Embrace Community Spirit: Shaping Tourism Together

Thursday 20th March 2025

Mid & East Antrim
A land shaped by Sea & Stone

Programme

|	Speakers
9:45	Jason Powell, MEA Tourism Marketing Manager
	Karen Steele, MEA Tourism & Product Development Manager
	Jessica Hoyle, Tourism NI
10:45	Q & A Session followed by comfort break / trade clinic
11:15	Steve Newell, Friends of the Abbey
11:45	Sharon Scott, Place Solutions
	Workshop Activity & Feedback
	Q & A Session
13:30	Networking lunch / trade clinic

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Mid and East Antrim Shaped by Sea and Stone

Did you know……
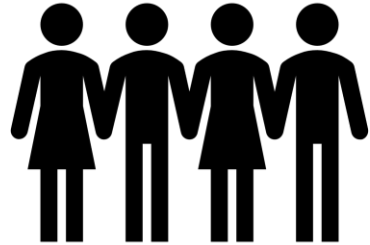
Tourism employs over 70,000 people in NI
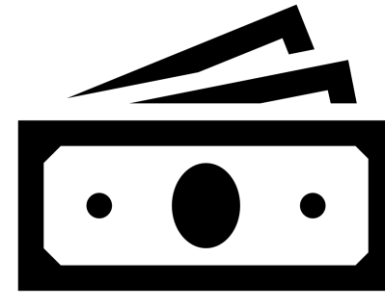
It is worth over £1.2bn

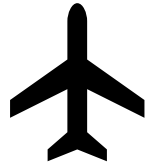**Mid & East Antrim**
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Jason Powell

Tourism Marketing Manager
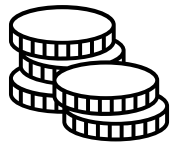
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Mid & East Antrim Tourism

✈ Trips - 271,639

🛏 Overnights – 829,298

🪙 Spend – £62,920,877

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Background

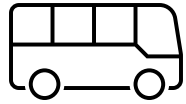- Key Focus for Mid & East Antrim

- Growth Area

- Regional Spread – 70% jobs outside of Belfast

- Visitor numbers nearly at 2019 level, exceeded in some cases

- Large growth from ROI, USA, Cruise

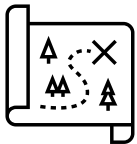**Mid & East Antrim**
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Going Forward

Increase in visitor numbers

Increase in visitor spend

Increase regional spread

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Travel Trends 2025

…There will be an increased desire for **authentic, off-the-beaten-path** experience

…**Sustainability** will be an even bigger priority

…A blend of **wellness and adventure** will drive travel choices

…Plan trips around **nocturnal, nature-based** activities

…**Family values** will hold more importance

…Trips and experiences will need to cater for **diversity**

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Mid & East Antrim Focus

- City Deal

- Gracehill

- Causeway Coastal Route – Shared Island

- Towns

- Neighbourhood Tourism

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Support & opportunities

- Council - various

- Tourism NI

- Tourism Ireland

- Tour Guides NI (TGNI)

- Northern Ireland Tourist Guide Association (NITGA)

- Independent opportunities

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Karen Steele

Tourism and Product Development Manager

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Neighbourhood Tourism

- Meet the changing demands of our visitors

- Help address regional spread

- Need to strategically place visitor information throughout the Borough

- Nuture relationships at community level that will build future tourism capacity from the ground up

- Help local communities to establish new tourism products

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Neighbourhood Visitor Information Points

Developing Neighbourhood Visitor Information Points in pilot locations at the heart of the community across Mid and East Antrim in 2025/2026:

- Gracehill

- Cullybackey

- Broughshane

- Whitehead

- Carnlough

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Neighbourhood Tourism – Next Steps

Council is supplying to each Visitor Information Point:

- Branded literature stand

- iPad

- Window Stickers

- QR Code linked to Shaped by Sea and Stone website

- Dedicated page on website for Visitor Information

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Neighbourhood Tourism – Next Steps

- Arrange familiarisation trips to key attractions and link in with existing visitor information centres:

- Carrickfergus Castle

- The Gobbins Visitor Centre

- The Book Nook, Larne

- Mid Town Makers, Ballymena

- Glenarm Visitor Centre, Glenarm Marina

- Identify training needs – WorldHost customer service

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Neighbourhood Tourism – Outcomes

- Develop itineraries to showcase authentic, regional experiences

- Engage and encourage locals and visitors to:

- Participate in local tourism experiences
- Explore neighbourhoods
- Experience local food
- Enjoy storytelling in local venues
- Stay overnight in local accommodation

- Create local clusters to build capacity for guided tours, walking trails and storytelling

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Neighbourhood Tourism – Outcomes

- Develop local support networks to enable collaborations and empower the community

- Enable visitors to have connections to local places

- Maximise on the potential to encourage visitors to dwell longer, increase visitor spend and bed nights to benefit the local economy

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Embracing the Community Spirit – Shaping Tourism Together

Jessica Hoyle

Tourism Experience Brand Manager
Tourism NI
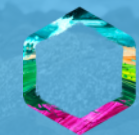
TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND

Tourism in Northern Ireland

Tourism is a vital contributor to the economy in Northern Ireland, enriching communities and bringing social benefits to rural and urban areas.

Northern Ireland is an increasingly attractive holiday destination. We have a unique story to tell, with outstanding scenery, strong culture and heritage, authentic experiences, award-winning local food and drink and warm, friendly people.

- Accounts for 1 in every 11 jobs in Northern Ireland

- Huge economic driver £1.2bn into the economy in 2023 and 5.4 million overnight trips

- There are 5,845 tourism businesses in NI, the highest on record with 77% of these located outside of Belfast

- Mid & East Antrim accounts for 5% of the NI total spend and visits, huge potential for growth and development

Strategic Context

PRODUCTIVITY: Tourism...contributes to economic growth

REGIONAL BALANCE Tourism is...about placemaking

GOOD JOBS Tourism is...people oriented

DECARBONISATION Tourism...fosters the conservation of our cultural and natural heritage

Department for the Economy
An Roinn Geilleagair
www.economy-ni.gov.uk

10 YEAR PLAN Tourism Vision & Action Plan

Tourism Vision & Plan – 10 Year Plan for Tourism in Northern Ireland

All stakeholders across the tourism sector have a shared ambition to create a thriving, sustainable, and inclusive tourism sector that benefits our people, businesses and communities.

Four priorities:

Productivity   **Good Jobs**

Regional Balance   **Decarbonisation**

Tourism NI measures our impact using the internationally recognised VICE model. This identifies sustainable and meaningful tourism as the interaction between Visitors, the Industry that provides services to them, the Community and culture that hosts them and their collective impact on and response to the Environment where it all takes place.

Embracing tourism in your community – The 'Why'

Tourism is driven by local pride and passion.

- Supports and fosters wellbeing and local pride

- Opportunity for connection, learning and enjoyment

- Major driver of economic regeneration

- Keeping stories, skills and traditions alive

- Supports ancillary services e.g. cafés, restaurants, overnight accommodation

- Creates jobs, giving skills and confidence

Creating tourism experiences

More than ever, people are seeking authentic and immersive tourism experiences that delve into the local culture of where they are visiting. This is where local communities and storytellers are vital to crafting memorable experiences.

To remain globally competitive, Northern Ireland must offer experiences that meet the ever-changing expectations of holidaymakers and the marketplace, while increasing our capacity to meet demand. Visitors want storytelling, to meet locals, active participation and not just passive visits or facts.

98% of travelers said **experiences are very or extremely important** when considering where to go

70% of travelers reported higher satisfaction when participating in immersive experiences, leading to a **30%** increase in repeat visits to destinations

Collaboration – the key to Shaping Tourism Together

Collaborating and working in partnership with each other to boost the success of tourism in the area can help increase visibility of the destination, improve appeal and increase benefits at local, regional and national levels.

Questions to ask yourself:

1. What role can I, or my community play in shaping local tourism? How might this have positive or negative impacts?

2. What unique cultural or natural assets do we have that we could enhance to attract visitors? What's the story we want to tell?

3. Who in my community, or nearby could I collaborate with to create a stronger offering? Who might like to be more involved?

4. What skills or resources do we need to make our tourism offering a success?

Friends of Greyabbey

Friends of the Abbey formed 2015, volunteer group of Greyabbey & District Community Association.

- Awarded The King's Award for Voluntary Service in 2023.

- Department of Communities own the Abbey – access controlled by around 20 volunteers

- Offer guided walking tours of Abbey and heritage-based tours (medieval medicine, folklore with herbs).

- Tours well established and now in a position whereby they have contracts with travel buyers/ tour operators

- The income from tours is initially used to care for the Abbey, with additional funds helping to fund projects to benefit the local community.

We're guides, gardeners & guilty of having a good chat!

The Burren Ecotourism Network Co. Clare

Some residents wanted tourism because they loved where they lived and wanted it to thrive

Some residents didn't want tourism because they loved where they lived and wanted it to thrive

The Network was established in 2010, made up of various tourism enterprises with the objective of ensuring the future economic and social growth and sustainable development of its communities, environment and heritage

All members must be committed to continuous improvement and achieving a third-party sustainability certification within 24 months. All are expected to correctly use and display marketing materials to actively promote the wider network.

In return, they receive a full business profile on the network website, additional social media activity, access to trade relationships and inclusion in media coverage.

Northern Ireland – Embrace a Giant Spirit

Launched 2019 to help Northern Ireland stand out competitively in the tourism market.

It's our collective identity and calling card to visitors around the world.

• One of 5 'Ireland' Destination & Experience Brands

• Original case for investment: 30% Increase to choose NI as a place to visit.

• Growing awareness on the island of Ireland (2024) with **66%** of NI Domestic and **38%** of ROI audiences having awareness of the brand.

5 Overarching Benefits for Northern Ireland:

1. **Increased Visitor Numbers**
2. **Longer Stays**
3. **Increased Visitor Spend**
4. **Business Growth**
5. **Enhanced Reputation**

A place driven by world-class experiences

Our visitor promise:

To Share the Giant Spirit of Northern Ireland

And

To Awaken that Giant Spirit in our Visitors

Experience Brand Inspirers

1. Big heartedness
2. Legends & Stories
3. Originality
4. Land, water & sea

The way to share our spirit is to deliver on each of these inspirers for our visitors.

Each one is a signpost that can guide us in the small changes we make.

Each one shows us how we can awaken our visitors' own spirits.

Big heartedness

How can you?

Put your passion at the heart of your experience?

Enable your guests to leave with a bit of this passion?

Introduce your guests to local, warm, enthusiastic and welcoming people?

Communicate a personal, bespoke service?

Share Northern Irish wit and humour?

Legends & Stories

How can you?

Help your visitor discover the history and culture of your area?

Communicate through storytelling and story-making?

Move your visitors to experience emotion, imagination and inspiration?

Discover ancient stories of the land e.g. myths and folklore?

Originality

How can you?

Deliver an authentic experience that is unique to what can be found elsewhere?

Help your visitors participate in something memorable, imaginative or creative?

Surprise your visitors with the unexpected?

Experience our distinct and local culture?

Create new connections to Northern Ireland?

How can you?

Help visitors discover our vibrant, diverse landscapes?

Help visitors connect or become advocates for your area?

Try and experience our local food and produce?

Enliven your visitor experience with sensory elements?

Developing new visitor experiences

Clarity = Conversion

What do you want to achieve by developing the experience, for yourself, your area and/or your community?

Who is the visitor that you are looking to attract?

What will be your unique selling point?

What are the memories that you want your visitor to come away with?

Embrace a Giant Spirit Brand Toolkit

The Guide is designed to be a handy reference tool to help you apply the brand, attract potential visitors and inspire them to discover their own 'giant spirit' while they're here.

It covers:
- Brand Proposition
- Brand Values
- Use of Logo and Typeface
- Photography Guidelines
- Tone of Voice guidelines
- Colour Palette
- Digital Brand Guidelines

To find out more: Northern Ireland's Embrace a Giant Spirit Brand | Tourism NI

Experience Development Resources

Through **MyTourismNI, our innovative e-learning platform** we offer **three experience development toolkits** to support our experience sectors. They offer guidance on integrating into the tourism industry, developing unique products, networking, and ensuring sustainability.

1. **Checking your business foundations**
2. **Understanding your customers**
3. **Developing your tourism offer**
4. **Building your networks**
5. **Making it happen**
6. **Supporting Materials**

By following these steps, you can create memorable and marketable cultural experiences that appeal to both local and international visitors.

Find out more and register for our e-learning platform:
MyTourismNI

Outdoor Experiences in Tourism Toolkit

Lunch & Learn Webinar Series

Arts, Culture and Heritage in Tourism Toolkit

Embrace a Giant Taste Toolkit

j.hoyle@tourismni.com

www.tourismni.com
www.discovernorthernireland.com

TOURISM
NORTHERN
IRELAND

GREY ABBEY

How it began

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

We are seeking enthusiastic volunteers to help promote and preserve our beautiful Abbey

Could you spare an hour or two to:

- Be a tour guide for visitors (training provided)
- Helping to man the Abbey Information Centre on weekends
- Helping with Abbey gardening projects including the herb garden

For further information:
Telephone: 0798 069 0250
Email: greyabbeyisgreat@yahoo.com
Facebook: greyabbey is great
"Friends of the Abbey" is an initiative of the Greyabbey & District Community Association

Greyabbey & District Community Association

THE ABBEY

The Physic Garden

OUR VOLUNTEERS

COMMUNITY SPIRIT

COMMUNITY SPIRIT

KINGS AWARD

FOR VOLUNTARY SERVICE

THANK YOU!

visitgreyabbey@gmail.com

Workshop Session

- Key takeaways so far
- Introduction to Community Experiences
- Divide into Community Groups (colour coded)
- Define your community
- Appoint a Spokesperson
- Complete Question Template (45-50 mins)
- Feedback to main group (25 mins)
- Summary and Next Steps

Key Takeaways

1   Aligned Government Strategic Context

2   Supportive Local Council Context

3   Consumer Trends and Visitor Insights underpin

4   Successful Examples of Community Tourism inspire

Embracing tourism in your community – The 'Why'

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Community Tourism
A Collaborative approach to …

- Build consensus around a collective, realistic vision for tourism development and an agreed visitor proposition

- Put sustainability and the local community at the centre.

- Strengthen the connection between people (locals), place and visitors (Regenerative Tourism).

- Build on existing tourism, regeneration and community plans and shape new plans.

- Collectively and objectively assess the assets, image and distinctiveness that define a place, from the perspective the visitor

- Inspire people to collectively develop visitor experiences/ itineraries and harness skills and expertise

- Effectively and efficiently manage and promote your visitor destination.

LOCAL COMMUNITY BENEFITS FROM TOURISM PRIMARILY CENTRE AROUND ITS IMPACT ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Respondents living in tourism areas were presented with 9 potential benefits from tourists who visited their area and asked for their level of agreement or disagreement with each on a scale of 1-10. 'Top 4 Box' agreement with each statement:

• It supports a range of other jobs such as food, retail and other services	**84%**
• It improves the local economy and helps generate economic growth in the area	**81%**
• It creates / increases local employment opportunities	**79%**
• It helps to sustain historic buildings and monuments in the area	**76%**
• It leads to events being held and other activities that residents can enjoy	**71%**
• It improves local investment, development, & infrastructure spending in area	**69%**
• It provides an opportunity to meet visitors spending time in my local area	**67%**
• It increases the availability of local arts and cultural opportunities	**67%**
• Because of tourism there are more public transport services available locally	**42%**

Visit Scotland | Alba

Community Experiences
(Paid, bookable, 0.5day, full day and overnight)

- Opening Historical Buildings and Monuments
- Guided Tours i.e. walking, cycle, driving
- Storytelling Experiences i.e. folklore, myths and legends
- Food and Drink Experiences
- Arts and Crafts Workshops or demos
- Heritage and Cultural experiences
- Local Traditions, Festivals and events
- Outdoor and water based activities i.e. boat trips, canoe
- Famous for….

Group Discussion

"When we collaborate and work in partnership with each other to boost the success and profile of community tourism, we can increase the benefits our projects produce at local, regional and national levels. Collaboration can help individual projects to gain greater visibility. Meanwhile, fresh ideas can improve projects' sustainability, as well as the appeal that they have for visitors"

Discussion Questions

1. Define your "Community" What role can my community play in shaping local tourism and what are the key challenges and opportunities to be addressed?

2. What are your community's key natural and cultural resources, attractions, experiences/activities which would appeal to visitors? What is the story you want to tell?

3. List 3 experiences which the community could collaboratively deliver?

- Provide Brief Description of Community Experience

- Who are the key partners/stakeholders required to help you effectively deliver?

- What additional support/resources are required from Council i.e. mentoring, training, access to trade shows/buyers, digital assets/marketing support, other?

Group Feedback

Next steps…..

- Collate today's insights and findings
- Further conversations
- Community support programme designed?
- Pilot projects?
- Fam trips and study visits?
- Develop marketing collateral?
- Market ready community experiences?