Visitor attractions range from built, natural, heritage, cultural and contemporary experiences. They provide access to specific areas of interest, education and entertainment and are an integral part of a tourist’s time in Ireland.

**WHAT MAKES A GREAT VISITOR ATTRACTION?**

- Nearly 6,000 visitors (predominantly international) were interviewed across 34 different visitor attractions (2016 & 2018) to test a range of experience features from amenities and staff, interior layouts, exhibits, information tools to the storytelling and the tour.
- This research ranks the key elements that influence visitor satisfaction levels and gives a greater understanding as to what makes a great visitor attraction.

**DRIVERS OF SATISFACTION**

This research ranks the elements of the visitor experience that influence satisfaction levels. The following are the rank order of these drivers of satisfaction:

1. **STORY CONTENT**
   A good story goes a long way

2. **GUIDED TOURS**
   Tours make all the difference

3. **STORY DELIVERY**
   Interpretation - there are lots of ways to tell a story

4. **NAVIGATION**
   Coherent layouts

5. **VISITOR MANAGEMENT**
   Remember the person in the crowd
Each of the drivers of satisfaction are now discussed in more detail, drawing on examples, both national and international. These examples highlight attractions that do this particular element of the experience well.

## STORY CONTENT: A GOOD STORY GOES A LONG WAY

Stories bring content to life. Great stories reveal what may not be apparent, relate to the visitor on a personal level and provoke an emotional response.

### WHAT IT'S ABOUT

### ATTR ACTIONS THAT DO THIS WELL

#### Story is interesting and unique
- **Mary Rose, Portsmouth**
  - The history of Henry VIII’s warship is made accessible to visitors by focusing on three strands of the story: life on board a Tudor ship, the theories behind her sinking and how she was recovered.

#### Characters are key
- **Westport House, Westport**
  - A favourite with visitors was the story of Grace O’Malley (the pirate queen), who broke the mould and reigned from where Westport house currently sits.

#### The plot thickens
- **Strokestown House, Roscommon**
  - The extremes between the poor and the wealthy landowners during the famine (Irish v British) added a whole new dimension to the story for many.

#### Stories need to build upon and be different from what is available on websites (or other sources)
- **Royal Yacht Britannia, Edinburgh**
  - The highlights of the tour are presented online to catch your attention but you need to go to find out why it features in the UK Top attractions on Tripadvisor.

#### Uniqueness of story to Ireland
- **Foyles Flying Boat Museum, Limerick**
  - “...The replica of the plane was amazing, you can sit at a bar and watch a hologram of the first Irish coffee being made then you can go and enjoy a real one in the cafe.”

### HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

- Review your current story offering. Consider all target audiences as part of your story development.
- Ensure you control your stories. If there are too many stories being told, would narrowing the focus give more stand out?
- Research and collate all interesting and relevant characters and their stories. Prioritise their appeal based on key target audiences.
- While the underdog has enduring appeal, don’t shy away from telling darker stories or stories of misfortune in an engaging way.
- Pre-visit information should be just enough to pique visitors’ interest. Remember some will have done their homework, others won’t.
- What makes the story special to Ireland – is there something about the people or place that can be a point of differentiation?
GUIDED TOURS: TOURS MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENT

While the delivery of a story can come in many forms, tour guides play a vital role in delivering excellent visitor experiences (with a strong take up where available).

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tour Delivery</strong></td>
<td>Kilmarnock Goal, Dublin</td>
<td>Interested and enthusiastic tour guides are key to keeping the story fresh for visitors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passionate, informed guides, who provide an entertaining tour and bring emotion to the story are highly valued</td>
<td>“Very well organised tour, the story was told with such emotion, couldn’t have been told any better”</td>
<td>Allow guides freedom to build on the story from their own research (as long as it’s evidenced)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tour being fun as well as informative</strong></td>
<td>Museum Hack, USA</td>
<td>Visitors want enjoyable experiences and can only take in so much information, so keep the narrative light and fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour and distinctive ‘nuggets’ contained within the tour delivery are often especially memorable</td>
<td>Selected US museums provide unconventional museum tours with lively ‘insider’ stories, juicy gossip, activities in the galleries and fun photos with the art</td>
<td>Allow the guides to bring out their own personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Re-tellable stories</strong></td>
<td>Hook Lighthouse, Wexford</td>
<td>What fun fact will resonate with your visitor and get them talking long after they've gone, marketing your attraction for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories about people, rituals and events are particularly well received and stick in the mind of the visitor</td>
<td>As the world’s oldest operational lighthouse, Hook is the source of many story vignettes – from the monks who wore down the stone steps carrying coal to the fire beacons, to the more modern tales of families who made Hook their home</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
## Story Delivery: There are lots of ways to tell a story*

Presentations, exhibits and information tools (all types of interpretation) are vital to a great visitor experience. They must be well-planned, entertaining and relevant to the story.

* Particularly important for self-guided visitors

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<td>Flow and orientation</td>
<td>EPIC, Dublin</td>
<td>Does the flow of the attraction allow the visitor to experience the story in sequence?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The one-way system and passport inspired map combine to easily guide visitors from one story gallery to the next</td>
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<tr>
<td>Range of media</td>
<td>National Museum Edinburgh</td>
<td>How can different media and interpretation techniques be used to best effect through the story narrative?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Has designed each exhibition for multiple types of audience engagement-props and hands on activities for children (and adults alike), different layers of information etc</td>
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<tr>
<td>Story structure</td>
<td>Wellcome Collection, London</td>
<td>Using a journalistic approach, how can headlines, executive summaries and more detailed information be innovatively facilitated to accommodate all visitor information needs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Show minimalist interpretation for exhibits, however each panel is hinged and can be opened out for more detail for those looking for more depth to the story</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Props and physical exhibits</td>
<td>Dublinia, Dublin</td>
<td>What elements of your story could benefit from a physical prop (things to hold and touch, 3D models etc) to help further understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visitors enjoyed the hands-on exhibits, digital streetscapes and Viking exhibits. Engaging with props creates a point of differentiation for visitors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Digital media</td>
<td>DDR Museum, Berlin</td>
<td>What nuance or layer can digital media interpretation add to your storytelling?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>While the experience showcases what life was like in former East Germany, digital tools have been effectively woven into their visitor experience e.g. using an old Trabi car with a driving simulator.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio guides and information</td>
<td>Alcatraz, San Francisco</td>
<td>Audio guides can provide consistency of storytelling when done right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The compelling Cellhouse Audio Tour “Doing Time” through the cellhouse featuring the voices of former guards and inmates is available in ten languages</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Audio guides can provide a consistent high quality of storytelling (for all, but especially for non-English speakers)</td>
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Audio guides can provide a consistent high quality of storytelling (for all, but especially for non-English speakers).
# NAVIGATION: COHERENT LAYOUTS

Good stories have a beginning, a middle and an end. Make it easy for visitors to find the start of your story and follow the flow.

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<td>Confusing exterior layout or unclear direction at the start</td>
<td>Louvre Museum, Paris</td>
<td>Understanding that visitors don’t always read signs: is there a physical way to easily help visitors navigate to the start of your experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear interior layout</td>
<td>Museum of New Zealand – Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington</td>
<td>What are the usual orientation questions staff receive? Can interventions be put in place to ease navigation?</td>
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# VISITOR MANAGEMENT: AMENITIES AND STAFF

Put yourself in your visitors’ shoes to get insight into how to continually improve their experience.

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<td>Value for money</td>
<td>Puy du Fou, Les Epesses, France</td>
<td>Are you offering good value for money? What value add can you offer as part of the overall experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One price point</td>
<td>Warwick Castle</td>
<td>Is one inclusive price available? Can price points be bundled?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where to next?</td>
<td>Fethard Horse Country Experience, Tipperary</td>
<td>Can you build in recommendations to other local attractions as part of your tour or exit orientation etc. Are all staff knowledgeable about cross promotional opportunities to increase service levels with great advice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Visitors don’t like what they deem to be hidden costs. Multiple pay points aggravate them (car parking, then entry, then audio guides etc).

Especially in urban areas the plans of overseas holidaymakers can be quite fluid. Are there opportunities to provide recommendations for where visitors can go next (either generally or to build on your story)?
MARKETING INSIGHTS: OVERSEAS VISITORS

Knowing the information sources that lead visitors to your door is important.

On average 60% of overseas visitors only heard of the attraction the visited from the time they time they arrived in Ireland. This highlights the importance of cross promotion with other trade partners – tourist accommodation providers, Tourist Information Centres, other attractions, local businesses etc.

KEY SOURCES OF WHERE OVERSEAS VISITORS HEARD ABOUT YOUR ATTRACTION

- Word of Mouth / Recommendation: 39%
- Guide Books: 33%
- Brochures / Promotional literature: 19%
- Travel Agent / Tour Operator: 17%
- Visitor Attractions own website: 11%
- Online Review Sites (Trip Advisor etc.): 7%
- On Street Sign Posting / Just passing by: 6%
- Tourist Board: 11%
- At Another Visitor Attraction(s): 7%
- Social Media: 5%
- Article(s) in Newspaper(s): 5%
- Travel Programme on TV or Radio: 4%
- Other Website / Online: 12%
- Other: 9%

FIND OUT MORE

- For more detail on this research go to www.failteireland.ie/Research – click on Visitor Feedback page
- For more information and toolkits on how to plan for better storytelling and interpretation no matter what part of the country you’re in go to
  - www.failteireland.ie/dublin
  - www.failteireland.ie/ireland-s-ancient-east