



Fáilte Ireland
National Tourism Development Authority

GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF FOOD TRAILS

APRIL 2021

»» Food is an expression of culture. This means food and drink experiences in tourism have the **potential to connect** visitors to cultures in a very special way.

DISCLAIMER:

Guidelines for the Development of Food Trails include information, examples, and considerations that may inform the design, development, and management of food trails. Those involved in food trail development are encouraged to access additional resources, including those referenced in this document, undertake their own research, and seek professional advice, as appropriate. Furthermore, examples and references contained within the guidelines are for illustrative purposes only. No responsibility for loss occasioned to any person or body acting or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by Fáilte Ireland.

Table of Contents

1

Introduction

4



2

Design
& Development

17

3

Governance
& Management

34



4

The Visitor
Journey

47

5

Marketing

58



6

Developer's
Checklist

70

7

Resources

77



Enhancing
Recreational
Trails through
Food & Drink
Supplement
[CLICK HERE](#)



Introduction



Visitors are increasingly seeking out experiences to immerse themselves in a destination story and engage with locals, exploring the culture of the place interpreted in many different and interesting ways.

Food trails are designed to provide visitors with a way to experience the food and drink of a destination. They are shaped by the histories, heritages, cultures, and unique geography of a place, and they showcase the people, places, and processes behind the food that makes each destination unique. Therefore, food trails should strive to deliver experiences that draw from the eating habits and unique culinary practises of a destination.

From the visitor perspective, food and drink experiences can play a significant role in any visitor's trip when brought together with various other elements of their stay to create a more encompassing and engaging proposition. Trail packaging and cross business collaboration have the potential to commercially boost local trade, strengthen local food systems, and drive tourists to a destination.

FIG. 1
FOOD TRAIL EXPERIENCE PROVIDERS



FOOD TRAIL EXPERIENCE PROVIDERS

Visitor-facing businesses that have the potential to contribute to and benefit from the development of food trails, including accommodation, activity providers, attractions, distilleries and breweries, cookery schools, farmers' and public markets, festivals and events, agri- tourism growers, producers, and artisans, restaurants, cafes, pubs, retailers, and tour operators.

Visitor experiences are enriched with each provider they encounter. Food trail experience providers can work together to deliver high-quality experiences that exceed the expectations of visitors.

Food trails are a means for increasing visitor participation in food and drink experiences, facilitating access to a range of tourism experiences, increasing visitor expenditure on food and drink, and localising economic impact.

They can be used to enhance or evolve existing recreational trails such as greenways and blueways. They can also help to streamline the food and drink component of the visitor journey, and when developed in alignment with broader destination experience development plans, they can be used to encourage visitor dispersal, return and referral.

Successful food trails contribute to the long-term sustainability of local Agriculture, Enterprise, and Food System Supply Chains.

Guidelines for the Development of Food Trails have been prepared during the uncertainty of Covid-19. They recognise the need to prioritise the concentration of effort from medium term strategic development which focuses on the growth of the international market to short term recovery which

relies on the domestic market as restrictions on non-essential travel ease and the industry re-opens.

Whilst the advice in this document will play a key role in strengthening Ireland's food trails for international tourists, it will be equally important in attracting and delivering for our local and domestic market. Food trails have much to offer at a time when safety is paramount and social distancing is a requirement of all out of home activities, we now need to ensure that they align to the distinctive opportunities around co-created experiences, getting off the beaten track and opening up the outdoors.

In response to the new tourism trading environment, Fáilte Ireland is focused on supporting the survival and recovery of the tourism sector to maximise the sustainable economic, environmental, cultural, and social contribution of tourism to Ireland.

FOOD TRAILS

are a means for increasing visitor participation
in food and drink experiences

How do I use these guidelines?

These guidelines are intended as a practical aid for use by individuals involved in the design, development, and management of local, regional or national food trails, including but not limited to Local Authorities, Sector Associations, members of local food tourism networks and Leader programmes. They are also directed at local food & drink and tourism businesses. After all, food trails are only as strong as the participants that activate them.

Regardless of where you are in the development of a food trail, you can use these guidelines to learn more about and inform decision-making around trail Design & Development, Governance & Management, The Visitor Experience, and Marketing & Promotions.

For established Food Trails, review the statements outlined in the **Developer's Checklist** as a way to identify areas of work or further development based on the context of your Food Trail.



READER TIP

Click on content with
TRANSPARENT UNDERLAY
to find out more.



BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

A number of unique food and beverage trails are referred to across these guidelines. Look for this symbol where they are referenced.



1

The California Cheese Trail California, USA

The state-wide trail seeks to present and celebrate artisanal cheese makers and family farms/creameries across California. The volunteer-run trail is not a continuous trail but rather region-specific itineraries. Currently the trail includes 49 cheesemakers, and it continues to grow as Vivien Straus', the trail creator and organiser, network grows. At its core the trail seeks to connect visitors and consumers directly to the artisanal and family run creameries in California.



Photo source: Ireland's Content Pool



2 Coast and Country High Life New South Wales, Australia

The Coast and Country High Life is a trail which traverses a loop from “country to coast” between Sydney and Canberra. The driving itinerary boasts a variety of stops including “forest and coast, food and wine, adventure and pampering”. In total there are 12 “must see” stops and more than 30 additional “see & do” and “eat & drink” stops for those looking to explore the region, taste its wines, try the food, visit farms, and pursue outdoor experiences. The trail is managed and marketed by Visit New South Wales as a travel itinerary.



3 The Basque Route Basque Country, Spain

This regional trail is not exclusive to food but rather focused on a variety of cultural stops, attractions and experiences connected to the Basque culture. “Gastronomic Experiences” are a main category of stops as they are closely related to culture. The route spans 56 municipalities and is divided into eight driving itineraries which include and highlight unique products from the region, including cheeses, cider, seafood, fresh produce, and wine. The Basque Route is managed by the Basque Tourism Board.



4 The Oxford County Cheese Trail Ontario, Canada

This regional trail is themed to include cheese-producing places and related experiences. There are a total of 24 stops which feature cheese, dairy, and related offerings for visitors to experiences such as beer, wine, or chocolate. Visitors to the trail can refer to a pre-planned itinerary based on the region they want to focus their visit, as well as learn about purchasable experiences or packages offered by businesses on the trail. It is managed by Tourism Oxford County.



5 Very Melbourne Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

This urban trail focused on food and drink is one of several food trails featured by Visit Melbourne. It acts as a suggested itinerary for visitors based on the proximity of the restaurants, bars, and cafés. The trail/itinerary has a total of seven stops which can be easily reached by walking or cycling from one to the next. The trail was created and is promoted by Visit Melbourne.



Photo Source:
Culinary Tourism Alliance



6 Urban Bourbon Trail Louisville, Kentucky, USA

This urban and themed trail highlights bars and restaurants serving Kentucky bourbon in the city of Louisville. All of the 40 stops on the trail offer bourbon, from drink-flights to bourbon infused dishes, and each stop has at least 60 different bourbon varieties on the bar. The trail is organised as a printed and online passport program managed by GotoLouisville.



7 Malt Whisky Trail Moray Speyside, Scotland

The Malt Whisky trail is a whisky-themed trail and has been present since the 1950's but only more recently has gone about a more concentrated effort to market the whisky and distilleries from the region. The trail includes nine stops, presented as a circular driving trail made up of distilleries and other whisky sites, large and small. The trail places a large focus on "masters" and "craftspeople" as well as visitor experiences, from tours to tastings to immersive workshops, at each of the stops. It is managed by a Board of Directors made up of like-minded organisations.

Photo Source:
Culinary Tourism Alliance

Destination Experience Development Plans

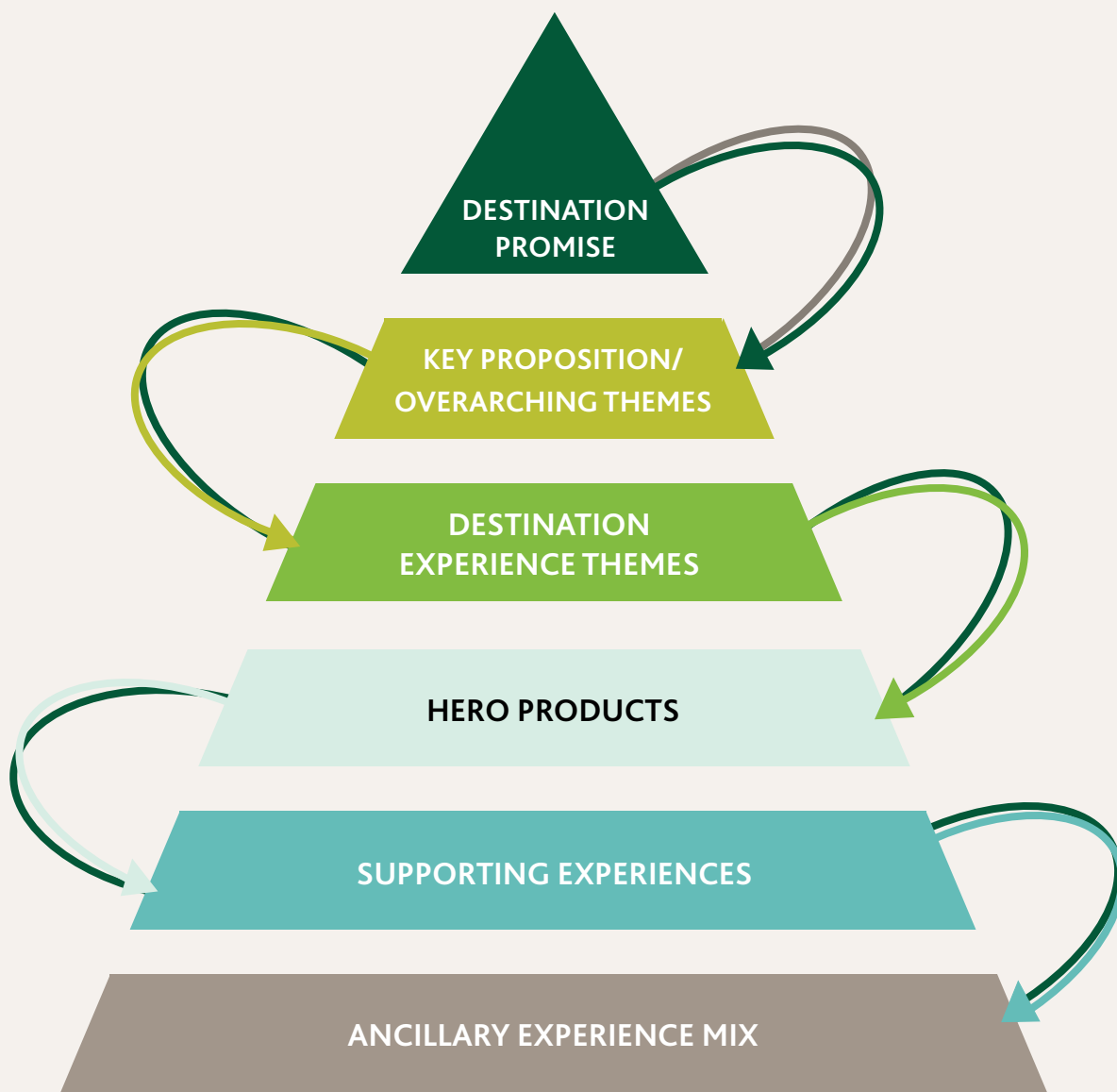
Developing a visitor experience requires a shift away from the traditional product versus price mentality. It is about delivering life enhancing moments that inspire visitors to share their experiences with others, but also make them want to return. The concept of experience development extends beyond simply providing an enjoyable experience for visitors. To achieve cut-through in today's 'sharing economy' experiences need to utilise thematic interpretation techniques that evoke a positive emotional response in visitors.

Experience development is the art and science of delivering a consistent message that inspires consumers throughout their travel experience – providing something that not only motivates visitors to become ambassadors for your destination and its great food offering but also gives them the tools to convey your message. By embedding an experience with the unique selling features or 'signatures' of a destination, visitors will associate that experience specifically with the destination and become advocates for these experiences with others.



**FIG. 2 FÁILTE IRELAND
EXPERIENCE PYRAMID**

Consider all components of the experience pyramid when developing your food trail



DESTINATION PROMISE

The expectation that is created amongst potential visitors about the experience(s) that they will enjoy in the destination (i.e. a promise of what they will receive based on what is being delivered)

KEY PROPOSITION /OVERARCHING THEMES

This is what sets your destination apart.

DESTINATION EXPERIENCE THEMES

The stories your customers can connect with that showcase your key proposition

HERO PRODUCTS

The customer accesses these experiences through the hero products

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

What each business does to bring the signature experience to life

ANCILLARY EXPERIENCE MIX

How the wider tourism offering supports the regional themes

Sustainability

The potential for food trails to contribute to positive impact is **REAL**.

This should be taken seriously by all food trail developers. In fact, it is the responsibility of *everyone* involved in the design, development, management, and enhancement of food trails in Ireland to ensure that they are using this tourism product to benefit the most amount of people while creating the least amount of negative impact on the environment, society, and economy.

The **VICE** model is adopted by Fáilte Ireland in all of our activities and outputs. It aims to find a balance between the needs of **V**isitors, the **I**ndustry, the **C**ommunities and **C**ulture that hosts them and the **E**nvironment where it all takes place.

FIG. 3
THE VICE MODEL





The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

They address the global challenges we face, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice.

In making sustainability a core part of your food trail development plans and activities, you will be contributing to a global initiative to make tourism a positive contributor to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals such as:

SDG 5 – Gender Equality

SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth

SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production

SDG 13 – Climate Action

SDG 14 – Life Below Water

SDG 15 – Life on Land

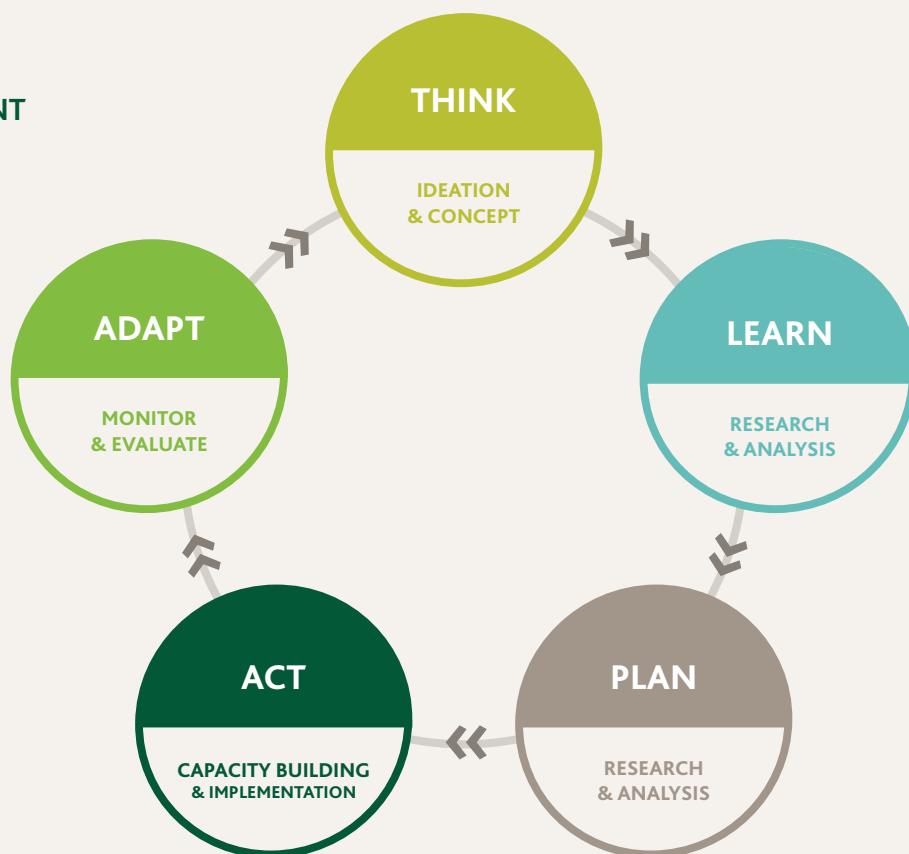
SDG 17 – Partnerships for The Goals

2

Design & Development



FIG. 4
FOOD TRAIL
DEVELOPMENT
LIFE CYCLE



The Food Trail development life cycle includes five stages.

Think includes ideation and conceptualisation of your Food Trail

Learn includes activities related to research and analysis

Plan is where you develop your strategy

Act is where you help build capacity among stakeholders and then implement your plan

Adapt is monitoring and evaluating your Food Trail - and making changes based on your findings

Mobilising Community, Industry, and Partners

A Food Trail is only as strong as the people and organisations invested in its success. Throughout the trail development life cycle, community engagement increases awareness, investment, and ambassadorship. In these ways, engaging a range of stakeholders enriches your Food Trail and increases your chances of success. Consider including engagements at each stage of trail development to inform and validate your approach.

Engagement can serve diverse purposes—from informing to consulting to partnering to delegating—with each step providing a higher level of stakeholder involvement than the last. Examples of how community and engagement can support trail development include:

- INFORMING PEOPLE ABOUT YOUR TRIAL
- EXPLORING PARTNERSHIPS & OPPORTUNITIES
- TESTING OUT A CONCEPT FOR YOUR TRAIL
- COMPILING RELEVANT DESTINATION STORIES
- SEEKING GUIDANCE AROUND ASSET IDENTIFICATION
- ASSISTANCE MAPPING YOUR TRAIL
- INFORMING BUSINESS PARTICIPATION CRITERIA



Photo source: Ireland's Content Pool

METHOD	IDEAS FOR WHEN TO USE METHOD
FOCUS GROUP	INFORM, CONSULT (e.g. collecting feedback on trail criteria)
DESIGN & PLANNING	INFORM, CONSULT (e.g. collaboratively mapping the trail route)
QUESTIONNAIRE	INFORM, CONSULT (e.g. learning about trail activation challenges)
WORKSHOP	INFORM, CONSULT (e.g. activity-based data collection)
INTERVIEWS	INFORM, CONSULT, PARTNER (e.g. learning about challenges operators face in meeting trail criteria, partnership development)
TASK FORCE, WORKING GROUP	INFORM, CONSULT, PARTNER, DELEGATE POWER (e.g. co-planning trail management and then delegating this responsibility to a working group)

« FIG. 5 METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT

Here are some engagement methods to consider, along with ideas for when to use each one.

Depending on your motivations, stakeholder groups to consider engaging include but are not limited to local residents, other trail developers, destination marketers, operators, potential partners, various levels of government, funders, local historians, industry sector organisations, and local food groups.

When possible, tailor engagements to the needs of your stakeholders by choosing dates, times, locations and methods that make sense for them. By offering multiple occasions to contribute, stakeholders can choose the option that works best for them. Generally, people are more satisfied when they are included in the conversation early on, this extra effort will result in more meaningful engagement. This will also help you collect richer data, build stronger partnerships, and ultimately develop a more successful and encompassing proposition.

THINK

IDEATION & CONCEPT

Every good plan starts with an idea.

The very first stage in Food Trail development is thinking of new ideas and communicating them with others either verbally, graphically, or in written form.

Individual or group brainstorming sessions are a great way to get started. Next, you'll want to write out your ideas clearly and concisely, potentially with the support of visualisations, branding, or maps to form an initial concept.



Photo source: Ireland's Content Pool



Once you've generated a few ideas it is time to dive deeper.

Stage two is conducting research and analysis, mapping out an inventory of your visitor trail assets; potential stakeholders; looking at current tourism trends; getting to know your potential target markets; and researching other best practice trails. This stage might include market research, inventory analysis, analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT), risk and feasibility assessments. These involve analysing your destination in an honest and critical way. Learning through research and analysis sets the foundation for trail development.

FIG. 6 EXAMPLE SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- Engaged group of stakeholders
- Good mix of quality visitor experiences for planning
- Highly rated food service providers in place (trail criteria)

WEAKNESSES

- Not enough visitor ready experiences. ie. things to do during the day and early evening.
- Poor supporting infrastructure, visitor facilities, transport, etc.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Attract tourists from other regions
- Increase spend at local businesses

THREATS

- Lack of innovation and experience variety
- Lack of capacity or engagement



This is where your ideas and the current market context merge to form a plan or strategy for your Food Trail. It's at this stage that you will set a clear vision, with a detailed set of goals and objectives. These guidelines help breakdown the various elements you'll want to include in your plans, and how to get started.

Food Trails can become a powerful enhancement of Fáilte Ireland's Regional Experience Brands (REBs), greatly improving the visitor's stay while delivering sustained growth in daily spending. When planning, you should look to align to the core destination promise and hero experience themes of the relevant destination experience development plan.

**FOR HELP AND SUPPORT AT THE PLANNING STAGE,
BE SURE TO CONTACT YOUR LOCAL FÁILTE IRELAND TEAM.**

LEARN MORE ABOUT FÁILTE IRELAND'S REGIONAL EXPERIENCE BRANDS



Establishing Goals and Objectives

The success of a Food Trail often comes down to setting clear goals and objectives at the onset. They set the framework for your actions and outline what you are attempting to achieve together. A good place to start is to establish a shared vision and mission for the Food Trail.

Food Trails can be a catalyst for tourism recovery post-COVID. Consider this opportunity when setting your short, medium, and long-term goals and objectives. Since Food Trails appeal to local residents, day visitors and domestic tourists as well as international tourists, they can drive awareness and appeal towards food and drink experiences in Ireland.

Tourism experiences are enriched when local residents also act as ambassadors. Focusing on the local tourist now, will help create a better experience for international travellers when the time comes.

It is important to consider the unique needs and behaviours of targeted consumer segments when strategy planning.



Photo source: Ireland's Content Pool

VISION STATEMENT

A vision statement is brief, precise, and motivational in nature. It describes what your trail seeks to become and what it seeks to achieve long term.

"THE BEST WAY TO EXPERIENCE THE FOOD AND DRINK OF OUR REGION/SECTOR."

MISSION STATEMENT

A mission statement should indicate what your trail is trying to achieve (the purpose) and to whom it is targeted.

"CONNECTING VISITORS AND LOCALS TO THE BOUNTY IN OUR BACKYARD."

GOALS

Goals are statements of expected outcomes. They are used to set the direction that help rally support for your Food Trail.

- Industry is mobilised around a shared tourism product
- We have packaged and are celebrating our unique points of differentiation
- Visitation and expenditure within our region/sector have both increased

OBJECTIVES

Objectives are statements that outline the results you want to achieve and the manner in which you want to achieve them. They should be clear, specific, measurable, time limited, realistic, and outline who is responsible for achieving them.

- To increase visitor access to and experiences of our food and drink
- To streamline marketing of saleable food and drink experiences in tourism
- To strengthen the connection between food & drink and tourism

Conceptualising Your Food Trail

Conceptualising your Food Trail is the process of developing the ideas that will help you reach your goals and objectives. Each Food Trail should have a main theme or story to tie all the stops together and differentiate your proposition.

Food Trails can come in all shapes and sizes in both urban and rural settings. Most follow two main structures:

1. THEMED TRAILS

These are sector driven and encompass similar types of experience product under a single agri-food category i.e. Whiskey Trails, Cheese Trails, Brewery Trails, etc.

2. REGIONAL/LOCAL TRAILS

Smaller in geographical scope and encompass a mix of Food Trail experience providers in a defined area.

SEE PAGE 5: FOOD TRAIL EXPERIENCE PROVIDERS

Draw from your destination's strengths and identified opportunities when refining your Food Trail concept and ask yourself other questions like, how can our Food Trail...

- **SUPPORT OTHER BUY-LOCAL INITIATIVES?**
- **PROVIDE DIRECT LINKS TO LOCAL BUSINESSES?**
- **SUPPORT OR LEVERAGE EXISTING REGIONAL, NATIONAL OR INTERNATIONAL MARKETING INITIATIVES?**
- **INTEGRATE WITH OTHER RECREATIONAL VISITOR TRAILS?**
- **BE STRUCTURED AROUND EXISTING BUSINESS CLUSTERS?**
- **USE EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION?**
- **EXTEND THE TOURISM SEASON?**
- **SUPPORT THE 'EVENING/ALL DAY ECONOMY'?**
- **SUPPORT 'OUTDOORS DINING'?**
- **ADAPT TO THE CURRENT COVID-19 CONTEXT?**

Setting Criteria for Business Participation

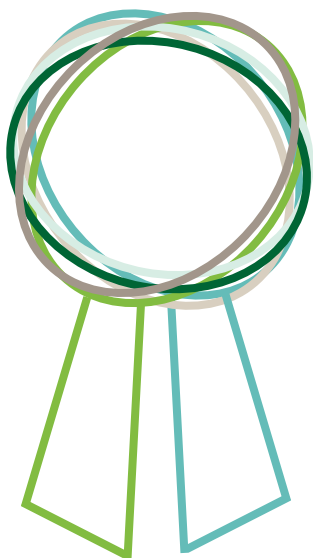
The businesses that participate in your trail are defining features of trail identity and set the quality standard. They provide the face-to-face interactions that form the basis of visitor experiences associated with the trail.

Setting criteria for business participation in your Food Trail is important for ensuring continuity and consistency among your trail stops. Having mechanisms to monitor, celebrate, or even certify businesses based on these criteria is something to consider. At minimum, businesses should be aware of, and agree to adhere to a common set of practices in order to participate in the Food Trail.

Criteria will differ based on your trail concept, and may include things like:

- OFFERS DIRECT CONTACT WITH A MAKER OR PRODUCER
- DELIVERS AGREED LEVEL SOURCING OF LOCAL FOOD & DRINK
- OFFERS A MENU THAT REFLECTS THE SEASONS
- STRIVES TO DELIVER QUALITY AND VALUE FOR MONEY
- IS AN ACTIVE MEMBER IN THE COMMUNITY
- ADHERES TO A SUSTAINABILITY CODE OF PRACTICE
- MEETS MINIMUM CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS
- COMPLIES WITH SPECIFIC HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS
- OFFERS DEDICATED BOOKABLE EXPERIENCES ONLINE
- HAS A STRONG SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE
- COMMITS TO TRAINING STAFF

Another way to determine eligibility is to use a certification program or quality award as a marker. You might consider using an external designation system or developing your own. Some trails use internal designations as sub-categories, to highlight a selection of participating businesses. The Basque Route, for example, does this with its “Top Euskadi”, which is a category of recommended trail stops and experiences included in a visitor journey planner.



Food Trails and Certification Programs

A number of Food Trails are created to provide consumers better access to certification programs.

Route des Saveurs is a self-guided agri-Food Trail in Charlevoix, Canada that connects local food and drink businesses. The trail celebrates Charlevoix's food and drink, and related food tourism experiences. Each year a certification committee made up of local producers, restaurateurs, growers, and representatives from the local development offices, updates the trail route.

The committee also manages a certification program, "Terroir Charlevoix", which designates agri-food products that use

local ingredients. These certified local products are available at businesses along the route and carry an identifying marker.

In Ontario, Canada, as part of a targeted Covid-19 Recovery Strategy, **Feast On®** Certification was leveraged to create **The Great Taste of Ontario**. The Great Taste of Ontario is a collection of +80 regional routes connecting Certified restaurants, producers, and cultural attractions via digital passports to encourage hyper local travel. The goal was to leverage the increased interest in local food production to inspire local travel planning and connect urban travellers to rural destinations.

Structuring Your Food Trail

Food Trails are a great way to get people exploring regions, counties or cities. When designing your Food Trail, consider how accessible the stops are along your trail based on available transportation options. The geographic span of your trail and the distance between stops, will influence whether your trail is best geared to those on foot, cycling, using public transportation, driving, touring as a group, or a mix of these. Be mindful that travellers will have different levels of physical mobility and benefit from highlighting which stops are accessible.

The purpose of a Food Trail is to help attract visitors to your destination and assist them with trip planning. When designing your Food Trail, imagine what it would look like on a map and how visitors will use it to plan a one-day, two-day, or week-long itinerary. Don't be afraid to start small. Having a cluster of engaged businesses is enough to get started. These may connect to offer an easy itinerary for weekend travellers, or others looking to integrate your Food Trail as part of a longer trip across the country.



Photo source: Ireland's Content Pool



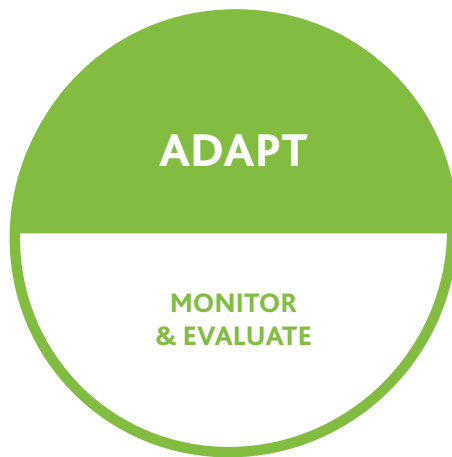
Setting criteria for business participation in your Food Trail helps to maintain a quality standard and drive competitiveness. At the same time, you can actively build industry capacity through the trail development process. This makes it possible for you to tap into a larger pool of eligible businesses and improve visitor experiences on your trail.

Draw from your mission statement and strategic objectives to define your capacity development requirements, which could include:

- **SALEABLE VISITOR EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT**
- **STORYTELLING AND EXPERIENCE INTERPRETATION**
- **WEBSITE AND DIGITAL PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT**
- **BOOKING AND E-COMMERCE OPTIMISATION**
- **DEMAND CREATION AND SALES**
- **B2B CROSS SELLING AND PROMOTION**
- **OPERATIONAL SERVICE EXCELLENCE**
- **INNOVATION CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT**
- **MASTERCLASS SERIES OR SKILLS TRAINING RELATING TO CULINARY PRACTICES**

Capacity development is considered a fundamental success indicator of any visitor trail and should be planned in conjunction with relevant agency stakeholders.

Finally, it's time to execute your plan. This stage includes anything related to the 'doing': launching, implementing, managing, marketing, and delighting visitors.



Food Trails are not static. At a minimum they evolve as some businesses leave the trail and others join. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic make it clear that shocks to the tourism industry can come suddenly and bring changes in consumer preferences. To stay competitive and meet shifting market demands, it is essential to monitor changes big or small and adapt trail offerings accordingly. Working with trail businesses to develop or drive co-creation of outdoor experiences or to outline safety protocols online are two examples of how to do this.

Reviewing your Food Trail regularly, helps ensure that you are on track to achieve your goals and objectives. Though this stage is the final one, it can and should be done, on a going basis. Markets and stakeholder needs are fluid and can change often. Though quarterly, or yearly reviews are typical, as well as some types of tourism success measures (think key performance indicators), monitoring and evaluating the success of your Food Trail is unique to your destination. It is recommended that you tailor your review process accordingly.

FOR MORE ON MONITORING AND EVALUATION, SEE SECTION 3

Funding and Support

Successful Food Trails benefit from formal governance structures and commercial business models. This means that when designing and developing your Food Trail, consider what funding and supports are available to you for both the initial and ongoing investments. Most Food Trails use a mix that combines government or grant funding for start-up or capital investments, and one or many self-generated revenue sources for maintenance and marketing.

In recent years, local authorities and Food Trail networks have accessed a variety of funding streams and supports when developing visitor trails.

Find out more about available supports on the following pages.



Photo Source:
Bord Iascaigh Mhara

Government Funding and Business Supports

The information presented in the following Government Funding and Business Supports section is compiled from multiple agencies and subject to change

IRELANDS NATIONAL TOURISM

DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY: FÁILTE IRELAND

As the National Tourism Development Authority, Fáilte Ireland's role is to support the long-term sustainable growth in the economic, social, cultural and environmental contribution of tourism to Ireland. They work in partnership with Government, State agencies, Local Authorities, representative groups and industry, to develop tourism across Ireland by creating destination development plans and networks, investing in infrastructure, activities, visitor attractions and festivals. Fáilte Ireland also provides consumer and buyer insights, mentoring, business supports and training programmes and buyer platforms to help tourism businesses innovate and grow.

TOURISM IRELAND

As the agency responsible for marketing the island of Ireland overseas as a leading holiday destination Tourism Ireland offers a range of research insights and promotional opportunities for Tourism Industry.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND THE MARINE

Provides funding for Agri-Food Tourism Initiatives under the Rural Innovation and Development fund. In recent years, local authorities and food trail networks have accessed a variety of funding and support streams from this fund.

RURAL REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Provides funding to enhancement of heritage and/or other community assets including the provision/enhancement of recreational or leisure facilities.

IRISH FOOD BOARD: BORD BIA

Provides a suite of supports and insights for small businesses in food, drink and horticulture sector. Offers a number of initiatives for businesses who are seeking to expand their operations. These include training and development programmes, community supports and a number of educational initiatives.

Government Funding and Business Supports, Cont'd



IRELANDS SEAFOOD DEVELOPMENT AGENCY: BORD IASCAIGH MHARA

FLAGS grant aid takes place under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme 2014 -2020, co-funded by the European Union and Irish Government. The aim is to support coastal communities in initiatives to maintain and develop jobs and promote the development of aquaculture and fisheries industries in coastal communities.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY: TEAGASC

Provides integrated research, advisory and training services to the agriculture and food industry and rural communities.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES

The role local authorities play in tourism development is multifaceted and includes: Developing, maintaining and running attractions; Providing leisure and tourism infrastructure; Supporting festivals and events; Developing and implementing tourism plans and policies; Planning, place-making and managing our natural and built environment; and, Working with communities, businesses and other agencies to improve the local tourism offering.

LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE

The Local Enterprise Office provides advice, information and support to you in starting up or growing your business. Its objective is to increase the job potential of new and existing micro and small businesses and to increase the number of innovative businesses with potential to export.

LEADER RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

A new Transition Leader programme has been announced, commencing the 1st April 2021. A key aim of this programme is to support job creation, entrepreneurship, enterprise development and innovation in a post-COVID-19 and/or post-Brexit environment.

3

Governance & Management



A successful Food Trail needs a defined governance structure.

A successful Food Trail needs a defined governance structure. That said, there is no one governance structure for all Food Trails, and whichever way you structure the governance of your trail needs to account for specific sectoral, regional and local contexts, as well as the range of stakeholders and partners involved. A governance structure does not need to be complex, but it does need to incorporate channels for contribution from and connections with the variety actors that make up the Food Trail ecosystem. This includes regular meetings, yearly review, and check-ins with participating trail businesses at specific times of the year. Additionally, the governance of a Food Trail needs to account for the evolution and adaptation to ensure the trail's life cycle. For more on this, please see [Monitoring and Evaluation](#)

Some examples of governance structures include regional food networks, industry-led membership schemes, volunteer run trails, and marketing initiatives led by a regional or municipal destination marketing organisation (DMO), among others. Below are a number of examples of governance and management structures drawn from specific Food Trails.



Photo source: Burren.ie

REGIONAL NETWORK/MEMBERSHIP SCHEME

The Burren Food Trail



The Burren Food Trail in Co. Clare is a trail developed around a regional network. The trail was founded by and is governed by the Burren Ecotourism Network, a collection of nearly 60 businesses who are all committed to establishing the Burren as an internationally recognised and sustainable tourism destination. Importantly, the Food Trail was established in partnership with the Cliffs of Moher Geopark, and it highlights the network and variety of food producers and providers in the area who have a shared commitment to building a sustainable future for the region.

All 26 members of the Food Trail are also members of the Burren Ecotourism network. As such management of the Food Trail is directly connected to the management of the tourism network. All participating businesses on the trail have achieved quality awards, reached a certain standard of excellence, signed the "Burren Food Trail Customer Promise", and adopted the Geopark's "Sustainable Code of Practice for Tourism". The Food Trail undergoes a yearly review and is supported by a number of food events across the year that bring together its members, such as the Burren Food Fayre in the Autumn. Important considerations for network-based trails include having a defined leadership structure, comprehensive systems of communication and engagement across the network, and robust criteria and service standards for network members.

INDUSTRY-LED

The California Cheese Trail



The California Cheese Trail is an example of a volunteer-run industry-led Food Trail focussed on artisanal cheese producers across the State of California in the USA. The Cheese Trail is a non-profit initiative, created and run by volunteer Vivien Straus. She pursued the creation of the California Cheese Trail as a volunteer and now she works with another volunteer who runs the media and communications. Governance of the Cheese Trail is determined by Vivien as the creator and lead volunteer.

As a volunteer-run trail, new trail participants come from Vivien's own network and as such there is no formalised application process. The main criteria determining participation is the creamery must be a licensed artisanal or family-run cheese maker in California. There are no fees for participation and Vivien manages all partner and participating business relations.



Photo source: Cheesetrail.org



Photo source: Bourboncountry.com

MANAGED BY A SOLE ORGANISATION

Urban Bourbon Trail



The Urban Bourbon Trail in Louisville, Kentucky, USA is a trail created and launched by the local destination marketing organisation, Go to Louisville as a collaborative marketing program. The trail is run by the Marketing and Communications Manager at the DMO. Participating businesses are all members of the DMO and as such pay the DMO membership fee as well as a trail participation fee. Businesses who meet strict trail criteria can apply to participate when the yearly call for new applications opens several months before the creation of new or refresh of existing trail materials (e.g., map, passport, website).

The management structure of a marketing initiative needs to be front-loaded with criteria and parameters for trail development so that it does not grow at a pace that cannot be managed by the DMO. In the case of the Urban Bourbon trail, it currently has around 60 stops, but growth is managed by the dedicated resource at the DMO so that it does not go over 100 stops which would make it difficult to manage and to ensure the quality of the participating businesses.

Innovative Tools and Technologies

Before considering innovative tools and technologies for trail and membership management, it is important that your Food Trail has a strong trail management plan. A trail management plan should outline who is responsible for what aspects of trail management and development, state the guiding principles of the trail (incl. goals and objectives), define the level of service needed to maintain the trail, both from the organising body and participating businesses, address environmental sustainability, and provide details on risk management, among others.

Many tools and technologies for trail design are focused on trekking or recreational trail land management such as GIS or GPS technologies. As such, technologies related to Food Trail management remain in the era of excel spreadsheets and contact lists. Although, no particular management tools or technologies are leading the way for Food Trails, there are a number of trail organising tools that are being employed as trail stop and information management platforms.





Photo source: Ireland's Content Pool

Software applications offer the infrastructure for online passport programs. It allows trail organisers to use the application's system and customise the trails based on their membership, changes in stops, and communicate trail promotions directly to consumers.

Itinerary planning and mapping resources can double as trail management tools. Through the creation of a customised map, trail organisers are able to incorporate key information on each trail stop such as location, business hours, and signature products.

The need to manage, and more specifically monitor and update trail stops is a challenge for any Food Trail as it must facilitate ease of access to a constantly changing landscape of businesses that make up the trail stops. It is important then that any tool and technology you choose to facilitate the management of your trail is one that you easily access and confidently use.



Very Melbourne **Melbourne, Victoria, Australia**

Organised and shared as a custom Google Map created through Google My Maps and added onto the trail's website

Business Participation

From network-based Food Trails to ones managed by DMOs, business awareness of their participation in a Food Trail is key to the trail's success. Many of the Food Trail examples presented across these guidelines encourage and depend on businesses to actively promote and celebrate their participation on a trail.

Business participation in Food Trails is dependent on a number of factors which include trail criteria, application process, confirmed commitment to shared standards, and ongoing communication.

Best practice indicates that participation needs to be reviewed on a yearly basis.



Burren Food Trail **The Burren, Ireland**

Businesses all sign a document confirming their understanding of what is expected by customers and needed from them, as well as a code of practice for sustainable tourism



The California Cheese Trail **California, USA**

Include all of the businesses that fit certain criteria or focus set by the trail founder(s) and business participation is reviewed on a yearly basis

Once business participation is confirmed for your Food Trail, a good practice is to provide brand assets so that the businesses, or new stops on your Food Trail, can incorporate the Food Trail's brand on site and online. Businesses can demonstrate their participation in a Food Trail through a variety of ways that include:

- **DISPLAYING A STICKER OR PLAQUE ON-SITE AND ONLINE, THIS INCLUDES ANY TRAIL-RELATED CERTIFICATIONS AND/OR AWARDS**
- **ADDING THE TRAIL LOGO TO THEIR MATERIAL (E.G. MENUS, WEBSITE, ETC.)**
- **USING SHARED HASHTAGS ACROSS THEIR SOCIAL MEDIA**
- **INCLUDING A LINK TO THE TRAIL WEBSITE ON THEIR CHANNELS**
- **SHARING THE TRAIL MAP AND ACCOMPANYING MATERIAL (E.G. PRE-DESIGNED ITINERARY)**
- **INCLUDING AND RECOMMENDING A "SIGNATURE" DISH OR PRODUCT FOR TRAIL VISITORS**
- **PARTNERING WITH OTHER TRAIL STOPS TO PACKAGE THEIR PRODUCT OR EXPERIENCE**
- **OFFERING UNIQUE DISCOUNTS FOR TRAIL VISITORS**
- **ENSURING THAT STAFF ARE AWARE AND INFORMED OF THEIR BUSINESS' PARTICIPATION**



Photo source: Ireland's Content Pool

Commercial Business Models

Your Food Trail can definitely take advantage of commercialisation opportunities. When you organise a range of businesses to participate on your Food Trail, you can also leverage your trail's platforms, infrastructure and audience reach to commercialise aspects of the trail. Commercialisation of your Food Trail can capture more visitor spend while in destination and drive euros to your trail's participating businesses. To be a sustainable venture, your food trail should consider commercial opportunities and viability.

Methods for commercialising your Food Trail range from encouraging participating businesses to offer special discounts or exclusive offers for trail visitors, like the Burren Food Trail's restaurants that offer featured dishes created for the Food Trail, to creating curated and purchasable packages such as those sold through the Oxford County Cheese Trail.

Overall, Food Trails are primarily used to connect visitors to places where purchasing can take place, specifically food and drink products and experience. However, the connector role that Food Trails play begins online, at the start of the customer journey, with directing visitors to businesses that have e-commerce.



Oxford County Cheese Trail Ontario, Canada

Created curated and purchasable packages to inspire and entice **visitors**



Burren Food Trail The Burren, Ireland

Restaurants offer a variety of featured dishes created specifically for the Burren Food Trail

Commercialisation Ideas & Examples

Selling pre-packaged picnic baskets using a range of food and drink products from participating businesses

Linking to an e-commerce website

Including a “Buy Online” page on your trail website

Including pre-booking of experiences or product bundles through itinerary planning platforms

Offering trail brand merchandise for sale online and at each stop

The Boulangerie À chacun son pain bakery, part of the Taste Trail in Charlevoix, Canada offers pre-packaged picnic baskets or lends visitors baskets, plates, and cutlery for their food and drink purchases from the region.

Products from businesses on the Basque Route in Spain can be browsed through the Hemengo website, which specialises on selling food products from the Basque region.

The California Cheese Trail’s “Buy Online” page lists the creameries and cheese makers on the tour that will ship their product directly to customers and links to their websites and e-commerce platforms.

The Oxford County Cheese Trail actively advertises purchasable packages and experiences offered by the trail’s participating businesses. These can be booked directly with the businesses; information is provided through the trail’s website.

The Kentucky Bourbon Trail website offers a full selection of branded trail apparel, glassware and accessories for sale to visitors. All branded items can be shipped internationally.

However, much like there is no 'one-size-fits-all' for the governance structure of a Food Trail, commercial business models vary as well. It is common for businesses to pay a participation or membership fee to be part of a Food Trail. When funding from the government or a tourism organisation exists, membership fees for businesses are paid or partly subsidised through that funding. Successful Food Trails often use mixed financial models which draw from the below list of sources:

- BUSINESS MEMBERSHIP FEES
- CORPORATE/PRIVATE SPONSORSHIPS
- GOVERNMENT FUNDING
- SECTOR ASSOCIATION FUNDING
- ADVERTISING/MARKETING SALES

Many Food Trails, whether they are themed by product or varied in focus, are organised as marketing initiatives. These types of trails often do not have revenue generation purposes for the managing organisation and do not charge customers for the use of the trail itineraries or platforms. One exception is the North Coast 500, a luxury trail in Scotland that charges a small customer fee to use of their itineraries.



Photo source: Ireland's Content Pool

Monitoring and Evaluation

Whether enhancing a Food Trail or establishing a new one, monitoring and evaluation processes are important components to build into your trail management plan and your governance structure. Established monitoring and evaluation processes can ensure that your Food Trail grows and evolves in a strategic way with regular and ongoing attention. For successful monitoring and evaluation, you need to establish or review the criteria or metrics you'll use to assess and adapt your trail.

It's important that the monitoring and evaluation data you collect is linked to and supports your trail's objectives and that trail participants understand and agree on the data to be collected. Although evaluating metrics is a useful way to understand the outcomes and long-term impacts of your trail, it is equally important to look beyond the numbers and monitor more intangible outcomes. Equally important is

engaging participating businesses across your communications and feedback loops. Businesses should be engaged by the trail manager as both contributors to monitoring and evaluation processes and sources of insights.

Being mindful of busy schedules and capacity-constraints is important when engaging businesses in monitoring and evaluation. Business can contribute through a variety of ways that include collecting feedback such as visitor questionnaire responses, validating trail participation materials such as passports, or tracking trail visitor numbers at their business or experience.

It's also important to reach out to participating businesses as sources of information by checking how the trail is contributing to exposure of their business, any new initiatives or partnerships that are being implemented or planned due to participation on the trail, as well as their vision for seeing the trail evolve.

Types of metrics and areas to monitor and evaluate include:

- NUMBER AND TYPES OF PARTICIPATING BUSINESSES
- DIGITAL – TRAIL AND INDIVIDUAL WEBSITE PERFORMANCE
- SOCIAL MEDIA REACH AND ENGAGEMENT
- INCREASES IN FOOTFALL, BOOKING AND TICKET SALES FOR PARTICIPATING BUSINESSES
- NUMBER AND DEMOGRAPHICS OF VISITORS TO YOUR TRAIL
- NUMBER AND CHANGES IN SALES REVENUE AT PARTICIPATING BUSINESSES
- NUMBER AND CHANGES IN % LEVEL SOURCING OF LOCAL FOOD AND DRINK
- SALES OF SIGNATURE OR EXCLUSIVE TRAIL EXPERIENCES, PRODUCTS OR DISHES/BEVERAGES
- TRIP ADVISOR OR SATISFACTION RATINGS



Photo source: Ireland's Content Pool

4

The Visitor Journey

The expectations that travellers bring with them to the trail strongly influence visitor satisfaction.

Gaps between visitor expectations and their experience can lead to disappointment. Satisfied visitors, whose expectations are met or exceeded, are more likely to refer the trail to others or make a return trip of their own. As a trail developer, consider the trail experience at every stage of the visitor journey, from research and booking through to the visit itself, and post-visit experience. By following each step, food trail developers and experience providers must ensure that they address all the elements of the pathway. This includes offering a proposition that is motivational for visitors at the consideration stage and ensuring the right systems and processes are in place to capture booking conversions.

FIG. 7
THREE PHASES
OF THE VISITOR
JOURNEY



RESEARCH & BOOKING

DREAMING PLANNING

Most often, the trail experience begins before the traveller arrives in destination.

Unless they find your trail by chance, a visitor's experience of your trail will start with trip planning, through exposures to maps, inventories, checklists, photos, and other trail materials. Online research and planning set the expectations that visitors will bring with them to your trail.

Research has shown that potential visitors to Ireland use multiple options to book their holidays. As a tourism provider, you should therefore aim to use multiple distribution channels to ensure your offering is visible to the visitor. Distribution channels are either direct or indirect.





Photo source: Ireland's Content Pool

Inspiring Visitation

A trail becomes more compelling when positioned as a tool for connecting meaningfully to a destination. Let prospective visitors know about exclusive experiences geared to trail users or opportunities to meet the people behind the food and drink on your trail. Food and drink products and experiences need to meet visitor demands (see Fig. 9 Visitor Demands by Target Market). Help visitors see trail participation as an experience in its own right.

Other ways to inspire visitation include using high-quality experiential imagery on Food Trail websites and social media, cross-promoting via partner channels, and developing a brand that unites trail assets. Choose images that show people enjoying the trail. Food photos alone make it difficult for potential visitors to envisage themselves on your trail.

SEE SECTION 5: MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Itinerary Planning

An effective way of getting visitors to your trail is to simplify their trip planning process. Position your trail as a solution by making it the easiest way to develop an itinerary, whether that's an afternoon walking between city breweries or a multi-day driving trip across the country. Always provide prospective visitors with sample itineraries. They can alter a base itinerary by adding or removing stops to match their personal preferences. An alternative (or addition) to premade itineraries is an itinerary-builder. User-test online tools before launching them. Poorly designed itinerary tools can complicate rather than simplify trip planning.

Through your itinerary planning materials, you might identify food and drink assets as:

- PRE-DESIGNED ITINERARY STOPS
- A SUBCATEGORY IN THE TRAIL MENU (E.G. FOOD MARKETS, RESTAURANTS, ETC.)
- INVENTORY OF DISHES USING INGREDIENTS RELATED TO TRAIL THEME (E.G. WHISKEY INFUSED DISHES)
- PURCHASABLE TRAVEL PACKAGES CONNECTED TO THE TRAIL
- CHECKLIST OF LOCAL INGREDIENTS AND REGIONAL DISHES AS PART OF A CULTURAL TOURISM EXPERIENCE
- FOR ALCOHOL THEMED TRAILS, INDICATE AVAILABILITY OF NON-ALCOHOLIC PRODUCTS AND EXPERIENCES



Oxford County Cheese Trail Ontario, Canada

Pre-planned itineraries along the trail, focused on a range of cheese and complementary products to make trip planning simple

Online Google Map and brochure that can be downloaded

Brochure includes "Cheese Trail Bucket List"

Tourism Oxford offers help online: "Need help? Let us plan your itinerary! Just email tourism@oxfordcounty.ca and we'd be happy to lend you a hand."

Booking

Many consumers prefer to book online and expect the same availability whether they are booking through your website, over the phone, in person, or through distributors. Ensure you make the process easy for them. Booking and payments systems must be in place. Consider how visitors book and purchase your trail experiences. Options include an online booking system on your trail website or bookable experiences at the level of each enterprise or trail stop.

Attention to customer enquiries is very important. Prospective visitors are looking for almost immediate replies to enquires as the variety of communications channels expands. This may be the first point of contact between your trail and the visitor so ensure you exceed their expectations in dealing with enquires and the booking process.





Once you attract visitors to your trail, it is equally important that you incentivise them to stay on the trail.

The best way to do this is to offer great visitor experiences. A satisfied customer is far more likely to stay on the trail than an unsatisfied one. There are many pieces to a great visitor experience from ease of navigation to business offerings onsite to storytelling along the journey.

Navigation and Wayfinding

Not all visitors plan itineraries in advance, making it important to provide trail users with navigation and wayfinding tools. Offline tools (e.g., downloadable or printed maps) are especially important for international visitors who may not have data services on their mobile phones. Several options are available for mapping trail assets and assisting with navigation:

- **DOWNLOADABLE OR PRINTED MAP, FEATURING PREMADE ITINERARIES**
- **INTERACTIVE MAP/ITINERARY BUILDER**
- **PRINTED OR DIGITAL PASSPORT**
- **INVENTORY OF BUSINESSES WITH LOCATION DETAILS**
- **DOWNLOADABLE GPS-LINKED AUDIO GUIDES**
- **ONSITE QR CODES**
- **DOWNLOADABLE MOBILE APP**

On site signage such as plaques, banners, or window decals reinforce the connection between trail stops and let visitors to know that they are in the right place. Road signage is also helpful, although, if signs include business names, they can become dated quickly.



Storytelling

Storytelling at both the destination and business-level builds the narrative of your trail. As a trail developer you use stories to link trail stops together. Stories draw people to your trail, but they also contribute to the overall visitor experience of the trail. You can support businesses with their storytelling efforts by empowering them to reinforce the overall trail narrative. Ways to do this might include tools, resources, training, or networking. The more visitors are exposed to key parts of the trail story, the more integrated the trail experience will feel to them.

Stories can be shared online and in person.

Menus, chalkboards, websites, décor, social media, signage, conversations are all places that storytelling happens. For Food Trails, key stories to tell often include, celebrating local producers, calling out partnerships, or talking about the heritage and traditions related to the food and drink on offer.



California Cheese Trail California, USA

Promotes artisan cheesemakers and family farmers

Cheesemakers tab on the website connects visitors to the cheesemakers, their tours, cheesemaking classes, and events

Instagram leveraged as an important storytelling platform

The Visitor Experience

The visitor experience of your trail is moulded by the experiences at every trail stop. As a trail developer, you can help operators develop new food tourism experiences, which might include offerings geared specifically to trail users. Food Trail experiences resonate when they feel connected to place, perhaps through meeting people or sampling local tastes.

In designing new experiences at the business level aim for multisensory, immersive experiences where visitors learn something new. When possible, encourage partnerships between local businesses for experience development. Collaborative trail experiences reinforce connections to place. Apply innovation thinking to develop the best possible visitor experiences that will resonate with domestic and international visitors.

All great food tourism experiences:

- **HAVE A CLEARLY DEFINED VISITOR EXPERIENCE OFFERING**
- **OFFER AN AUTHENTIC HIGH-QUALITY FOOD AND DRINK EXPERIENCE**
- **HAVE SUITABLE ACCESS AND FACILITIES IN PLACE TO WELCOME VISITORS**
- **ARE MULTISENSORY AND INTERACTIVE, MAKING VISITORS FEEL LIKE THEY ARE LEARNING ABOUT LOCAL CULTURE**
- **OFFER PRODUCT BEYOND THE EXPERIENCE (I.E., RETAIL, TAKE HOME PRODUCTS)**
- **LINK TO THE WIDER DESTINATION STORY.**

It is important to consult with external expertise such as the Local Enterprise Office and Fáilte Ireland at an early stage so that a range of business supports can be considered to help develop a quality experience and the elements required to create a strong commercial approach.

The Experience Wheel

The Experience Wheel was developed by Fáilte Ireland to capture the components that, when combined, deliver a memorable tourism experience.

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

1. PRODUCT: 'the hardware' at the core of the experience i.e. your Food Trail

2. SERVICE: 'the software' i.e. looking after visitor needs with ancillary infrastructure

3. STORY: the stories unique to your Food Trail, its heritage, history, characters

4. NARRATION: how you tell your local stories, pre, during and post the Food Trail visit

The next layer in the wheel details how you can deliver on expectations for each component.

The outermost layer summarises the type of emotions that arise when the experience is positive. So, the aim is to have your visitor feeling energised, enriched, valued or enlightened.

Positive emotions lead to good memories which can lead to recommendations and plans for returns trips, thus putting your Food Trail firmly on the map.



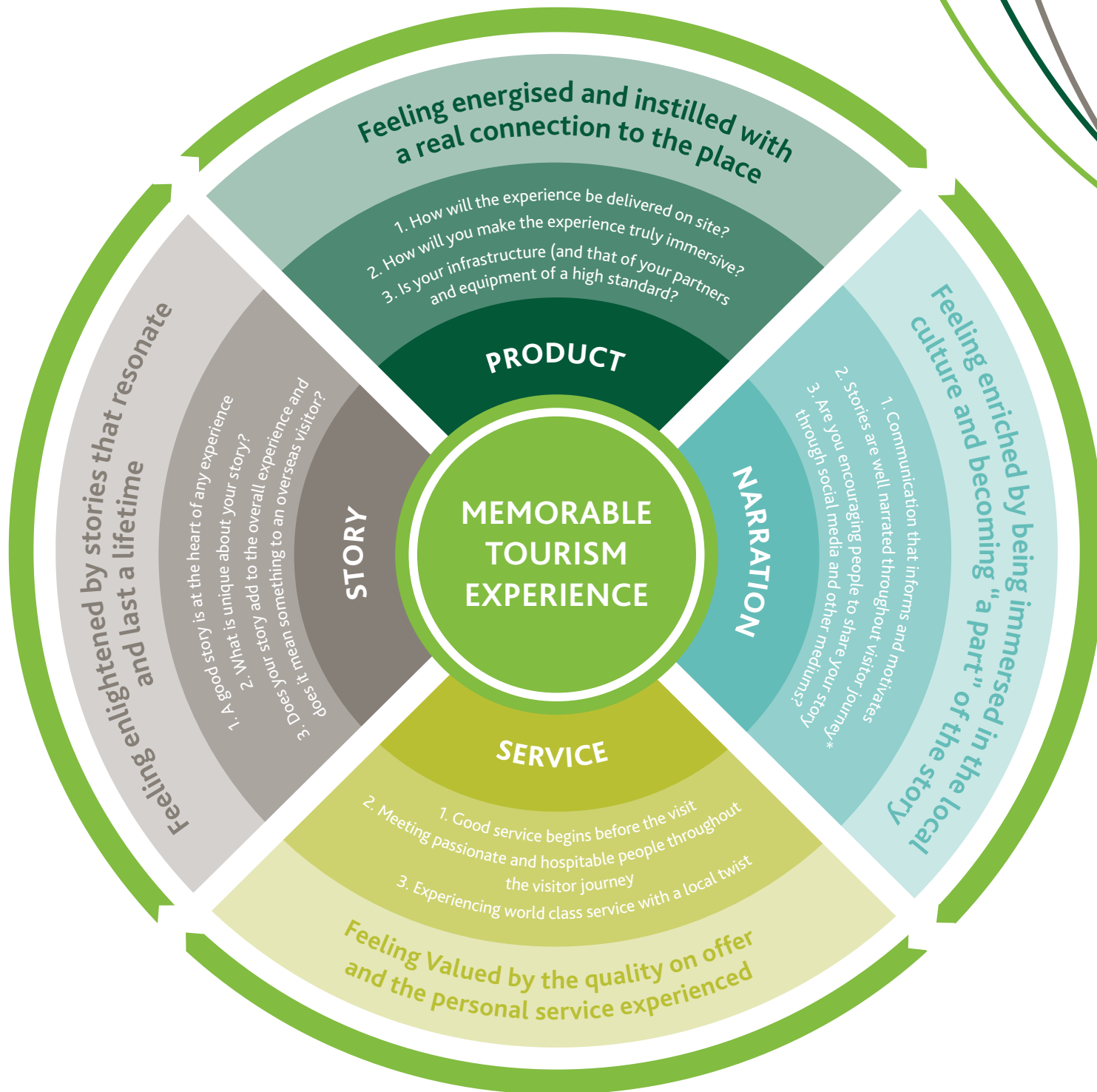


FIG. 8
THE EXPERIENCE
WHEEL

The experience wheel captures the components that contribute to the delivery of a memorable Tourism Experience



After a trip, visitors often stay connected to the destination.

They do this by reminiscing about their experiences, reading about the destination, enjoying food and drink that they purchased there, or looking through photographs. If leveraged, this sense of connection can relaunch the visitor journey back into wishing, planning, researching and booking a return trip.

As a trail developer, tap into this nostalgia. Stay connected through email newsletters and social media, etc., with past trail users and give them a reason to start planning their next trip. Partner with your trail businesses to reinforce these communication efforts through their networks.



The Basque Route Basque Country, Spain

Trail website includes a "Tell us about your experience" page with option to share text, image, and video content

Prominently lists #thebasqueroute to encourage user-generated social media content



5

Marketing



Food Trails can appeal to all different types of people, based on how they're structured.

Begin constructing your marketing strategy by closely understanding your market trends and potential audiences. This will help inform your brand positioning and choice of communication channels for each stage of the buyer journey.

Keep in mind that participants in Food Trails are not a uniform group but can share common characteristics. They tend to be active individuals, interested in exploratory travel (culture, food, history, adventure). These market segments are looking for experiences that have the potential to create meaningful connections to a place by bringing them behind the scenes, discovering the processes and people behind a product.

The COVID-19 pandemic has renewed people's interest in where food comes from, and in rediscovering what they can explore in their own backyards. Domestic travellers are therefore an important market for Food Trails as they are more likely to make repeat trips, purchase take-home product, and act as ambassadors for the trail through recommendations to family and friends living close by.

Prior to the pandemic, Irish residents spent €2bn on home holidays and €5bn on overseas holidays. With only 65% of Irish people taking breaks away in Ireland, there is significant opportunity to fundamentally change their longer-term sentiment towards domestic escapes.

As you gain a better understanding of your target market segments, make sure to tailor your marketing tactics accordingly.

The following graphic helps illustrate specific interests and cultural nuances according to various international audiences. To better understand your audience, ask yourself:



Photo source: Ireland's Content Pool

- HOW DO THE NEEDS AND INTERESTS OF A DOMESTIC TOURIST COMPARE TO INTERNATIONAL ONES?
- WHAT SEGMENTS DOES MY DESTINATION APPEAL TO MOST?
- WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES TO CATERING TO EACH SEGMENT?
- AM I PREPARED TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF ALL MY TARGET SEGMENTS?
- HOW MIGHT THE AUDIENCE CHANGE IN AN URBAN VS. A RURAL CONTEXT?

FÁILTE IRELAND and **TOURISM IRELAND** conduct market research regularly and are a good source of reliable data on the domestic and international tourism market, visitor trends, etc.



FIG. 9
VISITOR
DEMANDS
BY
TARGET
MARKET

Tourism Ireland's
Market Profiles

summarise tourism trends amongst overseas holidaymaker's to the Island of Ireland.

North Americans are interested in anything local produce related and immersion in uniquely Irish Experiences.

The **French** require information in French. Brochures, menus, etc. should be printed in French as well as English.

For the **Emirati**, Halal options need to be considered at all times in relation to food experiences. No alcohol can be offered.

Indians are one of the highest consumers of Irish whiskey. Combined food & culture experiences are appealing.

The **British** like checking out what's on locally – festivals, & events appeal to this market. They want to soak up the atmosphere

Ireland's coast is a differentiator for **Germans**, who are drawn to the dramatic vistas. Farm animals also appeal.

Food plays a big part in destination choice and itinerary planning for **Italians**. They enjoy simple, fresh food.

Building Your Brand

Your brand is the cornerstone of your marketing strategy.

It brings to life your Food Trail vision and helps guide the look, feel, and tone of all your marketing communications and collateral. Branding goes beyond just the brand name and mark itself. Think of it as the personality and voice that will help tell your story and showcase what is unique about your destination.

Whether your food trail produces this work in house, or you hire a professional agency, you'll want to start by identifying:

- WHAT CAN MY DESTINATION/SECTOR OFFER VISITORS THAT NO ONE ELSE CAN? WHAT UNIQUE PRODUCTS OR EXPERIENCES DO WE HAVE? (IDENTIFY YOUR UNIQUE SELLING POINTS (USPS))
- HOW CAN THE BRAND NAME CALL BACK TO THE REGION, OUR REGIONAL IDENTITY, OR SPECIFIC PRODUCT(S) WE WANT TO SHOWCASE? (IDENTIFY WHAT IMAGES YOU WANT TO EVOKE)
- WHAT IMAGERY WILL EVOKE POSITIVE OR DESIRED EMOTIONS?
- HOW CAN OUR BRAND BE INCORPORATED OR COMPLEMENT OTHERS AROUND US? (E.G., LEVERAGE A REGIONAL EXPERIENCE BRAND)
- WHAT EXISTING LOCAL CREATIVE ASSETS, REPUTATION, HISTORY, HERITAGE, CULTURE, OR TRADITIONS CAN WE LEVERAGE OR BUILT UPON?

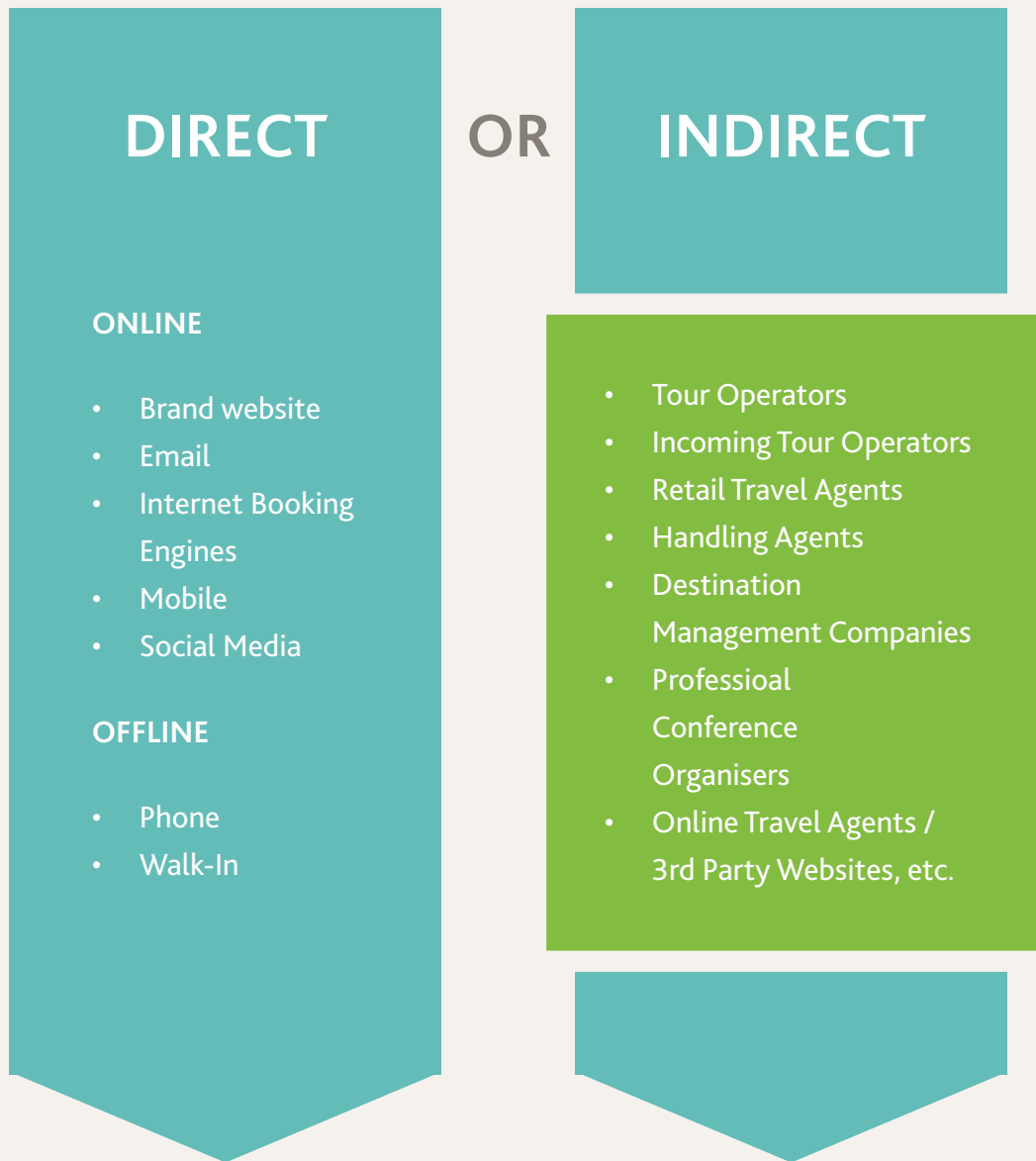
The result of this exercise will be the creation of your brand and branded marketing assets including but not limited to a logo, slogan, brand colours, brand voice, photos, videos, audio clips, and document templates. All these and how to use them should be summarised into a set of brand guidelines that can be referenced internally and by any participating businesses, partners, marketers, and media.

Choosing Your Channels

Selling and Marketing your Food Trail is a year-round activity that benefits from blending your communications across a mix of digital, direct, and in-direct channels. Choosing your channels goes hand-in-hand with the visitor experience you are looking to create.

Fáilte Ireland has created a range of **SALES SUPPORTS** to help you grow sales revenue. Find guidance on engaging Irish customers, driving domestic bookings as well as a suite of tactical webinars on the ever-changing consumer landscape.

FIG. 10 SALES CHANNELS



Website, Blog and Social Media

Owned digital channels are how you communicate your brand, and where you will house your main tourism product online.

Your digital media strategy should aim for search engine optimisation (SEO) and provide a seamless and dynamic experience across your channels. Investing in your website so that it is visually pleasing, mobile friendly, offers useful information, and is it up to date (with no broken links) ensures that people who find it, stick around and explore. Include practical information on trail stops such as hours of operation, contact details, inspirational itineraries, or even an interactive itinerary planner.

As you develop a social media engagement strategy, keep in mind that this too is an investment. It takes time to build your brand here, but if you do it can pay dividends. Be selective, choosing only those channels that will resonate with your brand and target audience, and for which you have the resources and capacity to maintain. Social media is great for sharing news, updates, and contesting. For example, encouraging visitors to share their Food Trail experiences is a quick way to drive engagement and brand awareness.

When creating content, always consider its appeal to your target audience. What you might consider ordinary could be considered extraordinary to potential visitors.

Maps, Signage and Other Collateral

There are many ways you can bring your Food Trail to life visually. The most common format is on a map, with trail stops. Consider how your use of iconography, landmarks, travel distances, stories, etc. can be incorporated in both digital and print versions. Though more and more people use their mobile devices to plan and book travel experiences, limited connectivity in rural settings, internationally, or simply wanting to 'disconnect', will have many reaching for a printed version. Similarly, a visitor's journey is made simpler through branded and clear wayfinding and road signage.

Distributing your message far and wide to tourism offices is facilitated by either printed marketing collateral such as brochures, leaflets, and pocket maps or via downloadable digital resource. Since participating businesses change over time, try to prioritise digital resources that can be updated more frequently, and limit printed resources for specific campaigns.



Coast and Country High Life New South Wales, Australia

Has an online itinerary with accompanying maps, stop distances and time, "things to do", and descriptions



The Basque Route Basque Country, Spain

Has maps and suggested routes along major highways/roads



Very Melbourne Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Offers a way for website visitors to 'favourite' trail stops by saving a version of their online map (using Google My Maps) to access later



Photo source: Ireland's Content Pool

Festivals and Events

Consider having an annual event to celebrate with visitors, trail members, media and stakeholders. If possible, hold your event at one of the stops along the trail and use the opportunity to showcase the wealth of tastes and experiences available along the trail. Hosting your own or leveraging an existing festival or event, can provide an outlet for added media attention, community engagement, or revenue generation.

[REGISTER YOUR CONSUMER EVENT HERE.](#)

Observe government

COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

in relation to gatherings when
event planning

Advertising, Public Relations, and Media

Traditional media channels offer paid and earned opportunities. You can get started with a simple press release to a list of local, regional or national publications. Editors of tourism, food or agriculture magazines are constantly on the lookout for good stories, so think of the many different angles through which your Food Trail stories can be told.

In preparation for your annual trail event, for example, try dropping off a basket of product samples with marketing materials and an invitation, to radio station and television hosts. These “media drops” are an excellent way to attract attention, especially when they include food and drink. Encouraging participating businesses to donate in-kind value (products or time) for promotions like these, are low-cost solutions that can engage a broader group. Set some budget aside to complement these efforts with paid digital, print, or other forms of advertising to help increase impressions and reach.



Photo source: Ireland's Content Pool

Promoting Continued Participation

There are a number of promotional methods you can use to help increase your Food Trail's 'stickiness', encouraging people to spend more time and money. Things like:

- Must-taste/must-try checklists (e.g., local specialties)
- Exclusive experiences only available to trail participants
- Special offer discounts at stops as part of trail
- Chances to win a prize (e.g., meal or other experience)
- Well-informed visitor-facing staff that can recommend other businesses on the trail
- Cross-promotion from member businesses via social media
- Local partnerships & cross-selling (offering referrals or bundles with other local businesses along the route)
- E-commerce platform within your website with Food Trail products



Malt Whisky Trail Moray Speyside, Scotland

Offers a chance to be inducted as a Malt Whisky Trail Master and win a luxury weekend break to Speyside for an exclusive Master's tour



Oxford County Cheese Trail Ontario, Canada

Includes a "Bucket List" of cheese-themed stops and experiences



The Urban Bourbon Trail Kentucky, USA

Offers a chance to win an official Urban Bourbon Trailblazer t-shirt for those who dine at six stops along the route

Empowering Others

Participating businesses and partner organisations play a key role in your marketing activities. Since they are the people behind the place, the voices behind the brand, empowering them as Food Trail ambassadors will be the key to your marketing strategy's success. Make sure you communicate clearly the role they can play and create opportunities for them to contribute throughout the year. Augment your brand guidelines to create a full-blown marketing or 'welcome' toolkit. Include things like logos, sample marketing copy, fact sheets, signage, window decals, printed maps and brochures, ideas and hashtags for cross-promotions, consistency standards, product samples, and tips on how to deliver an excellent multisensory visitor experience, as well as where to access other capacity building resources.

FÁILTE IRELAND'S SUITE OF MARKETING SUPPORTS

offers practical advice on how to collaborate with other businesses on low-cost or no-cost tactical marketing, which can help businesses win a fair share of domestic and local market.



Photo source: Ireland's Content Pool

6

Developer's Checklist



This checklist is a collection of statements to assist tourism agency partners and Food Trail developers in thinking about the key elements of development or enhancement of their Food Trail.

The checklist is not a step-by-step guide or a set of prescriptions for Food Trail development. We encourage you to review and complete the checklist as a way to identify areas of work or further development based on the context of your Food Trail. It is important that you pursue Food Trail development in a way that is right for your organisation, network, industry members and partners.

Introduction



We recognise the diversity of our Food Trail experience providers and stakeholders, and appreciate the value that each can bring to the visitor experience.



We are aware of Food Trail best practices and our comparators.



We can see the alignment between our Food Trail development and our regional tourism development plan.



We see a role for our Food Trail to contribute to positive impact, including the long-term sustainability of our local agriculture, enterprise, and food system supply chain.



We are committed to making sustainability a core part of our food trail development plans and activities.



Photo source: Ireland's Content Pool

Design & Development



We know what stage we are at in the Food Trail development cycle.



We are aware of the people and organisations that have a stake in our Food Trail success.



We have identified how and when to engage our community, industry members, and partners in Food Trail development and what methods to use to ensure their participation is meaningful.



We have recorded our food trail ideas and/or have a specific Food Trail concept in mind.



We have conducted research to confirm the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that surround our Food Trail.



We have a detailed plan for developing or enhancing our Food Trail.



We have contacted our local Fáilte Ireland team to discuss our Food Trail development plans.





We have a vision and mission for our Food Trail that is supported by realistic goals and clear objectives.



We have set criteria for managing business participation, performance, and experience quality.



We know how we will communicate with participating businesses and partners.



We have identified various ways, including specific modes of transportation and specific accessibility considerations, for different types of visitors to interact with our Food Trail.



We are aware of the challenges and limitations of our industry partners and we have identified opportunities to increase their capacity.



We have identified and/or accessed funding sources and supports to assist us with Food Trail development.



Governance & Management



We have defined a governance structure for our Food Trail that facilitates participation from partners and stakeholders, as appropriate.



We have a strong trail management plan that includes detail on who is responsible for what aspects of trail development and management.



We have tools and technologies that will help us to monitor and manage our Food Trail.



We have a strong business model for our Food Trail that benefits from more than one method for commercialisation.



We have an evaluation framework complete with data collection methods for monitoring and measuring our Food Trail's progress and success.



Photo source: Ireland's Content Pool

The Visitor Journey



We have planned and mapped the ideal experiences that we want visitors to have at each stage of the visitor journey on our Food Trail.



We have ensured that information about our Food Trail is easily discovered as visitors dream about and plan their trip.



We make it easy for visitors to reach and navigate our Food Trail with inspirational itineraries and wayfinding tools and signage.



We have made it easy for visitors to both learn about our Food Trail and book experiences on it.



We have a defined Food Trail theme or story, including specific stories, that span the visitor journey.



We have multisensory and immersive experiences along our Food Trail that connect visitors to our place.



All visitor experiences have suitable access and facilities in place for visitors.



We are confident that our Food Trail includes all of the components of a “memorable tourism experience”.



We have provided visitors with ways to stay connected with and return to our Food Trail.

Marketing



We have a Food Trail marketing plan, including a detailed budget.



We understand the unique needs and preferences of our market segments.



We have a clear understanding of our Food Trail target markets and how to reach them.



We are using our Food Trail's main theme or story across our marketing channels.



We have a Food Trail brand that aligns with our Regional Experience Brand. i.e., Dublin, Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East or Ireland's Hidden Heartlands.



We have compelling imagery that shows people enjoying our trail experiences.



We have a strong online presence and digital marketing strategy.



We are providing communications support to our Food Trail experience partners.



We leverage festivals and events in our marketing methods.



We have a communications strategy for our Food Trail.



We use promotions to help increase the 'stickiness' of our Food Trail.



We have identified ways to create marketing synergy by empowering our Food Trail community, industry members, and partners.

7

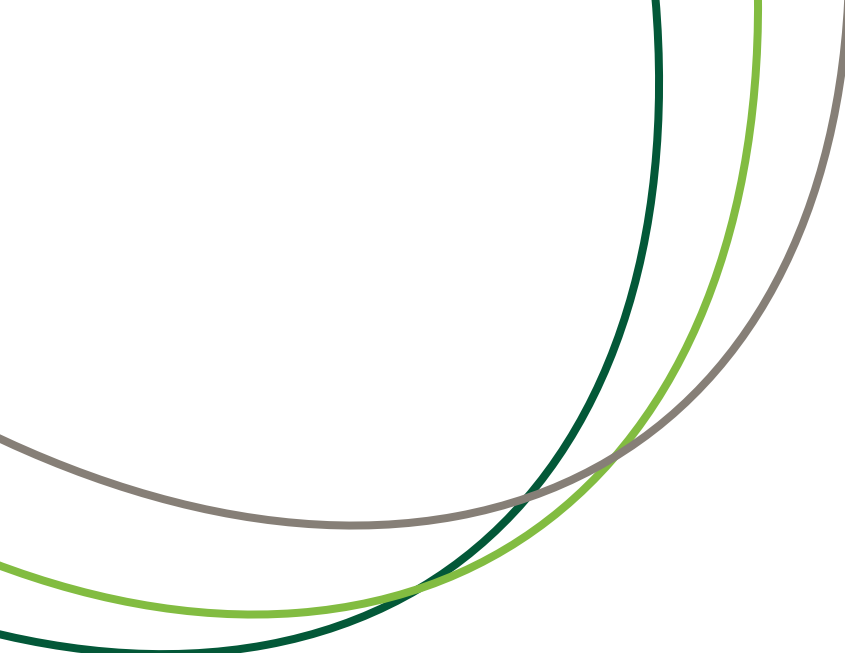
Resources



This section provides a collection of resources and references that you can leverage as you embark on the development or enhancement of your Food Trail.

Research and Development Supports

- Food Tourism Insights and Resources
<https://www.failteireland.ie/food-tourism>
- Enhancing Recreational Trail Experiences - Food Trail Guidelines Supplement
<https://www.failteireland.ie/food-tourism/research-and-innovation.aspx>
- Fáilte Ireland Outdoor Dining Toolkit
https://www.failteireland.ie/Failteireland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/2_Develop_Your_Business/6_Funding/Web-version-Best-Practice-Guidelines-Outdoor-Dining-and-Urban-Animation.pdf
- Fáilte Ireland Marketing Sales and Marketing
<https://covid19.failteireland.ie/business-supports/sales-and-marketing>
- Fáilte Ireland Research and insights
<https://www.failteireland.ie/Research-and-Insights.aspx>
- Fáilte Ireland Sales Resources
<https://www.failteireland.ie/Commercial-development/sales-resources.aspx>
- Tourism Ireland Research
<https://www.tourismireland.com/Research>
- United Nations World Tourism Organisation Tourism, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
<https://tourism4sdgs.org>




Fáilte Ireland's Regional Experience Brands

- Wild Atlantic Way
<https://www.failteireland.ie/Wild-Atlantic-Way.aspx>
- Ireland's Ancient East
<https://www.failteireland.ie/Ireland-s-Ancient-East.aspx>
- Dublin
<https://www.failteireland.ie/Dublin.aspx>
- Ireland's Hidden Heartlands
<https://www.failteireland.ie/IrelandsHiddenHeartlands.aspx>

Best Practices and Case Studies

- California Cheese Trail
<https://cheesetrail.org>
- Coast and Country High Life
<https://www.visitnsw.com/things-to-do/drives-and-road-trips/coast-and-country-highlife>
- The Basque Route
<https://www.thebasqueroute.eus/en>
- The Burren Food Trail
<https://burren.ie/food-dining/burren-food-trail>
- Feast On®
<http://www.culinarytourismalliance.com/feast-on>
- The Great Taste of Ontario
<http://www.ontarioculinary.com/great-taste>
- Malt Whisky Trail
<http://maltwhiskytrail.com/?age-verified=9762887bc7>
- Oxford County Cheese Trail
<https://www.tourismoxford.ca/listing.aspx?categoryid=723>
- Urban Bourbon Trail
<https://www.gotolouisville.com/restaurants/urban-bourbon-trail>
- Very Melbourne
<https://www.visitmelbourne.com/regions/melbourne/food-and-wine/food-trails/very-melbourne>
- Terroir Charlevoix Certification Program, Route des Saveurs
<https://www.tourisme-charlevoix.com/en/what-to-do/routes-and-circuits/flavour-trail/>



Government Funding and Business Supports

- Ireland's National Tourism Development Authority: Fáilte Ireland
<https://www.failteireland.ie/>
- Tourism Ireland
<https://www.tourismireland.com/>
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/e2273-agri-food-and-the-economy/#cedra%20>
- Department of Rural Community and Development
<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/c5849b-rural-funding/?section=rural-regeneration-and-development>
- Irish Food Board: Bord Bia
<https://www.bordbia.ie/>
- Ireland's Seafood Development Agency: Bord Iascaigh Mhara
<https://bim.ie/>
- Agriculture and Food Development Authority: Teagasc
<https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/rural-development/options-programme/>
- Local Authorities: City and County Councils and Regional Assemblies
<https://www.lgma.ie/en/publications/local-authority-sector-reports/tourism-is-everyone-s-business-local-authorities-role-in-tourism-development-2014-2018.pdf>
- Local Enterprise Office (LEO)
<https://www.localenterprise.ie/>
- LEADER Rural Development Programme
<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/111360/bbdb1d80-3ed7-4a96-bb96-c8aef885eead.pdf#page=null>



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National Tourism Development Authority