.2 THE EXPERIENCE MUST BRING STORIES TO LIFE

The experience must have the ability to immerse and engage the visitor in the story of the place and the people they are visiting.

##### REQUIREMENTS

- » Are all elements of the experience designed to make the story tangible and real for visitors?
- » Is the experience participative and stimulating? Does it allow the visitor to immerse themselves in the story in an authentic way? e.g. can it be made more tangible for visitors – touching or smelling often help us remember something.

#### 3.3 STORIES TRULY ADD TO THE EXPERIENCE

In order to constantly enhance the experience, the impact of stories on visitors must be monitored and evaluated.

##### REQUIREMENTS

- » When gathering feedback from visitors try to establish if the stories have resonated and contributed to the creation of a memorable experience for them. Create criteria to measure against.



*Experiencing the local brew...*



## 4 NARRATION

Narration is about how you communicate with customers, both pre-visit and when they are here. Your story is the unique experience you have to share; your narration is how and where you share it.

Pre-visit, customers expect quality information and marketing that informs and motivates. When they are here, they want stories to be brought to life through imaginative narration and story-telling.

### 4.1 PRE-VISIT – COMMUNICATION THAT INFORMS AND MOTIVATES

Examples of pre-visit narration include the language and imagery on your website, on social media, in guidebooks, in your dealings with third parties and so on. How useful is the information you provide? Does your marketing and information motivate and inform the visitor? Remember that narration is not just about text – imagery and video are key, and they're understandable in all languages.

#### REQUIREMENTS

- » Have you ensured that defined themes and stories are effectively integrated into all marketing and sales activities?
- » Is it easy for visitors to find up to date, informative, motivational information about your experience when they are planning their trip? Are you visible in the places where they look? Do you use media channels that are appropriate to your target customer?
- » Does your imagery and use of video communicate the experience effectively?



*Cant wait to go!*

### 4.2 ON-SITE – STORIES ARE WELL NARRATED DURING VISIT

During the visit, examples include personal guides who share the story and bring it to life as well as visual presentation, audio presentation, interpretive panels or self-narration. Think about opportunities for your visitor to use their senses – sound, sight, taste, touch and smell – when engaging with your experience. This can often be more enjoyable than reading lots of text.

The sharing of stories throughout the visit is vital and unless the narration is attractive and appropriate, the experience is less likely to leave a lasting memory.

#### REQUIREMENTS

- » Are there means available to support interpretation during the visit through guides, product providers, tourist office, information panels etc.?
- » Have you ensured that employees, locals and other stakeholders know your stories and are supported to share it e.g. do you invite them to try out your restaurant or attraction so they can talk knowledgeably about it?
- » Are personal interactions and storytelling authentic?
- » Does the narration take account of the target audience? Factors such as language barriers and cultural perspectives should be considered.

### 4.3 SOCIAL MEDIA ENCOURAGES SPONTANEOUS SHARING OF EXPERIENCES AND STORIES

The digital world offers innumerable opportunities to share their experiences, while still on holiday as well as when they return home. Think about ways to maximise this trend to best advantage – in a non-obtrusive manner.

#### REQUIREMENTS

- » Is the visitor encouraged (gently) and facilitated to share their experiences digitally, during and post-visit?
- » Do you offer to take photos of your visitors engaging with your experience so that they can share their images on social media? e.g. a prompt that invites guests to share their experience with you on Trip Advisor.



*'Love Dublin' she tweets....*







1. CONSUMER SEGMENTS	Culturally Curious	Social Energisers	Great Escapers	I don't know
What segment are you targeting with this experience?				
<p><b>TO THINK ABOUT ...</b>                      Three segments have been identified as priorities in the main overseas markets (Great Britain, United States, Germany and France). Different segments have different requirements – how well do you know and understand your target customer?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <b>Culturally Curious</b> – tend to be slightly older, very independently minded and interested in immersing themselves in a place. Interested in history and culture. Like good food and service.</li> <li>» <b>Social Energisers</b> – tend to be young, looking for new experiences and excitement. Like city experience with lots to see and do – interested in partying but not just partying.</li> <li>» <b>Great Escapers</b> – all about getting away from it all, renewing family bonds and spending time together in a beautiful place. 'Gentle' outdoor activities such as walking, cycling.</li> </ul> <p>For further information on segmentation visit <a href="http://www.failteireland.ie">www.failteireland.ie</a></p>				

2. PROPOSITION ('BIG IDEA')	Wild Atlantic Way	Dublin	East & South (Culture & Heritage)	I don't know
Which iconic proposition are you aligned to?				
<p><b>TO THINK ABOUT ...</b>                      Aligning your experience to one of the propositions will add to its attractiveness and appeal. If your experience is based in Dublin, include the Dublin story when developing your experience – vibrant capital city – bursting with a variety of surprising experiences – where city living thrives side by side with the natural outdoors.</p>				

3. PRODUCT	Customer expectations	Poor. Needs improving.	Good. Good, but I can improve it.	Excellent. I'm satisfied it's world-class.
1. The product is bringing the story to life.				
2. The on-site experience is truly immersive and engages the senses.				
3. The product mix is correct for customer. (e.g. the experience is aimed at the Culturally Curious therefore the accommodation, activities etc. offered are what they require)				
<p><b>TO THINK ABOUT ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Today's consumer requires high quality product in order to have a high quality experience – are you delivering this?</li> <li>» Is the product benchmarked against best-in-class offerings? Learn from those in other destinations and add a uniquely Irish twist.</li> <li>» Who do you collaborate with? Do they have the same high standards? Do you work well together? e.g. (if you use local producers)</li> <li>» Is your experience unique, story-driven, immersive, and designed to meet customer expectations? e.g. If you have a stunning view, are you sharing that?</li> <li>» Continually enhance and innovate – introduce new concepts to improve what you already have.</li> <li>» Be fully compliant with all legal, health &amp; safety, insurance and other relevant requirements.</li> <li>» Access and local infrastructure enhance the experience – collaborate with other tourism businesses and local government to ensure that infrastructure meets customer expectations.</li> <li>» Does the core product offering deliver on the broad Brand Ireland themes of:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Living historical stories</li> <li>• Vibe in the city</li> <li>• Awakening the senses</li> <li>• Active in nature</li> </ul> </li> </ul>				



4. SERVICE			
Customer expectations	Poor. Needs training.	Good. Good, but I can improve it.	Excellent. I'm satisfied it's world-class.
1. You and your staff are passionate about customer service, and it shows.			
2. We gather and act on customer feedback.			
3. I know that, for example, the Culturally Curious and the Great Escaper enjoy personalised service so I refer to them by name.			
<b>TO THINK ABOUT ...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Test the effectiveness of employees and partners in promoting and delivering the experience through mystery shopping.</li> <li>» Have you, your staff and your partners all trialed the experience first hand? If not, how do you stand over it and effectively promote it?</li> <li>» Set up a referral network – can your partners recommend the experience to their customers too?</li> <li>» Continually invest time and resources in training and upskilling.</li> <li>» Spread the word – do locals understand the importance of the experience and the integral role they play in delivering it?</li> <li>» Work with and integrate local artists, musicians, artisan producers etc. into your experience where possible.</li> <li>» Make visitor feedback a priority.</li> </ul>			

5. STORY			
Customer expectations	Poor. I need to devote time to this.	Good. Good, but I can improve it.	Excellent. I'm satisfied it's world-class.
1. The story allows the customer to fully immerse themselves in an authentic way			
2. We can tweak the story to our customer needs. We know, for example, that the story for the Culturally Curious can have slightly different nuances to the story for the Great Escaper.			
<b>TO THINK ABOUT ...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» A good story idea or concept is essential to create the necessary mood triggers which involve visitors, stimulate their emotions and create memories.</li> <li>» Your story should resonate with one of the propositions – The Wild Atlantic Way, Dublin, East &amp; South (Culture and Heritage)</li> <li>» Do you know what emotions the story idea is designed to evoke in the various target audiences?</li> <li>» Is the story is communicated to visitors before their arrival through marketing materials online and offline?</li> <li>» Is the story delivered on site in a way that involves and immerses the visitor?</li> <li>» Are you assured that the visitor 'got the story' and that you have the means of measuring its success and impact?</li> <li>» Does the story live outside of the business experience? In other words, is it supported by other businesses and by the community? Do they know about it? Can they reinforce or extend it?</li> </ul>			

6. NARRATION			
Customer expectations	Poor. Needs investment or resources.	Good. Good, but I can improve it.	Excellent. I'm satisfied it's world-class.
1. Employees, locals and other stakeholders know the stories and share them with visitors.			
2. Visitors will be encouraged, and facilitated, to share their experiences during and post-visit.			
3. I understand that languages are important for my German and French visitors so I take account of that online and on-site.			
<b>TO THINK ABOUT ...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Narration is about how you communicate with customers, both pre-visit and when they are here. Your story is what you want to share; your narration is how and where you say it.</li> <li>» Delivery is critical. It's not about learning off a script and retelling a monologue. It's about drawing on the audience so they believe and live the story.</li> <li>» Pre-visit, customers expect quality information and communication that informs and motivates.</li> <li>» When here, visitors want stories brought to life through narration and story-telling.</li> <li>» Evaluate the language and imagery on your website, on social media, in guidebooks, in your dealings with third parties and so on. Does it motivate and inform the visitor?</li> <li>» Narration is not just about text – imagery and video are key, and they're understandable in all languages.</li> <li>» During the visit, examples include personal guides, visual presentation, audio presentation, interpretive panels or self-narration. When can the visitor use their senses when engaging with your experience?</li> <li>» Ensure that employees, locals and other stakeholders know the stories and share them with visitors.</li> <li>» Does the narration take account of the audience? What about language barriers? Consider the Culturally Curious customer – they may want more or different information to the Great Escaper.</li> <li>» Cultural perspectives should be considered. Particular attention should be paid to local dialect, we often forget others can find it difficult to understand the very many and very different lyrical Irish twangs!</li> <li>» Gently encourage the visitor to share their experiences digitally, during and post-visit.</li> </ul>			









**Fáilte Ireland**  
National Tourism Development Authority

Cycling in Connemara  
National Park.

FI-23051-14