



EXPERIENCE



EXPERIENCE

European Regional Development Fund

REDUCING TOURISM SEASONALITY THROUGH SUSTAINABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCES

EUROPARC WEBINAR
25th of October – 10:00 CEST

Prof. Xavier Font
University of Surrey
x.font@surrey.ac.uk

 @xavierfont



Stop selling high season- market low season to become more innovative



What is experiential tourism?

Products are so yesterday, and customers want to engage with your offering with all their senses.

[Read more](#)



Different seasons different markets

You will need to adapt your offer to different types of customer to balance changes in demand.

[Read more](#)



What is special about your offer in the low season?

We often take for granted what's on our doorsteps, so look at your resources with fresh eyes and see how you can turn them into something special.

[Read more](#)

Library, case studies, videos in <https://www.tourismexperience.org/resources-hub>



Creating innovative experiences

You will need to create experiences that are great, even when it's cold, wet, and dark early. Co-create experiences with nearby partners and use events to drive demand.

[Read more](#)



Marketing and storytelling

New experiences require a lot of marketing effort, but if they are truly innovative and you've communicated them well, consumers will share the messages for you.

[Read more](#)



Benefits of experiential tourism

Visualising the results that you want to achieve will help you have the determination you need to make changes.

[Read more](#)

1. Products, make way for experiences



Engage your customer's five senses

- **Aesthetics**, colour and light are the primary contributors to experience perception
- Experiences can be enhanced by **music**, and other natural or artificial **sounds**
- **Textures** improve a traveller's participation with their surroundings
- **Odours** and **tastes** enhance visitor engagement
- Inclusivity and accessibility



Be proactive in managing your seasonality challenges

- Avoid – Change plans to circumvent the problem, such as identifying new markets that you can serve that either complement your current markets or that are not seasonal.
- Control / mitigate / modify / reduce – Reduce the likelihood of winter conditions to negatively impact your business. Identify ways to upgrade your offering by addressing some of the shortcomings in low season, such as weatherproofing your current services and investing in infrastructure.
- Accept – Assume that your experiences will have limited demand due to uncontrollable events; reduce prices to attract demand; reduce operating costs to reduce losses; and budget the remaining cost via a contingency budget line.
- Transfer / share – Outsource a portion of the risk to a third party (or parties). For example, outsource an activity, such as running an event, to an expert company.



2. Different seasons, different markets



Why do we treat the customers the same?

- High and low season customers are different.
- Low season travellers seek leisure and travel experiences for different purposes; they seek different benefits, search suppliers differently and will be satisfied with different types and levels of service.
- Invest time in learning about different markets. Understand how to be more inclusive of different groups of customers
- Use the new knowledge you gain to adapt your offer to different types of customer and to balance changes in demand.



Locals first

- First time customers are more predictable, but also harder to influence. They can be highly price sensitive but also use price as a sign of quality because they cannot judge quality in advance as they have no prior experience. You are likely to pay a commission to attract them.
- Selling to local market is quite the opposite: Local customers will recognise quality as they can distinguish between fake and real products. They are more likely to seek variety. Devote your marketing budget to your social media activity.
- Word of mouth is crucial. Show your local markets how you have multiple offerings, to show that they can do something different when they come back



We change our market priorities in the low season from tourists to locals



Françoise Le Moine is the Director of the Beauport Abbey (FR)

- During the low season, we move from a "tourist" event calendar to a cultural programme for our local communities, as well as making our premises available for community workshops.
- Reorganising the space that is usually set up for large concerts, to instead have smaller reflective workshop areas. Supporting projects for the transmission of traditional, local know-how, such as the rehabilitation of a wicker grove from the planting of willows to the pruning of wicker and the art of basketry.
- It is essential to convince local authorities to reorient political discourse and funding logics away from the promotion of the territory's assets in high season towards an awareness of the value and public utility of a heritage assimilated and carried by its residents.

Encourage repeat visits

- **Tell customers what to look forward to.** On their way out of your venue, tell customers what's on next week (or next month).
- **Create an annual pass.** You can further learn from the techniques used in leisure centres to manage demand: create an autumn to spring membership, a midweek membership, or a 9 to 3pm membership.
- **Create a sense of belonging.** Create a club of regular users; give them status and reward their loyalty with new offers.
- **Run clubs.** Work with specific community groups to increase occupancy of your premises.
- **Discount or upsell.** Provide discount vouchers for next purchases that are time-limited. Provide upgrades for visits Monday to Thursday to encourage higher expenditure.
- **Provide loyalty gifts.** Loyal customers or annual members could be given a birthday gift, in the form of one free pass to bring a friend



We create a sense of community by gamifying the discovery of local heritage



Laurence Pourageaud is the Quality and Geocaching Coordinator at Charentes Tourisme (FR)

- We co-developed a region-wide treasure hunt that invites users to venture into the most unexpected corners of the destination through a geocaching mobile application.
- Life-size treasure hunt, for young and old, enhanced with fictional and endearing characters. Strong user community with players setting ambitious targets comparing and sharing badges online and offline, nourishing its own marketing buzz
- It is important to offer only free tours, with no commercial commitments, the clues should always remain in the public domain. Tool to encourage visits to sites or museums, half of users spend at least one night away from home on each tour.

We offer a bundle of activities to promote low season travel



David Isern i Casanovas is the General Manager of Cerdanya Resort (Spain)

- Based on the concept of the UK National Trust’s “50 things to do before you are 11¾” challenge, we offer a bundle of 50 nature challenges for families to do together and have fun in nature. This family activity aims to increase loyalty, satisfaction, word of mouth, and reduce seasonality.
- All the activities can be done locally to the resort and completed as a family without requiring staff involvement. Family passport. Prizes for challenges. Challenges designed to be best achieved in the spring (flowers identification) and autumn (angel in autumn leaves).
- Identify experiences that have emotional and entertainment value to your customers but that cost little for you to offer, and design them to promote visits during low season.

Aim for equality, diversity, and inclusion

Is your business implicitly biased by targeting white, Christian, middle class, heterosexual couples with two children, who will drive and have no disabilities?

- Targeting a diverse community is not only the right thing to do, it also gives you excellent business opportunities.
- There exists a range of disabilities and most of them are not visible
- Companies that demonstrate disability confidence achieve over 25% higher revenue



3. There's something special about your place in the low season



What are your seasonal assets?

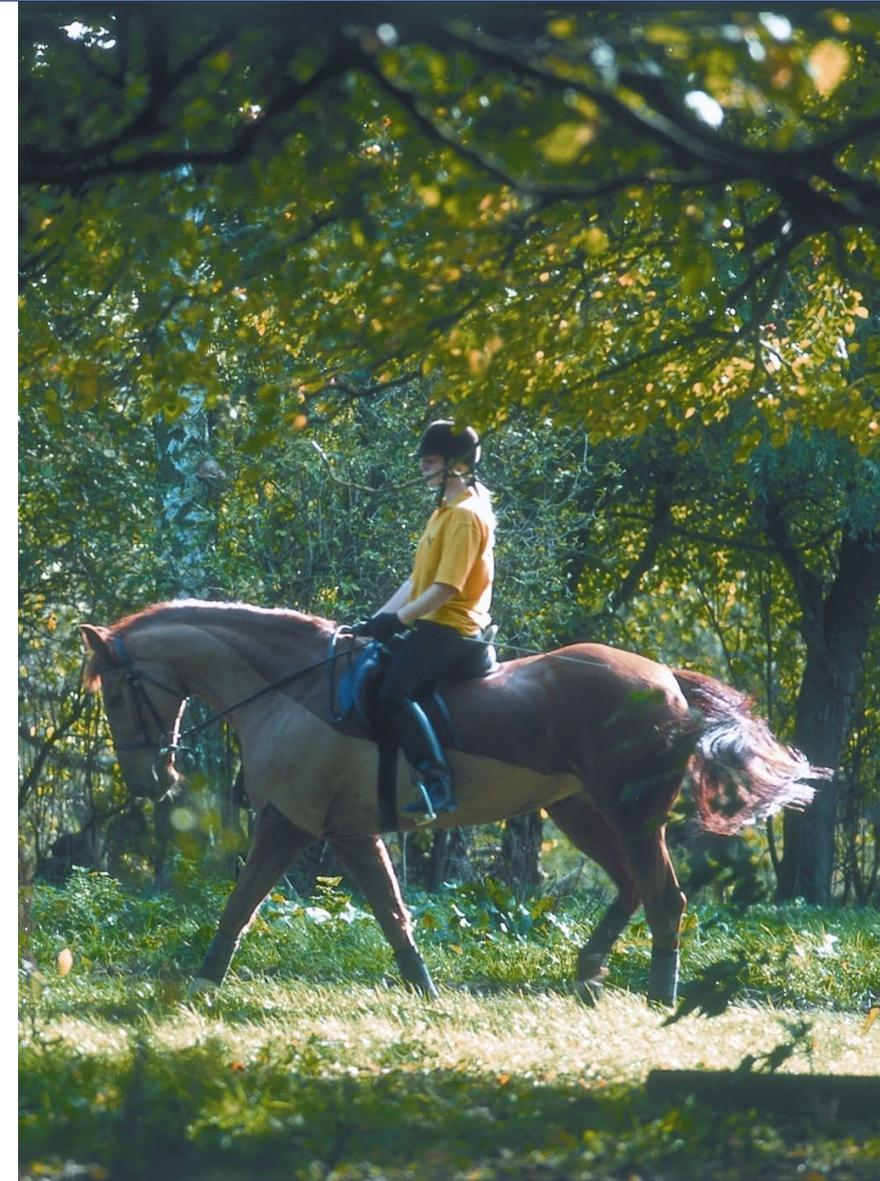
Natural environment. Use the uniqueness of each season. **Colours, smells and sounds:** The sound of the wind in the branches, the moving trees mirrored on the water, the smell of wet earth... Specific migratory birds or animals, or flowers that cannot be found in summer.

Emotions. Show the link to your customers: braving the rain or the tumultuous sea becomes an **adventure**, the outdoor **coolness** reinforces the **sensation of cosiness** and **serenity** when cuddled up by the fireplace with a hot mug of tea.

Access. Offer places usually off-limit during crowded summer seasons. Go behind the scenes of nature conservation with park rangers, visit the restoration area of a museum, walk your dog on the beach.

Time is different. What can you offer that your visitors can enjoy most when not limited by time? Ex: Access to a great second hand bookshop, a local café with comfy sofas and excellent coffee, or activities such as cooking lunch with a chef

Specific events. What local events take place in your area? Is there a patron saint associated with a local craft celebrated during those months? A carnival? A food or art festival? But also, are there specific natural phenomenon taking place then?



Assess the readiness of what you offer in advance of November to March

Offer an indoor space. Identify activities that are not weather dependant. If you cannot offer indoor spaces, provide some sheltered places outdoors and use poor weather conditions as a fun/new way to experience things.

Provide suitable equipment. Anticipate your customers' needs by offering weather-proof equipment. Use these to show your customer care and make customers aware of your added service compared to competitors.

Guarantee weather-proof access. Ensure that your place remains accessible under any weather conditions, particularly for customers with limited mobility. Whether it is your parking, driveway or the access between different focal points in your grounds, you need to make sure it is safe for visitors to drive/walk/wheelchair around.

Train your staff accordingly. Build long-lasting relationships with your customers to increase repeat business and loyalty. To do so, make sure your staff knows all there is to know about low season activities, local specialties, traditions and your local environment.



We redesign our experiences specifically to meet our customers' needs in winter

Andrew Jasper is the Programme Director of RHS Wisley (UK), a vast garden including a glasshouse with three climatic zones



- We upgraded our infrastructure, gardening programme, events, visitor flows and marketing to provide an optimal winter experience.
- Website showcases the must-see areas of the garden specific to that month, placing emphasis on the plants that are looking their most beautiful. On site, our receptionists and signage emphasise what is in season. This creates a sense of novelty.
- In winter, we design dusk and darkness activities and events to extend visiting hours. Expand our appeal beyond traditional gardeners to be more inclusive of younger audiences.
- Think about your customers' needs in winter and how to cater for them, rather than expecting the customer to adapt to fit around you.

4. Let's design innovative experiences



Low season is the time to experiment and learn

Personalisation. Customers look for products customised to their needs. Personalise low season when you have more time to cater for fewer customers.

Packaging. Identify all the customer needs (transport, activities, food and beverages, entertainment, interpretation, accommodation, souvenirs...) and select the most relevant for your target markets Only package the elements that add value to the customer.

Premiumisation. Emphasise the superior quality and exclusivity of your experiences to make your customers feel special. This also allows you to be less price sensitive.

Gamification. Engage your customers with playful experiences to encourage them to spend more and come back.

Co-creation. Customers want to be the protagonists of their experiences not spectators. Find a way to involve them further and create opportunities for them to share their experiences with others on-site and online.



We raise awareness of our resources amongst businesses



*Hetty Byrne is the Sustainable Tourism Officer
at the Forest of Bowland AONB (UK)*

- We promote winter as the best time of year to star gaze, when you can see the Milky Way on moonless nights with the naked eye.
- We identify five designated Dark Sky Discovery Sites and engage with about 20 tourism businesses as 'Dark Sky Friendly', which means that they proactively plan to reduce light pollution. The AONB runs a Dark Skies Festival week (in February half term) and encourages visitors to stay in the Dark Sky Friendly accommodation.
- For situations in which you need a critical mass of activity to create a new product, you need to work in parallel with local supply to raise awareness of the potential available. Launching a new experience in the market requires capturing the attention and imagination of both businesses and customers.

Create economies of scale and new experiences

Find a common need with other businesses in your area. For example, the Christmas season is not exploited to its full potential. If you are a venue or a hotel, your impact on your own is limited despite your best efforts to be creative in your offer. Yet, if different local organisations was to put on an attractive show, the range and scale of your appeal to potential visitors has the potential to be much more effective, with everyone benefitting.

Coordinate exchanges between stakeholders (or find the right facilitator to do so) to find a common approach and put together a finely tuned communication campaign that offers a range of complementary local experiences to your visitors.

Share data. Data that might be irrelevant to some may be relevant for others. The more information that you, and other local stakeholders, can gather on consumer behaviours and expectations, the more easily you can form a cohesive and impactful communication campaign and design better experiences for your visitors.

Join forces. Create new experiences by combining complementary products and services, and share the marketing effort and risk.



We find synergy with local stakeholders that share the same issues



LA BAULE-GUÉRANDE • PORNICHEM • SAINT-NAZAIRE • SAINT-BREVIN-LES-PINS • PORNIC

LA MER EN HIVER

Réservez votre séjour en Loire-Atlantique
sur lamerenhiver.fr



Claire Ballossier is the Communications Officer at the departmental tourism development agency Loire-Atlantique Développement (FR)

- We have created a platform to promote our coastal destination, bringing together five seaside resorts by initiating "La Mer en Hiver" campaign.
- We group offers under four key categories: *Thrills* (outdoor sports), *Wellbeing*, *Nature*, and *Family*. Our communication style is based on a vocabulary drawn from the mountains and winter games (slopes, wetsuits, sliding, slalom, etc.) to give a playful tone to change habits.
- Multi-sector collaboration is key to the success of an ambitious communication campaign. Play on the fun aspect to encourage a new look and a better commitment from consumers.

Tap into people's yearning for a meaningful experience

The bucket list. Out-of-the-ordinary experiences, “extreme” and/or weird and wonderful experiences.

Reconnecting with nature. Strong desire for some urbanites to reconnect with nature. Further enhanced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Going back to simpler things. Offer no internet zones/sites, replace the microwave with a fire pit, provide hampers with fresh local produce and a cooking guide rather than ready meals.

Learning traditional savoir-faire. Offer the possibility of learning long-forgotten crafts to give people a sense of belonging. Ex: Spin wool, identify wild plants.

Exploring oneself. Through wellness, meditation, sport or experiences that will bring people out of their comfort zone. Turn it into a personal journey of self-discovery.



We optimise outdoor spaces during the colder months



Dawn Singh is the Duty Manager of Stirrups Hotel (Bracknell, UK)

- We offer four luxury pods as an sheltered outdoor dining experience that increases low season capacity and provides a night under the stars, no matter the weather.
- To optimise demand, the pods are booked for £40 within five slots: Breakfast, Lunch, Afternoon Tea, Dinner and Drinks. Use of small fan heaters and additional blankets and cushions.
- Personalise the pods with lights, candles and a small speaker. Add a buzzer for guests to press when they need service.

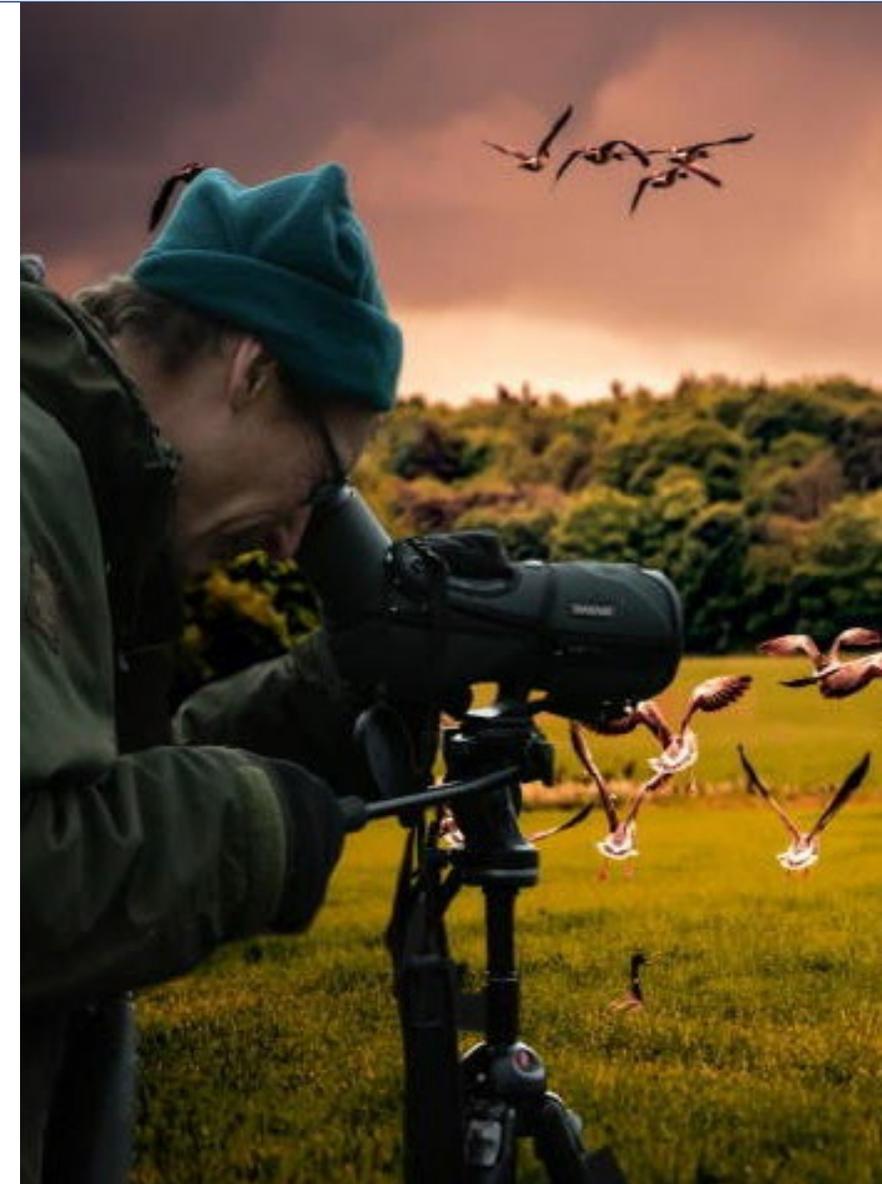
Translate emotions into experiences

Cosiness/Hygge. When it's wet, cold and dark, compensate with warm and light inside.

Timelessness. Approach time differently by offering experiences in which time is not of the essence. Promote activities that allow your customers to learn a new skill. Ex: painting, drawing, cooking, crafting.

People. The unexpected laughs, the deep conversations, the shared experiences. Enable those connections by offering the suitable space and time for it. Market holidays as time for yourself and your loved ones.

Adventure. Time for exploration, pushing the limits and going out of the comfort zone.



4. Let's design innovative experiences



We offer an opportunity for togetherness and a romantic all-year round experience

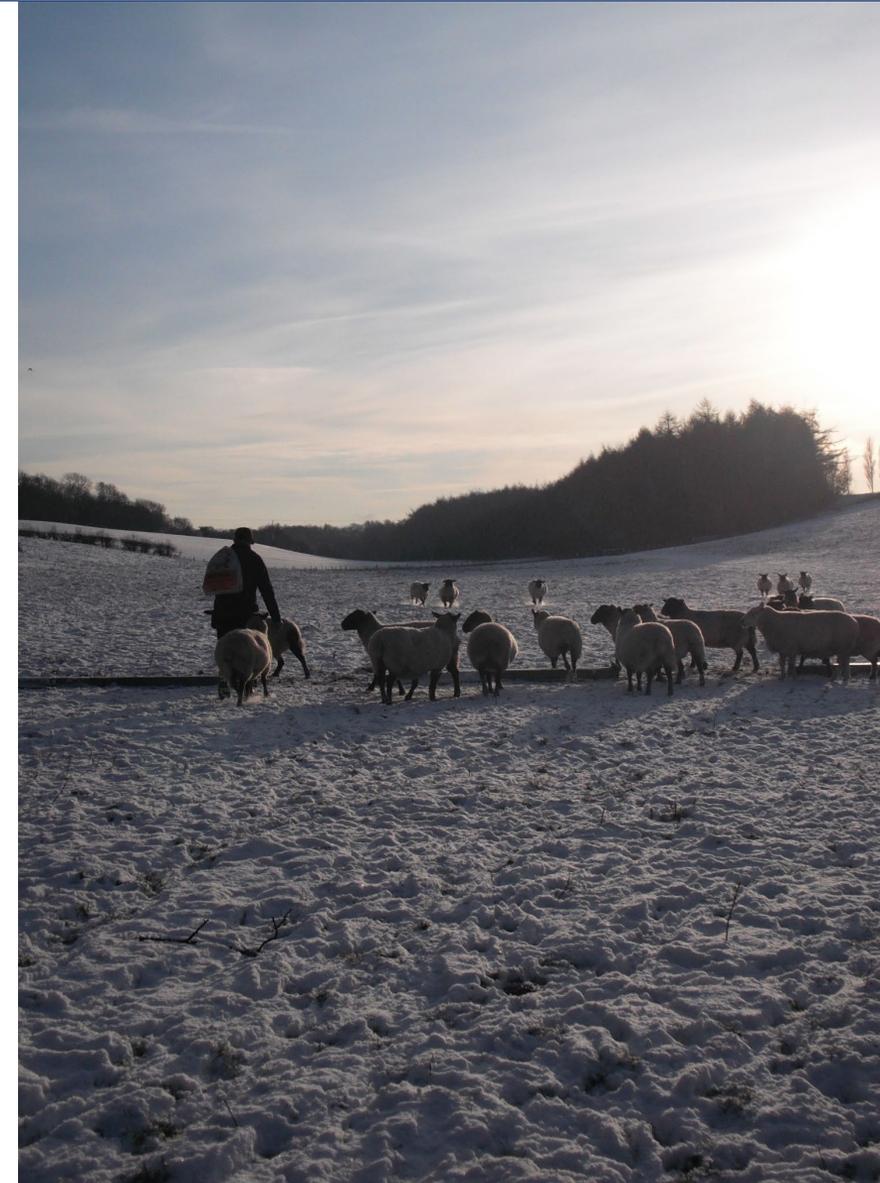
Robert Rezin is the General Manager of Brentwood Hotel (US)

- We set-up fire pits in our rooms which create a lovely romantic atmosphere all year round, but especially in colder seasons.
- We offer 5-dollar packs that contain chocolate, marshmallows and crackers, the trinity required for making the American campfire classic of s'mores. Simple treat that adds disproportionate romance to the firepit experience and enhances the word-of mouth demand.
- Find a way to meet the growing demand among guests for experiences of togetherness.

4. Let's design innovative experiences

Get a calendar

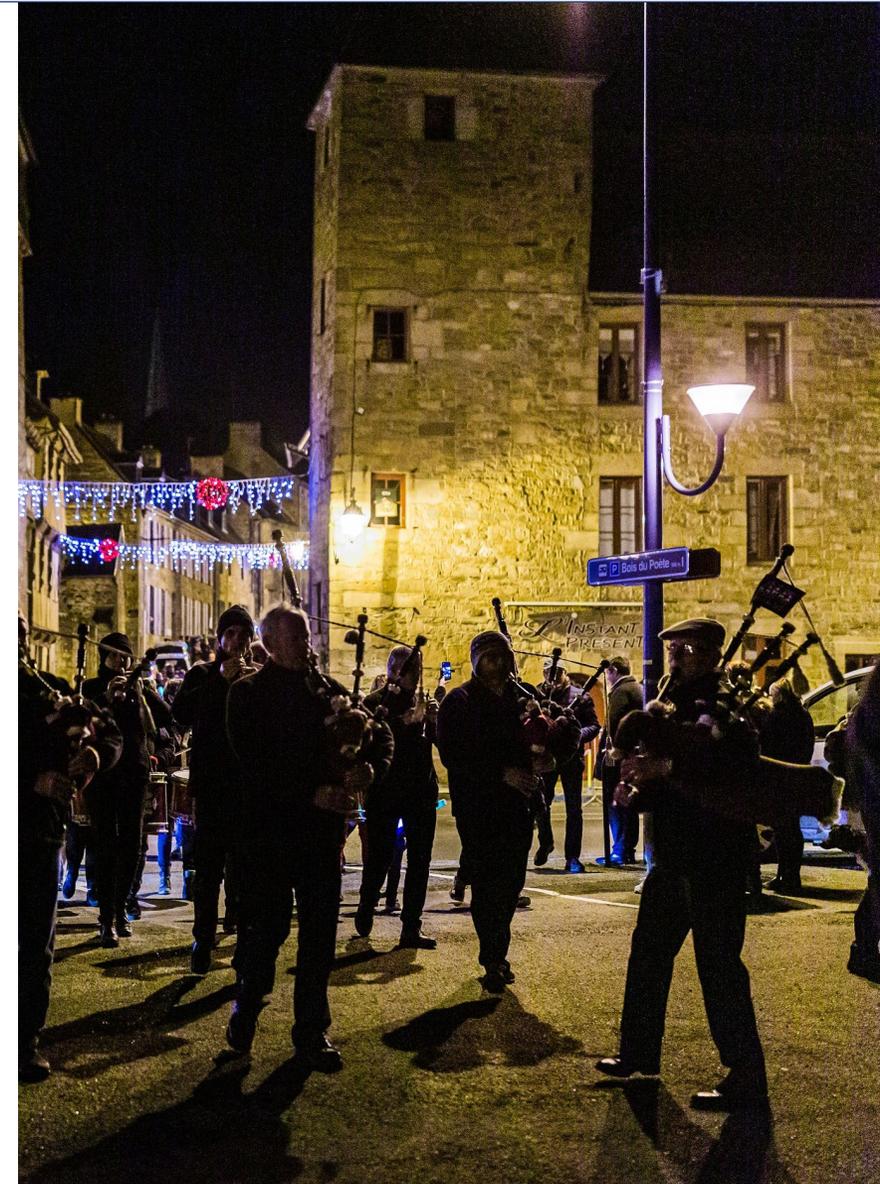
1. **Halloween.** The market for higher end tailormade experiences is growing fast.
2. **The market for pre-Christmas office parties.** A sustainability/authenticity themed team building experience gives that otherwise “samey” annual party a new sense of adventure.
3. **Christmas shopping.** From participation in workshops where you make your own personalised gifts to purchasing luxury, expertly made crafts, gifting experiences.
4. **Christmas and New Year holiday.** Offer themed Christmases - family ones focused on Santa's elves, or adult ones focused on a particular theme of music - jazz Christmas, folkloric Christmas.
5. **Between New Year and Valentine's Day.** Promote your experience as a Christmas gift for family members to buy each other and you are likely to get these vouchers cashed in during January and February.
6. **Snowdrop walks.** Incentivise January and February visits to your destination by creating and promoting snowdrop walks, in the same way that you can create bluebell walks in May.
7. **Chinese New Year.** Excellent opportunity to celebrate Chinese culture and to generate sales.
8. **Lambing season.** Promote an Instagram campaign to photograph early lambs at your destination from March.



Create your own events

Creating your own event can be a fantastic way to bring together your **local community**, highlight your **organisation's values**, strengthen your **brand identity** and increase your **visibility**.

- Find below a non-exhaustive list of event types:
- Art festivals (music, cinema, theatre, culture)
- Exhibitions and shows (hosting community groups and local dance or music schools)
- Food (street food events, buying locally sourced and delicatessen produce, learning how to cook)
- Shopping (pre-Christmas markets, artists' open homes, make your own gift events)
- Societal events (historical event, local celebrity, political movements)
- Entertainment (festival of light, carnival, Halloween, shows)
- Trade events
- Unusual/exclusive/one-off events



5. Time for marketing and storytelling



Invest in low season marketing resources

Identify communication channels. Search online for “ten things to do in winter in my area”, or “winter wedding venues”, or “winter days out”. Understand what those suppliers of experiences do that is different to your offering, and figure out how you can pitch for your business to be included.

Identify online publications in need of content. Travel blogs and magazines need content so if you have a unique experience, invite journalists to experience your services and pitch a story to them.

Enjoy winter photography. Customers want to be able to picture themselves in the photography you use in your marketing efforts. Winter photography of cosy interiors and fireplaces, and beautiful landscape winter scenery can be compellingly evocative and inviting.

Update your website regularly. Your website today needs to show what your business, and its surroundings, look like at the time that your customers expect to visit you. Prepare website content that is season specific and rotate it throughout the year.

Market onsite to encourage repeat custom. Through a leaflet, a coffee table photo book, or photos on your walls.



We widen our appeal by harnessing social media trends to attract a new audience

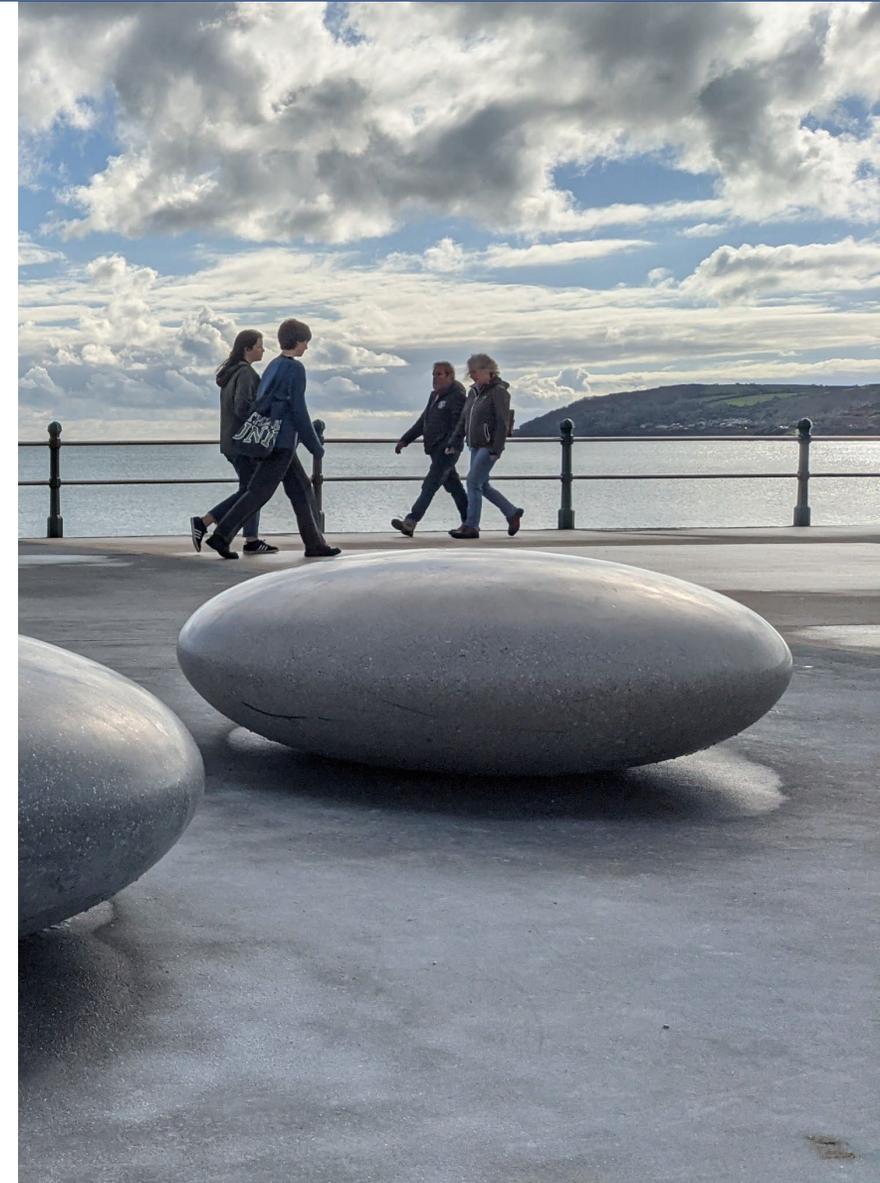


Elizabeth Meath Baker is the Director of Walsingham Estate Trading Ltd, responsible for public access to Walsingham Abbey, Norfolk (UK)

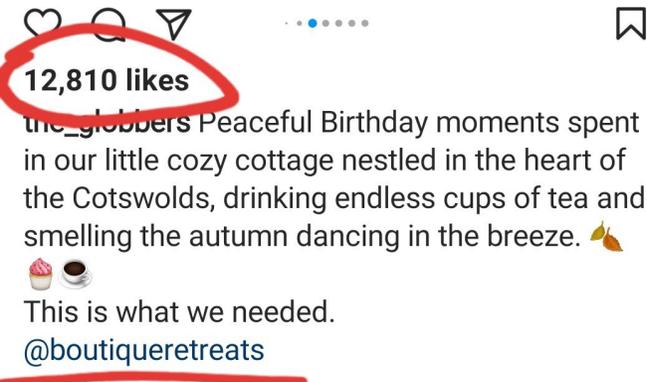
- Instagram allows us to introduce our snowdrop walks to a new audience who are seeking instagrammable settings in which to take pictures, for example, of their children, partners or dogs.
- We are developing a collection to showcase the snowdrop's amazing range, and we have designed the Abbey's gardens to provide snowdrop photo opportunities. Snowdrops work well to attract social media attention and increase demand for days out, at a time of year when there are few leisure opportunities.
- Design your visitor experience to encourage people to spend more time, and money, by providing them with a number of "must do" activities. Encourage them to share photos of their experience.

Harness the power of social media

- **Set yourself a target.** Figure out what you want to achieve and why it matters to you.
- **Learn about your customers.** Use social media analytics to learn more about the profile of your followers, so you can meet their needs.
- **Learn from your competitors.** Identify 3-5 businesses similar to yours that are more successful in social media and learn what they do differently.
- **Learn what already works for you.** What's different about the social media post that had the highest number of likes or shares, compared to your "average" post? Is it the time of day, the fact it has a better photo, the language you use, or that the content was funny rather than factual?
- **Each social media channel has a purpose.** While Facebook and Instagram outrank all other channels in communication with customers, the purposes of YouTube or TikTok are very different.
- **Create a social media content calendar.** Set up a posting schedule, for example with Hootsuite, so your posts are spaced out and they are released at the time of maximum engagement for your audience.
- **Set up social media competitions.** Provide incentives to your customers to post about you.
- **Get professional help.** While micro influencers with few followers may be happy to provide reviews for free in exchange for free use of your facilities, the people that are more established in social media will require a payment.



We have a winter-themed Social Media Marketing campaign



Boutique Retreats is a holiday letting agency with a wide-ranging portfolio of 150 unique properties of various styles (UK)

- We encourage low season bookings with special offers and the main way we promote these is through social media.
- Social Media Marketing = Photography + Affiliate Marketing
The Power of Photography: Pictures of cosy interiors and log fires on Instagram enhance peoples' desire to visit
Affiliate Marketing: We invest in our affiliate program, partnering with influencers and brands. We track the benefits with links, product/account tags, exposure, exchange of followers.
- Strengthen audience engagement on social media through eye-catching photographs and collaborations with influencers.

Become a storyteller

- **Sensory experience:** engage your audience with visual content such as pictures and videos. Vision accounts for more than 50% of purchase intention. Sounds, smells, taste, touch can also improve advertisement effectiveness.
- **Emotional experience:** create emotion-inducing stimuli such as happiness (more shares), sadness (more clicks), fear/surprise (more loyalty), anger/disgust (viral content).
- **Problem-solving experience:** engage your audience with creative thinking and make them curious about your offers.
- **Physical/virtual experience and lifestyles:** focus on the virtual experience of interaction with both products and other individuals, since action-oriented advertisement communicates motivation and meaning.
- **Ideal self:** embellish customers' appeals for self-improvement and their desired impressions of the social context, for example, through social media and influencers.



6. Be clear what benefits you expect



Reducing seasonality has a wealth of benefits

- **Generate a year-round income.** Create unique products and diversify your markets to provide continuity to your business.
- **Improve the quality of your service.** Create year-round jobs to give your business the opportunity to retain talented staff and to reduce your recruitment and training costs.
- **Maintain your mid-season prices.** Increase the quality, variety and attractiveness of your offer so that you don't need to reduce your prices.
- **Provide a consistent service.** Open all year round to allow your business to set service standards and professionalise its service.
- **Be more creative.** Open in the low season to give yourself the chance to experiment with changes in your products that you might find too risky or time consuming in high season.
- **Increase loyalty.** Open all year round to gain more repeat customers as they favour businesses that are reliably open.



It's cold, wet and dark: what shall we do? Work with the seasons, not against them



1. List your three top selling products or services in winter.
2. Now write down what makes them different to your summer products.
3. Are the differences positive, such that you want to enhance them, or are your best winter products a poor version of your summer product? It may be better to increase your offering, i.e., provide additional benefits to consumers, rather than simply reduce prices.
4. It's time to brainstorm ways to enhance your products to become appealing winter experiences:
 - Theme it: decorate for Halloween, Christmas and then Chinese New Year, so your customers always find something new.
 - Make it longer: mix indoors and outdoors by adding extra activities such as an Autumn leaves family hunt and collage.
 - Make it unique: tempt customers with small gifts such as a small drink or food tasting.
 - Make it special: promote beach walks with your dog, which are not possible in peak season.
 - Increase the size of the group: incentivise past customers to bring a friend.
 - Share it with another business: Bring in an expert on a certain topic who needs a venue (or offer your expertise to different venues).
 - Share it with the community: have an open day for schools, care homes, community groups.
 - Other ideas?



EUROPEAN UNION
EUROPEAN REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT FUND

EXPERIENCE

Interreg 
EUROPEAN UNION

France (Channel
Manche) England

EXPERIENCE

European Regional Development Fund

Want to learn more?
<https://www.tourismexperience.org/>

