

EXPERIENCE MAKER TOOLKIT

How to develop a Countryside Experience in the Kent Downs AONB and the North Downs Way



NORTH DOWNS WAY
NATIONAL TRAIL





Kent Downs AONB and North Downs Way Countryside Experiences

The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the North Downs Way are exceptional places for exploring, walking and being immersed in the countryside. They are also protected landscapes of national and international significance. Kent Downs AONB and North Downs Way Countryside Experiences are deeply rooted and inspired by the landscape, they allow visitors to explore undiscovered rural England, connecting with its heritage and culture, wildlife and nature, food and drink, local people and communities.

This toolkit will help you create new bookable immersive experiences in the Kent Downs AONB and along the North Downs Way National Trail.

Authentic visitor experiences are an opportunity for businesses, organisations and individuals to go beyond delivering conventional tourism products based on goods and services. Rethinking this approach and offering visitors immersive experiences will provide more reasons to visit, add value based on sustainable principles and share what is special about this landscape.



Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The **Kent Downs AONB** is a special and enchanting place; it is a landscape of drama and intimacy offering beautiful views, vibrant communities and a rich cultural heritage full of diverse wildlife.

We want to conserve, enhance and manage this special landscape for our visitors to enjoy. With a huge network of public rights of way we encourage visitors to experience nature in exciting new ways, discover new favourite locations and meet passionate locals who can bring our countryside story to life and help safely guide their journey along our famous coastline, ancient woodlands and delicate chalk grassland. Now, more than ever visitors are looking for tranquility, temptation, wellbeing, self-discovery, culture, or a taste of rural life and through the EXPERIENCE project we will help them find what they are seeking in the Kent Downs.

www.kentdowns.org.uk

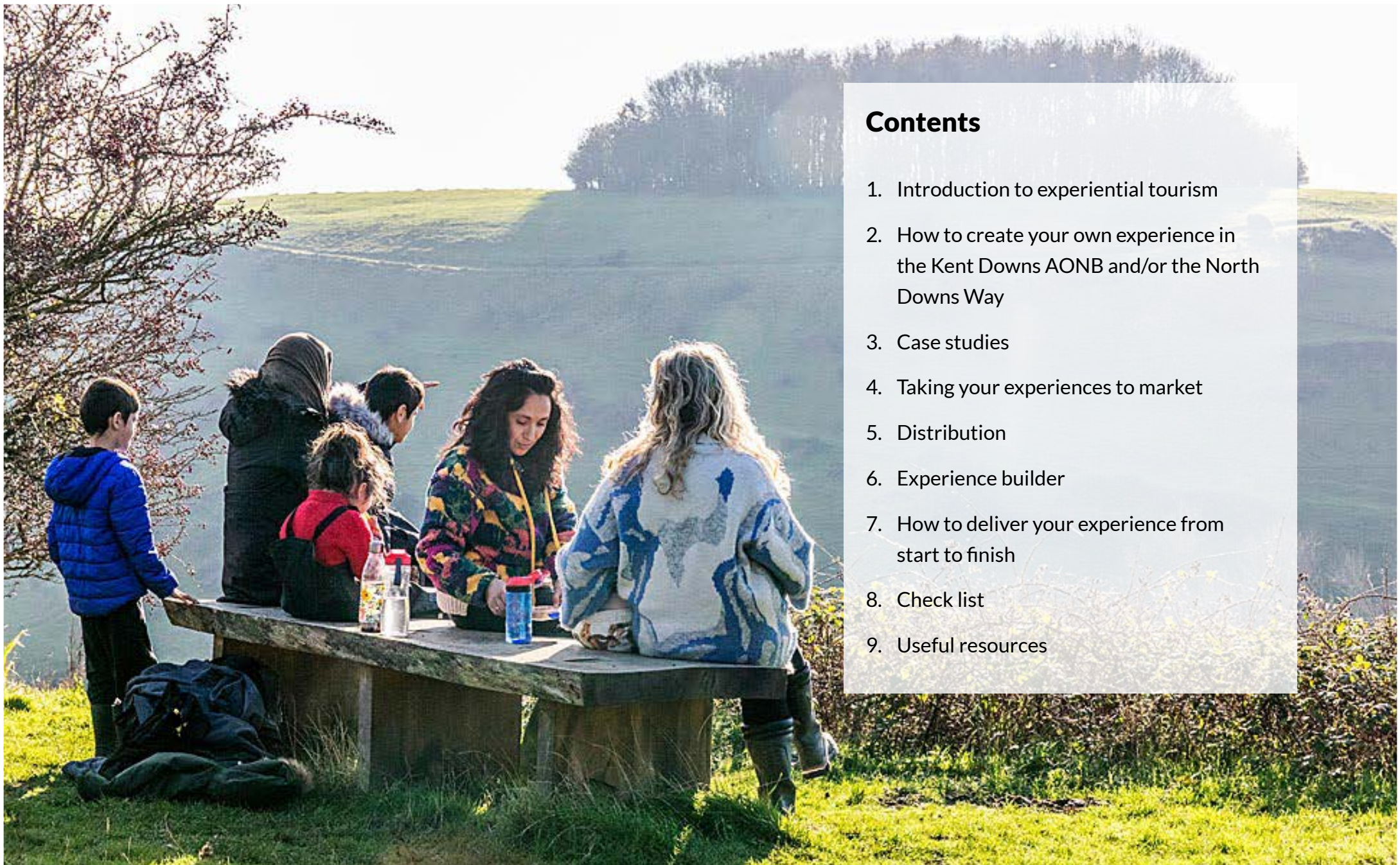
NORTH DOWNS WAY

NATIONAL TRAIL 

Cutting across the South East of England, the **North Downs Way National Trail** offers walkers 153 miles (246 km) of spectacular scenery, picturesque villages and glorious countryside, easily accessible from London.

Running from Farnham to Canterbury and the White Cliffs of Dover, the Trail passes through two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Surrey Hills and the Kent Downs, and along the famous Pilgrims Way and the Via Francigena through Canterbury – one of England's most famous cities. You'll discover history every step of the way: there are eight castles, three cathedrals, three archbishops' palaces and numerous stately homes and gardens close to the Trail. After a day of exploring, sample English ales flavoured with Kentish hops at traditional English country pubs and inns, or try sophisticated wines from one of the various local vineyards.

www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/trails/north-downs-way



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1 Introduction to experiential tourism

Experiential tourism provides a brand new layer of opportunities well beyond the traditional tourism landscape of products.

An experience actively involves visitors to partake, where they will create lasting memories and have the opportunity to engage with local stories, culture and to connect with the essence of a place and its people.

It's the alignment of the following four components that develops a unique and authentic visitor experience;

- RESOURCES
- PRODUCTS
- SERVICES
- LOCAL STORIES AND PEOPLE

“A tourism *product* is what you buy; a tourism *experience* is what you remember.”

Canadian Tourism Commission



The components of a Kent Downs AONB or North Downs Way experience

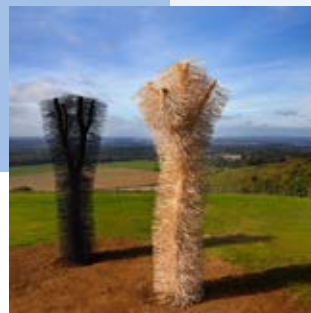
Resources

e.g.
AONB,
Footpaths, National Trail
Cycle paths
Beaches
Towns and villages



Local stories and people

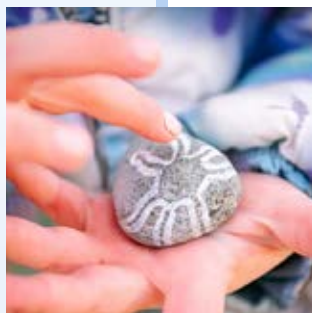
e.g.
Communities
Heritage
Culture
Sustainability
Nature and wildlife



Experiences

Product

e.g.
Accommodation
Attractions
Activities
Food and drink
Other tourism businesses



Services

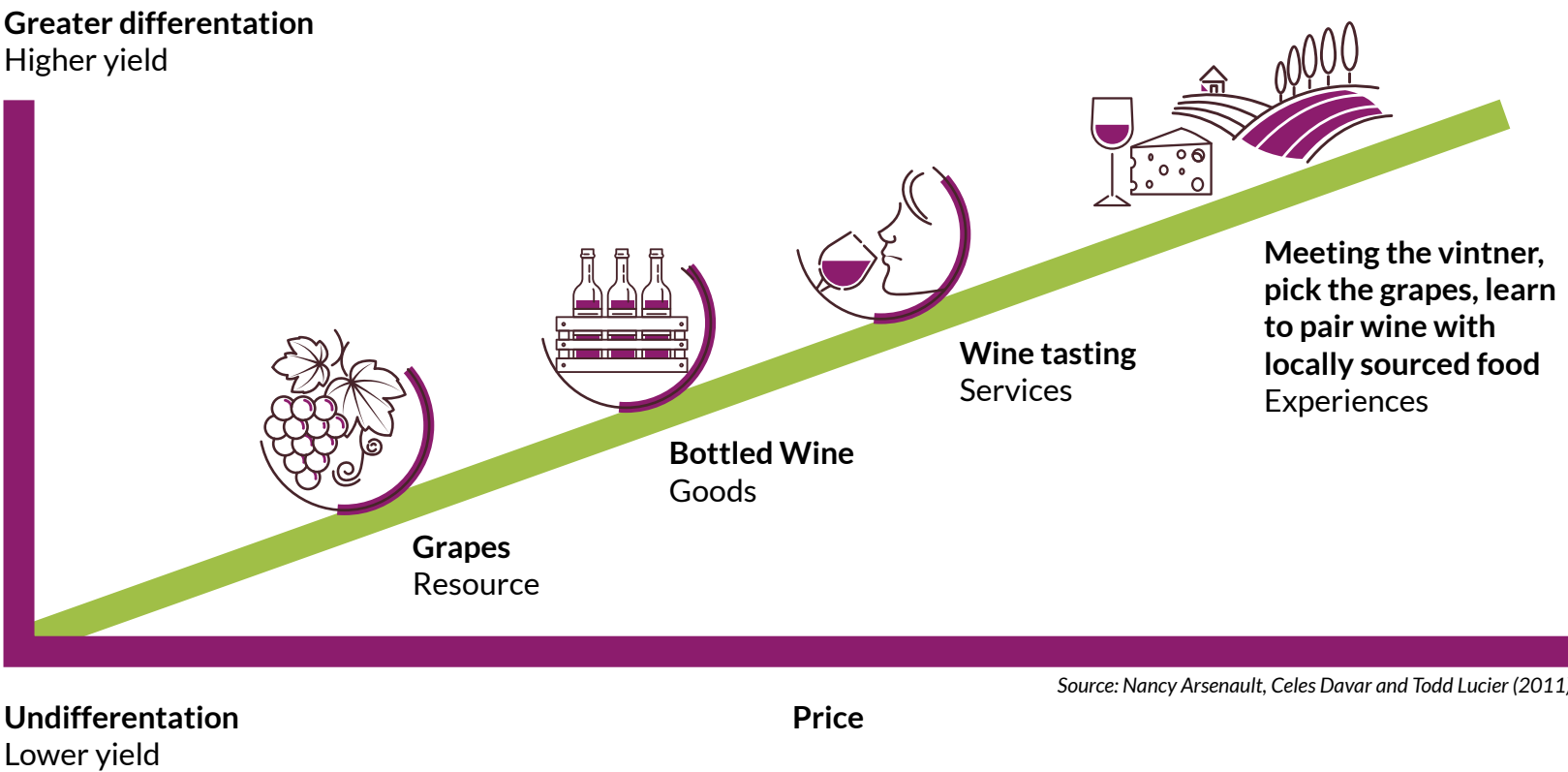
e.g.
Cycle hire
Luggage transfers
Guided tours
Public transport



Economic value of visitor experiences

For businesses in the Kent Downs AONB and North Downs Way, there are plenty of opportunities beyond delivering traditional tourism products based on goods and services.

The Canadian Tourism Commission refers to this as 'The Progression of Economic Value'. This diagram illustrates the process of moving from offering individual commodities, products and services to delivering compelling and engaging experiences.



Creating a Visitor Experience

The Story

Establish your story

People

Who will lead?
Who will you work with?
Who else will your guests
interact with?
What is your expertise
and passion?

Place

Where will you go? Where
are you planning to take your
guests? Are you giving access
to a location or venue they
wouldn't have access to unless
they were doing this experience?

Participation

What will your guests do?
What hands-on activities
are you including in your
experience? Who will be leading
these activities?

What is the difference between a tour and a visitor experience?

The following chart highlights the differences between a guided tour and a visitor experience.

	GUIDED TOUR	EXPERIENCE
Led by a guide	Yes	Yes
Led by an expert	Yes	Yes and No
Transit between locations included in pricing	Yes	Yes
All refreshments included in pricing	No	Yes
Access to venues included in pricing	No	Yes
A compelling story is told throughout	No	Yes
Create an emotional connection between visitor and location	No	Yes
Provide visitors with hands-on activities to participate in; learning a new skill	No	Yes
A unique opportunity that guests can only do and not by themselves	No	Yes
Visitors feel like locals	No	Yes
Can go beyond a single activity, location or attraction	No	Yes

2 Five steps to create your own immersive experience in the Kent Downs AONB or on the North Downs Way

01

ESTABLISH YOUR STORY

Like all good stories your experience should have a good start, middle and end. Tell your story well and keep it simple and memorable. Don't include too many elements that will steer away from your overall story of your experience, making it difficult to remember.

02

GUESTS GET HUNGRY

Unlike a classic tour, all meals and refreshments are included within the experience price. So, if your experience is over a meal time you should include food and drink and where possible use locally sourced produce to further enhance your local story.

03

THE UNEXPECTED

Give your guests a surprise! Include something within your experience that will create lasting memories. However big or small, the surprise will create great moments for your guests to share with their friends and family.

04

THE EXPECTED

Surprises are great, but as well as the unexpected it's good to include some of the expected elements in your experience. For example fish and chips on the beach or a visit to an old English pub. International visitors will love it – and if it's done well and fits with your overall story it can be a real highlight for guests.

05

KEEP IT SIMPLE AND BE FLEXIBLE

Every guest is different, every group is different, so you'll need to be flexible when developing your experience. Allowing extra time for groups that like to take their time or have an extra place to visit for groups that speed through the experience. If you're planning to work with the travel trade, you'll need to be flexible as they might want to adjust the duration or have their own ideas of what their guests might want to do.

Costs vs Profit

When starting to develop your experience idea you'll need to think about how much you will need to charge per person or per group in order to cover all of your outgoing costs and to make a profit.

It's good practice to count your time as a cost, especially if you're a business providing the experience. You will also need to break down any annual costs you may have (e.g., insurance, printing of leaflets, hosting of your website) and estimate the number of guests you will have in that year.

Example: Here are some costings for "Boots, Beavers and Boats", a 7 hour experience priced at £120 per person. The business uses TXGB as its booking system and distributes via TripAdvisor Experiences.

	TIME/COST	PER PERSON	PER GROUP OF 4
Your time & staffing resource in admin prior to experience; (e.g. enquiries and bookings, scheduling dates on OTAs etc)	1 hour	£10	£10
Your time & any staffing resource in delivering the experience	7 hours	£70	£70
Booking system fees, when making booking through distributor	TXGB	2.5% (£3)	2.5% (£12)
Commission to OTA's or trade (marketing budget)	TripAdvisor or Airbnb Experiences	20% (£24)	20% (£96)
Pay entry to venues	Boat museum donation	50p	£2
Equipment hire	Boat hire	£4	£16
Refreshments and meals	Pub lunch and pint	£7	£28
Local marketing	Leaflets in local hotels and website hosting	10p	40p
Transportation	Pick-up in company minibus - fuel	10p	20p
Insurances and licensing	Public liability insurance	5p	20p
Total Sale		£120	£480
Cost		£118.75	£234.70
Profit*		£1.75 (+ £80 your time)	£245.30 (+ £80 your time)

**It's good practice to count your time as a cost, especially if you're a business providing the experience. If you're an individual you might simply see this as a part of your profit line.*

TOP TIP

Don't be afraid to negotiate pricing with the businesses you work with. For example; talk to the pub you're having lunch in or the boat hire company and get a discounted price per head, tell them you will bring them regular trade throughout the year.

3 Case studies of experiences in other protected landscapes



HILLS, HEATH, HOPS AND HAMPERS

4 Hours, £65 per person

Walk in the steps of our ancestors exploring Black Down, the highest point and a hidden heathland treasure within the National Park. With an experienced local guide leading the way, discover the fascinating history and geology of the area while listening to the birdsong. Enjoy stunning views of patchwork fields, rolling hills and ancient woodland. Savour a delicious luxury picnic full of scrumptious local produce at one of the best viewpoints. Complete the experience with a visit to an award-winning independent microbrewery for a fun guided tour and ale tasting session.

- Local expert-led guided walk with stunning views of the local landscape – bring your camera!
- Reconnect with nature whilst enjoying a locally sourced picnic
- Craft ale brewery tour in 18th Century building



ARTY FOOTSTEPS

4 Hours, £140 per person

Ignite your creativity with a guided walk in the Breamish Valley in Northumberland National Park, followed by a creative art session with a professional local artist. Let the landscape's prehistoric features, vast skies, wonderful views and plentiful wildlife inspire you to create an everlasting memory of your experience. Enjoy a delicious lunch made with ingredients from local Northumberland producers, courtesy Ingram Café.

- Guided walk through remarkable prehistoric landscape
- Walk with a professional guide and work with a professional artist
- Create your own artwork to remember the experience

Case studies of experiences in other protected landscapes



SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK RANGER EXPERIENCE

4 Hours, £60 per person

The South Downs Ranger Experience gives visitors a real-life glimpse into the work of a South Downs Ranger. Working closely with local communities, farmers and landowners, the South Downs National Park Rangers play a pivotal role in conserving and enhancing the 1,600km² of landscape, biodiversity, cultural heritage and the famous South Downs Way.

- Step aboard a Land Rover to visit iconic sites, hear extraordinary stories and see conservation in action
- Immerse yourself in nature and history and hear extraordinary stories of life as a National Park Ranger
- Enjoy a locally source picnic and visit a local brewery



THE WENSLEYDALE FARMER'S EXPERIENCE

6 Hours, £65 per person

A true Wensleydale experience – try out life as a farmer on the Swinithwaite Estate, home of the Thornton-Berry family since 1925. Start the day with a traditional, hearty English breakfast of fresh local produce in an award-winning café. Then spend the day taking a close look at traditional drystone walls, feeding the animals, gathering sheep and learning about how sheep are farmed. A fun and engaging hands-on experience in the heart of the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

- Experience stunning views in Wensleydale in the heart of the National Park
- The chance to experience life as a farmer
- Learn about sheep and the importance of farming to our economy and the sustainable process of farm-to-plate

4 Taking your experiences to market

Simply having your experiences on your own website is not going to attract a huge number of customers to book.

HOW WILL CUSTOMERS KNOW YOU EXIST?

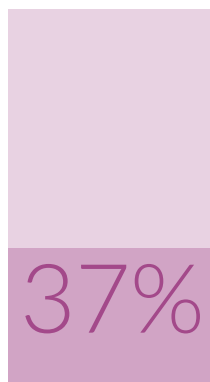
In 2019, 22% of the domestic market booked an experience because of the type of experience they wanted to do, not because of where they wanted to go.

There are many ways to market your experiences, but it's much more than just listing your experience on your own website or distributing leaflets to local businesses.

While all of the above are good to do, on their own they are never going to drive enough traffic for bookings. You will need to widen your reach and in doing so you need to distribute your experience more widely and effectively.



65% of the domestic market booked an experience **before leaving home**



37% of domestic visitors choose the destination **because** of the experience



Develop your experience for your preferred market and audience

When developing your experience you need to think about who your audience is:

- Who are you trying to attract to book?
- Which markets and what type of visitors do you think your experience will most appeal to?
- Do you think you are more likely to get visitors from the UK rather than from outside the UK?
- Is your experience more suited to families?
- Will you only take bookings from private groups or do you prefer to have mixed groups and have individuals who don't know each other?

In 2019, 77% of all tourism in England was from the domestic market, with the remaining 23% from the inbound market.

DOMESTIC OR INBOUND? WHICH IS BEST FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

DOMESTIC MARKET	INBOUND MARKET
Lower marketing costs	Higher marketing costs
Visitors tend to be more familiar with England	Visitor may only have limited knowledge of England
Visitors tend to book short breaks and straightforward activities	Visitors tend to travel longer and spend more money than domestic visitors
Easier to get to market and quicker to distribute	Longer term investment and complete distribution systems to get to market

How you develop and price your experience is very dependent on the market and audience you are trying to reach and to book.

It's worth understanding who your market is before you develop your experience. **VisitEngland** has created useful resources and toolkits on taking your experiences to market, with details of the different audiences (known as segments) and markets.

<https://www.visitbritain.org/england-research-insights>

<https://www.visitbritain.org/experiential-activity-research>

If you are planning to onboard your experience on to an Online Travel Agent (OTA), the OTA will provide you with insights and sometimes advice on pricing based on their target markets.

BOOKABILITY AND THE TOURISM DISTRIBUTION LANDSCAPE

In order to succeed in an international market, it is important to tailor your experiences to your visitor's requirements. By understanding how your region and product might appeal to the international market, you can tailor your product, marketing and promotional activities to attract new visitors.

	THE LARGEST MARKETS TO THE SOUTH EAST			
	FRANCE	GERMANY	USA	SPAIN
Global ranking for inbound visits to the UK in 2019	#2	#3	#1	#5
Key travel periods	April - June	July - Sept	April - June	Jan - Mar July - Sept
VisitBritain's global audience targeted segments	Buzzseekers Explorers	Buzzseekers Explorers	Buzzseekers Explorers	Buzzseekers Explorers
Key booking periods	> 50% of French visitors booked within 2 months of their arrival in Britain	6 months+ German tend to start thinking about their trip to Britain early	3-6 months before departure to UK/Europe	>60% of Spanish visitors booked within 2 months of their arrival in Britain

TARGET SEGMENTS

BUZZSEEKERS

Free spirited and spontaneous, they like holidays full of action and excitement.

Aged 25-34

EXPLORERS

They enjoy outdoors, must-see sites, and embracing local cultures at a more relaxed pace.

Aged 45-64

5 Distribution

Online travel agents (OTAs) act as online marketplaces where experience providers from all over the world can onboard their experiences to be bookable. OTAs then spend a lot of money aggregating services from all over the world and marketing their inventory to a global customer base.

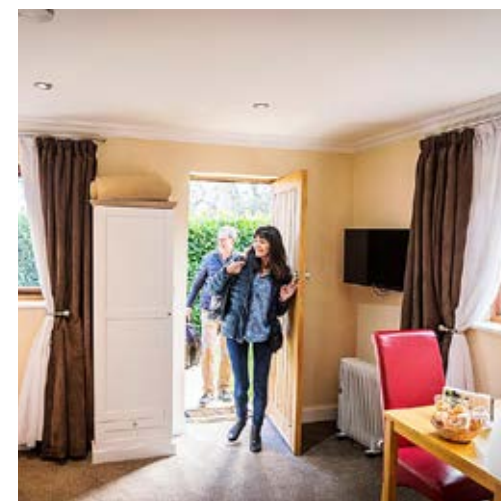
The global key players in the industry at present are Airbnb Experiences, TripAdvisor Experiences, Expedia Local Expert and Get Your Guide. These large OTAs have a long established presence in the travel industry and are continuing to grow their online presence among visitors.

Every OTA is different, some are large scale and some are small and specialised, some only accept instant bookings and others allow guests to request to book. Some connect into distribution platforms and others have their own standalone booking platform.

It's good to compare and select the right OTA for you and your business. Which works best with your booking strategy. If you are looking to attract a large number of visitors to your experiences and will host them often you may choose to work with one of the larger OTA's below. Or perhaps you are looking to reach a certain market or segment that chooses a more specialist OTA.








A few questions to ask yourself when choosing the right OTA(s) for your business:

- Are you looking to a particular market?
- Do you want guests to book instantly?
- Are you happy to run an experience with only one guest?
- Do you prefer private groups rather than mixed with individual bookings?
- How much commission are you willing to pay?



Often businesses will choose to work with more than just one OTA. The table demonstrates the differences between the leading OTAs.

Note: policies and conditions are subject to change so do check current information.

OTA	Market	Booking request option	Min. group size set by OTA	Group types	Exclusivity	Approved experiences	Linked into distributors
	Global large-scale OTA	Instant booking only	1	Mixed and private	Yes but check latest policy	Yes	No
	Global large-scale OTA	Instant booking only	No	Mixed and private	Non exclusive	Yes	Trekkssoft
	Global large-scale OTA	Instant booking only	No	Mixed and private	No	No	Trekkssoft
	Global - small specialised OTA	Instant booking only	N/A	Private	N/A	Yes	No
	North America - Small specialised OTA	Instant booking only	N/A	Private	N/A	Yes	No
	Global large-scale OTA	Instant booking only	No	Mixed and private	No	No	TXGB, Trekkssoft
	Domestic, North America & Europe	Booking request with 24h to accept/ decline	1 (option to reschedule guest up to 7d before)	Mixed and private	Non exclusive	Yes	No

Let's talk about OTAs' commission...

Instead of thinking of commission being taken by OTAs as an extra cost to running your business, think of this as your marketing cost, which will often work out to be more cost-effective than your own marketing strategy.

Ask yourself, will you attract and reach the same volume of bookings as these OTAs? Will your own website be able to reach the same traffic as these online marketplaces that have been perfected over the years. Do you have the time, expertise and budget to deliver your own marketing strategy all by yourself?

THE OTA CHEAT SHEET: GOOD TO KNOW...

TripAdvisor Experiences requires all prices listed to be the lowest available price, meaning that you're not allowed to sell your experiences for a lower price on your website.

GetYourGuide isn't as clear-cut and sets a commission rate based on the experience provider's destination and type of activities offered.

Other OTAs not included in the comparison chart include; Booking.com, Klook, Civitatis Musement and With Locals - these OTA's mostly have products in London; often bus tours or tickets for attractions rather than immersive visitor experiences.

Websites like Viator and Get Your Guide are experience aggregators, which search across multiple websites and show the results all in one place on their own websites.

AirBnB will provide you with insurance for your Experience. This is useful if you are just starting with Experiences and don't have existing insurance that will cover them.

TRAVEL TRADE

The Travel Trade is really worth considering as a distribution channel enabling a wider reach both in the domestic and international markets. The Kent Downs Team has identified a group of operators who specialise in walking and cycling tourism with a focus on the countryside and unique experiences.

It is important to be 'Travel Trade Ready', meaning you are set up to do business with tour operators. To do this, you would need to:

BE FLEXIBLE - Each operator will have different needs for their groups and you should be ready to accommodate them where feasible for you and your business/experience

BE OPEN-MINDED - The operator may want you to look at a slightly different version of your experience to meet their needs

BE READY TO DISCUSS CANCELLATION TERMS - It is important for operators to keep their product open for sale as long as possible to maximise sales. This means you need to be willing to negotiate your cancellation policy and be as flexible as your business will allow. In these times, it is also advisable to have a Covid cancellation policy in place

BE COMMUNICATIVE - The Travel Trade thrives on building strong working relationships and if you are easy to do business with, the more your business will grow.

Distribution - Kent Downs AONB

As part of the EXPERIENCE project Kent Downs are undertaking marketing campaigns and a new web-site to promote the new Experiences in the Kent Downs and North Downs Way. This includes:

CUSTOMER INSIGHTS



Key Learnings Overview

Consumer Research: Options Analysis, Surveys, Accessible Audiences, VisitEngland and VisitKent Research, Market Reports.

Audience Data: Key Customer Targets, Google Keywords, Local Competitors.

Test Learnings: Facebook Campaign Insights.

PRODUCT TESTING



Paid Advertising: to increase reach and gain detailed data on audience demographics.

Competitions: linked to a surveys the build engaged audiences.

Influencer Activity: testing your experience and providing key feedback.

Testing Platform: [usertesting.com](https://www.usertesting.com) can test product messaging and concept.

INTEGRATED CAMPAIGNS



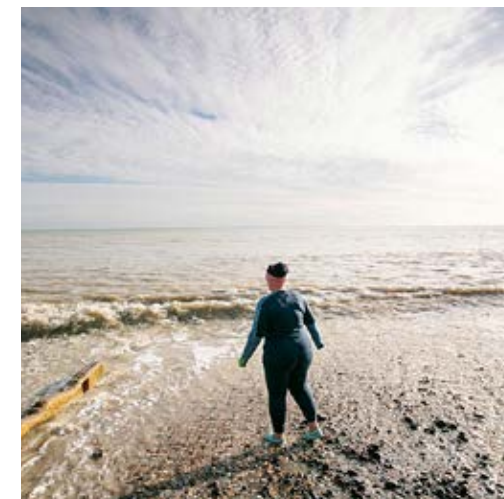
#findyourspace: Live from 15th April to end September focussing on Awareness.

#bemoreoutdoor: Live from October to March 22 (TBC) focussing on Engagement.

#natureconnected: Live April 22 to September 22 focussing on Action.

#lovekentdowns: Live October 22 to March 23.

TOOLKITS AND ASSETS



Toolkit: What makes Kent Downs and North Downs Way special.

Imagery and Video of your business and range of landscapes.

Logos and tools to help you promote our partnership.

Curated experiences featured on our website.

Booking Platforms

A booking platform is where you can add and schedule your experience. Some platforms will also distribute your experience on to other websites and platforms giving you a much wider reach to new customers.

Tourism Exchange Great Britain (TXGB) is a business-to-business platform connecting tourism suppliers to a range of domestic and international distributors.

TXGB allows you to access a global network of distributors including the trade in one place. By connecting to TXGB you can manage your availability, pricing, bookings and content across multiple distribution channels, and also access a wide range of analytical data. For businesses, getting distributed via some of the larger or niche distributors can be a daunting task. TXGB offers all the benefits as outlined above, in an accessible way for businesses of all sizes.

www.txgb.co.uk

Beyonk provides the booking platform technology for businesses to onboard their experiences and activities and distribution to a network of local and regional tourism promoters. Beyonk has a feature to add a booking widget to your own website to take bookings.

www.beyonk.co.uk

Unmissable England is new to the distribution marketplace. As well as being an online travel agent, experiences onboarded to Unmissable England will soon be distributed to various DMOs and other tourism websites as well as being bookable via a widget on the experience providers own websites.

www.unmissableengland.com

Other distribution platforms are in the marketplace, but what's the difference and the advantages of TXGB, Beyonk and Unmissable England?

Here's what you need to know:

	Distributor to DMOs and other tourism sites	Distributes experiences on to some OTAs	Commission per booking distribution	Booking widget for businesses website
TXGB	Yes	Yes	2.5% + DMO%	Yes
Beyonk	Yes	No	10%	Yes
Unmissable England	Yes	Yes	8% + DMO%	Yes

Marketing - Quick wins

As well as distributing your experiences in the marketplace, it's a good idea to create your own mini marketing strategy. This could include some of the following ideas;

- Create engaging content on your social media channel, inspiring guests to book; Tag Kent Downs AONB, North Downs Way and your local destination marketing organisations.
- Design publicity materials to distribute locally in accommodation providers, attractions and visitor information centres;
- Develop your website where you can accept direct bookings;
- Create a mailing list for visitors to your website to sign up for regular news and updates;
- Hold a launch event and invite your local media and peers along to come and try out your experience;
- Connect with relevant influencers and invite them to try your experience
- Keep the team at the Kent Downs AONB updated with your experiences so they can help promote them with you. Add the Kent Downs AONB and/or North Downs Way information to your web-site. Customers love to connect with companies that share their values.
- Encourage reviews and share
- Ensure any content has a link straight through to your preferred booking method so that customers can book straight away!



6 Experience Builder

Print out this form and use it to start building the perfect guest experience.

Name of experience:

What is the overall story of your experience?

What are your 3 key highlights?

Answer the following:

People - Who will you guests meet and interact with? How will you make them feel like a local?

Place - Where will you go, where will you take them? What special access will you give your guests?

Participation - What will you do with your guests? What hands-on activities do you have planned for them?

Write a short description about your new experience. Describe what you'll do. (*Talk about the details of the itinerary you have planned for your guests*) This is your chance to inspire guests to take your experience. Write as if you are selling your experience on your own website. Try to include some of the expected and unexpected elements of your experience.

Who is your key audience and market?

Some options for you to consider: Families, young/empty nesters, couples, solo travellers, groups, domestic consumers, international consumers (which countries?)

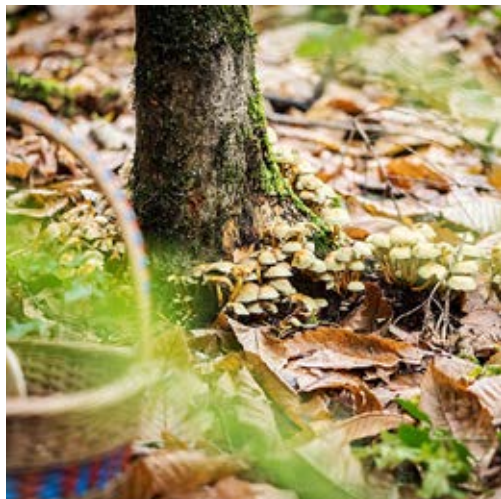
How long will your experience last? Will you have different options for different audiences and markets?

What will you charge?

Have you researched about what public liability insurance and licenses you will need to obtain in order to carry out your experiences? If so, what are these? *e.g. public liability, food safety, or licensing of transportation with guests.*

Where will you distribute your experience to ensure you receive bookings from your intended markets?

7 How to deliver your experience from start to finish



BEFORE THE EXPERIENCE TAKES PLACE

After booking, reach out to your guests to thank them for booking and provide all the information they need about the experience.

Answer any questions your guests might have.

Check with your guests if they have any special dietary requirements (if drinks/snacks are provided) or any health concerns you should be aware of before providing an active experience.

Your marketing should provide details about what food and drink you will offer so guests are fully aware of what to expect. Provide details in your marketing about how active the experience is likely to be (i.e. “a 3 hour walk along a rocky mountain edge”).

A week before the experience, send another message to guests to say how you’re looking forward to meeting them. This is a good opportunity to check if your guests are able to find the start point of the experience.

You may need to rearrange the start point or end point for guests - e.g. picking up from a train station instead of a hotel.



DURING THE EXPERIENCE

Meet and welcome your guests

Get to know your guest’s names — maybe ask where they’re from and if they had a good journey.

Introduce yourself and make sure your guests feel welcome and at ease.

This is a good opportunity to offer your guests a cup of tea, have a chat and get to know one another.

Inform your guests of the plan, what will you be doing, where will you be going and when.



Reminding guests of the itinerary will help guests feel at ease and help them plan in their heads how the experience will unfold. You may wish to leave out some of the unexpected elements to give your guests some surprises along the way.

Present a map of where you are and where your experience will go and where you will end up.

This is a good opportunity to inform your guests of loo breaks (especially if you are doing a lot of travelling in a vehicle) but also guests will get a good understanding of their location and the places they will explore and discover with you.

TELL YOUR STORY

Start to tell your story, providing your guests with facts and information to capture their imaginations.

Like all good stories, your experience should have a good start, middle and end. Launch into your story by describing or showing guests of what you are talking about. Hosting your experience in a costume can be fun and really immersive, so don't be afraid to do this — but just make sure it fits in with your story and isn't too gimmicky!

As soon as your experience is underway, create moments for guests to take photographs.

Stop and pause and allow guests to take images of the vista or of the place they are exploring.

This is a great way to get your guests to promote your experience by taking photos and after sharing them on their social media feeds.

At this point it's time to have some hands on activity. You may hand over to someone else to run the activity (e.g. a chef, surfing instructor etc) or you may be running the activity yourself.





INTRODUCTIONS

Introduce the activity (and who's running the activity) so guests really do understand what they are doing, why, and how. Make this as fun and informative as possible. You may have guests who only speak a little English so you will need to be prepared to go over things a few times. It's OK not to be an expert if you are running the activity - for example you may not be a professional chef but you may really enjoy cooking; therefore pitch your experience around cooking with a local.

During this activity, make sure you continue telling the overall story of the experience - making links back to the story.

Provide anecdotes and facts about the activity and how it links in with the story.

CHECK

Check in with your guests. Are they all happy and content?

Is there lots of laughter, smiling and chatting going on? If not, how can you improve the atmosphere? Every group is different, if you have a mixed group they might be really chatty and learning all about each other, a private group might be very quiet, so find a way to build up the atmosphere.

Keep your guests well informed with what's coming up next and later.

At this stage you may find your guests still asking a lot of questions about what's coming next — then gather the group and share an update on what they will be doing for the rest of the experience.

Don't forget to include something that's unexpected.

However big or small, give your guests a surprise; it could be as simple as sharing an interesting fact or getting special access behind the scenes.

Create more photo opportunities. This time organise a group shot and get a snap with you in the photo on your own smartphone.

These kinds of images help create even more lasting memories for guests, and are great to use in your own marketing and your listings on OTA websites.





FOOD AND DRINK

Depending on the type and length of your experience, you might choose now to have lunch, dinner or a snack.

Always check with guests when booking if they have any dietary requirements and adjust their experience accordingly.

When including food and drink into your experience make sure it connects well into your overall story. Where possible use locally produced and sourced food and drink.

For example; have lunch in an old inn where Oliver Cromwell once dined - as your story is all about the English civil war. Or forage for delicacies on the coast, then guests get to cook and eat what they find on an open fire on the beach. Eat the landscape - picnic on the hills enjoying a ploughman's of locally sourced and produced food and drink.

Any meals or snacks that you provide in your experience should always be included in the pricing of your experience. There shouldn't be any hidden extras!

There's no awkward moments in an experience when your guests are getting their wallets out to pay after they have eaten; as all food and drink is always included in the fee.

Sometimes, even if it's all paid for, some guests may insist on paying and end up buying you a drink at the end of the day. Not a bad thing.

Including a meal or snack stop is also a good chance for your guests to use the toilets and refresh themselves.

This is partially helpful for experiences that are mainly on foot, walking between locations.

If your experience is longer than a half day, this is when you add in another hands on activity.

You may find your guests become a little tired after a big lunch. Having another hands on activity after lunch is a good way to continue the momentum of the experience.





If you see anyone that you know; a neighbour, farmers, pub landlord etc., always introduce them to your guests and vice versa.

Many guests love the feeling of being a local for the day, meeting the folk that you know and really immersing themselves into the local community. This is a really important feature of your experience and many guests will remember these introductions to the people you know.

Now you're coming towards the end of the experience, this is a good chance to know your guests a little better and most likely you will have questions to ask them.

Always steer away from politics and religion in conversations even if your guests have certain views that you might not always agree with. Smile and move on.

If you feel there is a good connection with guests and they tell you that they have enjoyed themselves, don't be afraid to encourage them to review the experience in the following days.

Some OTA sites will automatically ask guests to review a day after an experience has taken place, others won't so you will need to ask your guest to do this for you. Don't be too afraid to mention how important reviews are to you and your business.



LEAVE YOUR GUESTS ON A HIGH – WRAP UP YOUR STORY.

You might choose to end up in a pub for a pint of the local ale or reach a beautiful open view before your experience comes to an end.

Don't forget to thank your guests for choosing your experience and you can always remind them again about leaving a review.

A sign of a good experience is when your guests are tired yet they don't want to leave!

If you run other experiences this might be a good time to remind guests if they are staying in the area a bit longer.

This is a great way to make direct sales and spread the word.

If you have a gift shop, you may choose to end your experience there. This is an ideal opportunity for your guests to purchase from the shop and now they have formed that connection with you and the place they are really likely to buy something from your shop.



AND FINALLY...

Present your guests with something they can take away.

Take away items are so important - they are your gifts to guests. This can be as simple as a recipe card if it's a foodie experience or a bottle of beer on a brewery themed experience. Whatever your giveaway is, itemise this in your pricing.

AFTER THE EXPERIENCE

The day after the experience, send a direct message to your guests thanking them for choosing your experience, ask if they got home safely and express how you also enjoyed the experience

Many experience providers keep in touch with their guests, connecting on Facebook and Instagram — this is a great way to keep in touch and for them to recommend you to their friends

If your guests haven't done it already, don't be afraid to mention one final time about how much you'd appreciate a review.

Send your guests links to review sites like Google and TripAdvisor.

Congratulations on running a successful experience!



8 Check list

To help you get started, go through the list below to check you have investigated the following in order to proceed with hosting your experiences.

- ☐ **PUBLIC LIABILITY INSURANCE** *Insurance broker*
Unless you are onboarding your experiences to Airbnb, you'll need your own insurance.
- ☐ **LICENSING** *District or Unitary Council*
If you're driving guests about you'll need a licence and relevant vehicle insurance to meet legal requirements. If you're including alcohol, you'll need a license.
- ☐ **FOOD HYGIENE CERTIFICATE** *Food safety training websites*
When preparing food for your guests or giving a hands-on activity you should have an up to date food hygiene certificate.
- ☐ **REGISTER FOOD/DRINK BUSINESS** *District or Unitary Council*
If you're preparing food and drink in your premises, you'll need to ensure you have been granted permission from your local authority. This includes running your experience from the premises if dealing with food and drink.
- ☐ **MARKET RESEARCH** *Local DMO and VisitBritain website*
Do you know your audience? Who are you trying to attract and market to? Get the latest research and information.
- ☐ **BOOKING SYSTEM** *OTA, booking system, distribution platform*
Decide how you will manage bookings overall. Will you use various OTA's and keep yourself a simple spreadsheet of the bookings? Use a booking system or distribution platform.

- ☐ **TERMS AND CONDITIONS** *OTA, DMO, distribution platform*
Whether you're signing up to a distribution platform, OTA or your local DMO, always read the terms and conditions so you're fully aware of what you're agreeing to.
- ☐ **CANCELLATION POLICIES** *OTA, DMO, distribution platform*
Create your own cancellation policy and be ready to adopt policies by distributors.
- ☐ **PRICING STRUCTURE**
Develop your pricing building in all costs including commission of OTA and distributors.

LATEST TRAVEL LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

For the latest legislation and guidance please log on to the VisitEngland website to download The Pink Book. [visitengland.org/pinkbookonline](https://www.visitengland.org/pinkbookonline)

Here is a useful free guide by VisitEngland on Package Travel Law. It is worth reading to ensure your experience is applying to the latest government legislation.

https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/Documents-Library/documents/England-documents/package_travel_law_guidance.pdf

9 Useful resources

Airbnb Experiences

airbnb.co.uk/experiences

Not in the Guidebooks

notintheguidebooks.com

Unmissable England

unmissableengland.com

Expedia Local Expert

localexpertpartnercentral.com

North Downs Way National Trail

nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/trails/north-downs-way/

Viator

viator.com

Fareharbor

fareharbor.com

Tours by Locals

toursbylocals.com

VisitBritain

visitbritain.org

Get Your Guide

getyourguide.co.uk

TripAdvisor Experiences

tripadvisor.co.uk

VisitEngland

visitengland.com

Kent Downs AONB

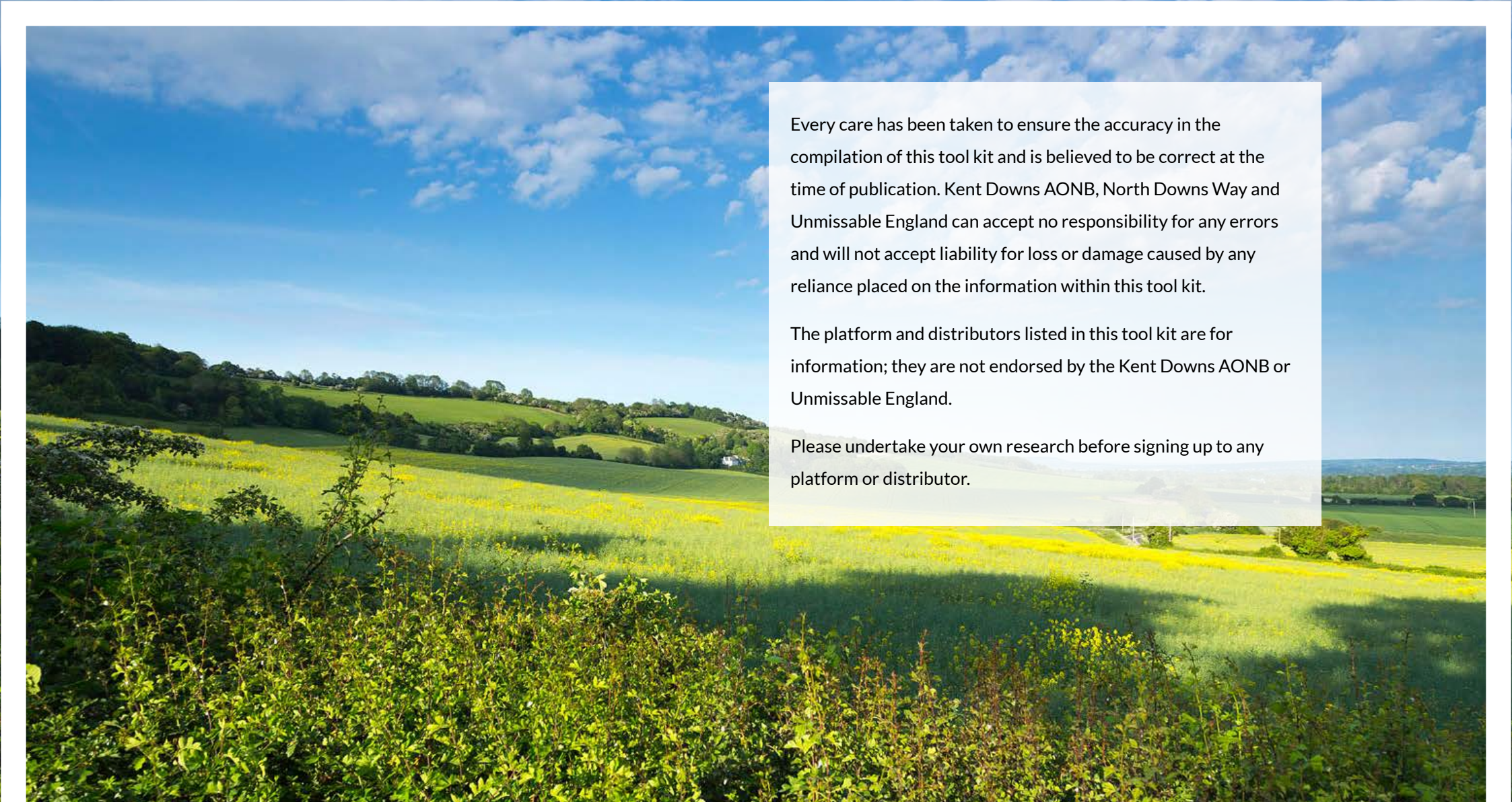
kentdowns.org.uk

TXGB

txgb.co.uk

Visit Kent

visitkent.co.uk



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