

# Our food. So good.

A practical toolkit  
to developing food  
related visitor  
experiences



A green rectangular sign with a bright pink triangle attached to its top right corner. A thin brown string is tied around the top left of the sign. The sign is hanging from a white object, possibly a bag or a stand. The background is out of focus, showing some architectural lines.

**Grown  
here, not  
flown here.**

**Northern Ireland**  
**Our food. So good.**

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Afternoon Tea at The Ballygally Castle

# Definition

Food tourism can be defined as any tourism experience in which a visitor learns about, appreciates and/or consumes food and drink that reflects the local or regional food culture, heritage or traditions.

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# Food & our visitors

Food is a vital part of the Northern Ireland tourism experience and is as important as accommodation, culture and scenery for visitors coming to experience the real Northern Ireland.

Visitors cite 'Experiencing good quality food, drink and dining' as a key factor when choosing the destination for a short break/holiday (NITB Consumer Barometer, 2013).

Visitors particularly enjoy finding Northern Irish food on menus and an increasing number of them are choosing to dine in places which serve distinctive and authentic dishes based on fresh, local produce (Mintel Ireland, 2012).

However, NITB research in 2011 found that 10% of GB consumers and just 6% of Republic of Ireland consumers would come to Northern Ireland for just the food. This is a very low proportion, visitors are just clearly not aware of how good our food is. **We believe telling visitors about our food can add so much to their experience.**



### Visitor Spend on Food and Drink

- In 2012 GB and overseas visitors spent almost £1 billion, over one third of their total spend, on food and drink on the island of Ireland making a massive contribution to the food and drink industry.
- GB and overseas visitors to Northern Ireland spent an estimated £138m (33% of their total spend) on food and drink in Northern Ireland.
- Northern Ireland residents on overnight trips in Northern Ireland spent approximately £134m (34%) on food and drink while Northern Ireland residents on tourism day trips in Northern Ireland spent an estimated £73m (36%) on eating and drinking.

(Sources: NITB/NISRA/Fáilte Ireland)

**These figures speak for themselves and clearly visitors will spend on food and drink if we can provide interesting and appealing menus and engaging food experiences.**

# Raising Northern Ireland's profile as a food destination



## PGI

Three of our indigenous foods now hold EU Protected Geographic Indication (PGI) Status, putting them on the world stage - Lough Neagh Eels, Armagh Bramley Apples and Comber Early Potatoes from County Down. This status recognises the quality and uniqueness of these products and how they are inextricably linked to the place from where they are produced – raising Northern Ireland's profile as a food destination. This European decision puts these products on a par with French champagne, Melton Mowbray pork pies and Cornish pasties.



## Great Taste Awards

They're the most trusted food and drink awards in the world and again Northern Ireland food and drink companies have broken all previous records in the 2014 Great Taste Awards. 371 gold stars were awarded to 101 local companies. This is an outstanding set of results in what is regarded as the most significant and trend setting food and drink event in the British Isles and Europe.





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“Northern Ireland’s reputation for high quality food and drink is going from strength to strength based on local businesses recognition in awards from The Guild of Fine Foods. With two supreme champions within the whole of the UK and Ireland (McCartney’s of Moira and Hannan Meats) and European recognition of our Comber Early Potatoes, Armagh Bramley Apples and Lough Neagh Eels, it really is something to shout about. Our fresh local produce adds value and a real stamp of authenticity to the visitor experience. By linking with local produce there is a huge opportunity for Northern Ireland to grow its reputation on the global stage as a great place to visit and eat. After all, everybody remembers that time they had an exceptional food experience.”

Michele Shirlow from Food NI

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# Good Practice



**STEP 1/8**

# ‘Local’ is the buzz word

## Food with an identity!

Think about the food on your menu – is it locally sourced?

Visitors say that on average they would pay 7% more for local food. They will also spend that little bit more on local produce which offers a sense of place and a true taste of the region.

Think about how you can incorporate local produce on your seasonal menus. Try to use suppliers who value local producers. Or if you do your own shopping, contact local food producers or farmer’s markets to see what good value local suppliers can provide.



Picked  
here, not  
shipped  
here.

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STEP 2/8

# Celebrate the story of the producer

## Be proud.

Use local produce and tell your visitor about it; who grew it, reared it or baked it! It's as important to celebrate the ingredients as it is to promote the finished dish.

Find out stories from your producers – with our strong agricultural and rural heritage, there'll be many stories that you can tell. Why not ask your producers for a quote and a photo.

Make sure to include place names as well as producer names in your menu to connect the dishes you create with places in Northern Ireland.





**STEP 3/8**

# Tell the story of your place

Be genuine and authentic.

Visitors want to connect and immerse themselves into a destination. Stories help them connect with a place and its people to deliver memorable experiences.

Every establishment is unique, so let's tell our visitors. Think about using your menu design, chalk boards or table talkers to tell your story. Or perhaps chart the history of your place with pictures on the wall.

Be proud of your successes and show off awards you've won or positive feedback you've received.



BOARD

PERMISSION GRANTED TO COME ABOARD

WHITE STAR LINE'S

R.M.S.

**TITANIC**

ISMAY, ISMIR & CO.,  
34, LEACHON LANE, STREET, LONDON,  
and  
10, WATER STREET, LIVERPOOL.

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Grace Neill's Pub, Donaghadee

## STEP 4/8

# Menu design

Your menu is a marketing tool!

Menu design should reflect the individuality of an establishment and work as a marketing tool to tell your story and the story of your food. However there are some main elements to consider:

- Clear, concise and easy to read.
- Choice, but not too extensive. Use special boards and menu inserts to promote short supply dishes.
- Seasonal, to make the most of seasonal produce.
- Value for money, however this doesn't necessarily mean you should cut your prices.
- Good provenance and clear menu messaging.
- Quality, include any quality marks, awards or logos you have won.

Be consistent in your marketing and make sure your website and menus are updated and offer something fresh for repeat visitors.



**STEP 5/8**

# Menu Messaging

## Provenance – Think Local!

We know that visitors are willing to pay more for food with provenance, however NITB research indicates that only 28% of GB consumers and 17% of Republic of Ireland consumers agree that local produce is very apparent in Northern Ireland's restaurants.

We need to get better at telling visitors when they are eating local produce. Food provenance and menu messaging are vital.

Educate front of house staff on local food being used in menu dishes. Ensure they know the story of the producer and any traditional cooking methods, so they can confidently tell visitors about them. Think of using table talkers, front or back pages of menus, special boards, big screens, web and social media to get your food provenance messages out.



Northern Ireland  
**Our food.  
So good.**

Northern Ireland Lamb with Rosemary

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Traditional Northern Irish Breakfast

## STEP 6/8

# Celebrate our food traditions and traditional recipes

## Traditional food heritage

Menus which reference traditional Northern Irish cooking and demonstrate a strong use of local produce will give visitors an authentic experience. Think of our strong bread making and baking traditions. Our grass fed beef and lamb, as well as a local preference for a strong cup of tea! Simple local dishes prepared and presented well will impress visitors.

## **“There is nothing in the USA that compares to an Ulster Fry!”**

According to one respondent in research conducted by NITB in 2013. Make the most of breakfast - Northern Ireland has such a unique offering at the breakfast table with our potato bread, soda farls and wheaten bread. **You can really make a deal of this and visitors will LOVE it!**

**STEP 7/8**

# Go the Extra Mile

## Immerse in the experience

Think about ways of making your guests visit truly memorable. Little things make a big difference. Cater for children with fun menus and entertainment. Offer handmade chocolates or biscuits with coffee, or develop branded recipe cards so people can recreate the dishes back home.

If you're an accommodation provider, why not link up with local suppliers to leave a welcome hamper that is packed with local produce for your guests or offer a picnic hamper and recommend a scenic place to enjoy it.

If you have a hospitality tray for guests in rooms – can you source locally produced tea and coffee or offer homemade tray bakes? It is always a little disappointing to be given a generic brand from somewhere else when there is so much more interesting produce closer to home.





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Hans Sloane Chocolate Festival, Killyleagh



## STEP 8/8

# Work together – Collaboration and Clustering

Tourism is everyone's business.

Collaborating with like-minded providers to develop and extend the tourism experiences available in your area, motivates visitors to stay longer and spend more.

Are there any outdoor activity providers near you who have groups of hungry visitors but no place to offer hospitality? By working together both businesses can benefit.

Is there an opportunity to create a new food tour, trail, festival or other partnership opportunities which will benefit many businesses?

Can you create special packages which include accommodation and a food experience? For example farm visits, taster menus or cookery classes.

Can you be involved in festivals and events, cookery demonstrations or farmer's markets?

**Get involved with local food initiatives and encourage collaboration and clustering.**

# Supporting Food Tourism

**If you are a food provider**, such as a restaurant, supporting food tourism means:

- Being informed of food producers/suppliers local to you.
- Sourcing and using local food produce.
- Highlighting local food produce on menus.
- Delivering dishes that reflect traditional and authentic cuisine.
- Educating front of house staff on local food being used in menu dishes as well as local food traditions so they can tell customers about them.
- Providing high quality, reasonably priced dishes.
- Getting involved in local food initiatives, festivals and events.



**If you are a food producer**, supporting food tourism means:

- Letting local food & tourism providers know about your produce.
- Ensuring that local food & tourism providers can source and buy your products easily.
- Getting involved in local food initiatives, festivals and events.
- Developing food related experiences. Examples of how food producers can engage include;
  - Visitor interpretation, a viewing gallery or an opportunity to get 'hands-on' at a production facility.
  - Farm visits, food tours and trails.
  - Farmers markets.
  - Food festivals and events.

**If you are a tourism provider**, such as a guesthouse, supporting food tourism means:

- Being informed of food producers close by.
- Sourcing and using local food produce.
- Highlighting local food and local food traditions to visitors.
- Encouraging visitors to sample local & traditional foods.
- Getting involved in food tourism initiatives, festivals and events.
- Developing food related experiences. Collaborating with local food producers and food providers to develop:
  - Food tours and trails.
  - Themed events and menus.
  - Welcome Hampers.
  - Special accommodation packages – for example fish, dine and stay.

**Be brave,  
be proud  
and celebrate  
all that is unique  
and special about  
Northern Irish food.  
Do the simple  
things brilliantly!**





A guide for industry professionals prepared by  
Northern Ireland Tourist Board



northernireland  
tourist board

[nitb.com](http://nitb.com)

St George's Market, Belfast