

Tourism Strategy and Action Plan

2023-2028

FLOURISH

Communications | Community | Commercial | Measure | Invest

Ag freastallair an Dón
agus Ard Mhacha Theas
Serving Down
and South Armagh



Ceannairde Ceantair
an Iúir, Mhúrn agus an Dúin
Newry, Mourne and Down
District Council

1. Executive Summary

The purpose of this plan is to provide a clear roadmap and practical guidelines to maximise opportunities for the Newry Mourne and Down district (NMD) as a tourism destination for the period 2023-2028. This plan follows the Tourism Strategy 2017-2021 that represents the first tourism strategy coordinated by Newry Mourne Down District Council (established as a local authority in Northern Ireland in 2015). Within this period, there have been significant widespread achievements ranging from the curation of over 40 world-class market-ready experiences to promote the district and hosting leading tourism events (e.g., the annual IAAT Conference,¹ November 2022) to the Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark being ratified by the UNESCO Executive Board in May 2023.

The successes of the Tourism Strategy 2017-2021 have been acknowledged via stakeholder engagement conducted for the Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2028, with feedback from NMD's tourism industry confirming that significant ground has been broken in raising the destination's profile in Ireland and globally. Looking to the future, over the next five years the expressed aim is to build upon the hard work and strong foundations that have been laid to date so that NMD can flourish, supported by an ambitious strategy that can achieve increased measurable economic and social benefits.

The Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2028 clarifies the goals, objectives and strategic priorities that can maximise opportunities and position NMD as a leading tourism destination in Ireland. To that end, this plan is set out in two parts:

- **Strategic Analysis:** a summary of the research and recommendation outcomes that inform the Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2028
- **Action Plan 2023-2028:** outlining the strategic priorities and associated actions that should be undertaken over the upcoming years

Across these two parts, the plan includes six sections as follows:

- Vision statement and value proposition
- Summary review of NMD's tourism strategy 2017-2021
- Summary outcomes for NMD's tourism strategy 2023-2028
- Action plan 2023-2028
- Appendices
- Addendum: redefined destination brand outcomes for NMD

1.1. Creating the Plan

To inform the creation of this plan, the following work was undertaken:

1. Consultations with
 - Newry Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC) officers
 - NMD tourism businesses, stakeholders, organisations, and networks

¹ IAAT: Ireland's Association for Adventure Tourism

- NMD community representatives and organisations
- NMD elected members
- Tourism Northern Ireland (TNI)
- Tourism Ireland (TI)
- professional travel buyers: leisure and business tourism
- independent data intelligence and global benchmarking organisations
- Ulster University Economic Policy Centre

2. Desk research including reports and analyses relevant to NMD's tourism strategy.²

This plan including all recommendations and actions align with regional/national policies and strategies including those noted below:

Newry Mourne Down District Council (NMDDC):	National Strategies and Policies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NMDDC Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy 2022- 2027 • NMDDC's Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy 2022-2025 • NMDDC Corporate Plan 2021-2023 • NMDDC Village, Towns and City Masterplans • Newry City Centre Masterplan – October 2011 • NMDDC - Tourist Accommodation Scoping Study for Destinations Mourne Mountains & Ring of Gullion & Strangford Lough • Mourne Gullion Strangford Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark – Ten Year Masterplan 2020 – 2030 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Together Building a United Community Strategy • Rural Needs Act • Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act • Tourism NI 2022-23 operating plan • Tourism NI Annual Report 2020 • Tourism Ireland Marketing Plans • Department for the Economy Economic Strategy • Department of Culture, Arts and Heritage: A Way Forward

Across all Newry Mourne Down District Council policies, there is a commitment to creating opportunities for local people and local communities to thrive by supporting sustainable economic growth over time and helping people to lead fulfilling lifestyles under five core values that underpin this plan:

² Appendix 1

1. We will be citizen focused and actively encourage citizen and community engagement, as well as being a listening and responsive Council.
2. We will be accountable and make decisions based on an objective assessment of need and operate in a transparent way as well as openly reporting on our performance.
3. We will be collaborative and actively encourage and pursue working in partnership, and at all levels, to deliver for our district.
4. We will be sustainable and will take into account the social, economic and environmental impacts of our decisions on current and future generations.
5. We will be fair at all times and will proactively target actions at those who are marginalised within our community.

As an output from the research conducted for this plan, five overarching key strategic priorities and a growth target for tourism revenue generation have been established for the upcoming period 2023-2028.

These five strategic priorities, goals and associated actions have been consciously created in a way that aligns with NMD's ethos of placing sustainability at the heart of all decision-making.

1.2. Sustainability, Strategic Priorities and Goals

Sustainability is an inherent hallmark of NMD as emphasised in NMDDC's core values and the Tourism Strategy 2017-2021, championing a balanced and holistic approach that prioritises:

- safeguarding the environment
- supporting the local community
- supporting livelihoods and the economy

For the Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2028, each of the five strategic priorities outlined below are framed within this ethos. Via the consultation process, it was strongly noted that sustainable and regenerative tourism practices have been an integral part of NMD's strategy. For many NMD tourism businesses, a sustainable/regenerative approach is naturally ingrained into their operations.

Going forward, NMD will amplify communications regarding its long-standing commitment and performance in this regard. The plan is to position NMD as a global leader and advocate for sustainable tourism within a destination that is home to more than

- 100 miles (160 kilometres) of coastline
- 600 square miles (1,600 kilometres) of premier outdoor landscape

As part of this process, tourism businesses will be equipped with the knowledge, support, metrics and roadmap that can enable them (individually and collectively) to represent NMD as confident communicators of the sustainable/regenerative tourism approaches practiced in this destination. Taking care to adopt a multi-layered approach (working at tourism business level, community level and council level), the aim is to ensure that NMD's goal of becoming a recognised leader in sustainable tourism is fully realised.

1.3. Five Key Strategic Priorities

The five strategic priorities for the Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2028 are

1. Invest in Communications
- 1.1 Redefine a new destination brand for NMD
2. Invest in NMD's Community
3. Maximise Commercial Capability
4. Engage in Data Collation and Analysis
5. Prioritise Investment in tourism related infrastructure

The principles behind these five priorities are summarised below. The objectives and associated actions that have emerged for each noted strategic priority are outlined under part-two of this plan, entitled Action Plan 2023-2028.

Strategic Priority 1: Invest in Communications

It is clear that NMD has matured and grown in confidence as a tourism destination over the past five years. To advance that success in the upcoming years, communications have emerged as a high priority with key actions to include:

- the creation of a new Vision Statement and Value Proposition that defines NMD's offering as a tourism destination
- ensuring that NMD emerges as a landmark tourism destination, rather than as a gateway to other locations (e.g., Dublin and Belfast)
- continued investment in experience development (defined as a destination game changer for the period 2017-2022) to include
 - developing a dedicated collection of outdoor/adventure experiences
 - maintaining the focus on experiences that
 - connect authentically with the local community
 - showcase themes that are intrinsic to NMD such as mountains, maritime and legends
 - function as a collective to maximise opportunities for NMD (across food/drink, culture/heritage, outdoor/adventure and wellness, etc.)
- maximising opportunities for NMD's tourism offering via clear offline and online communications under the following categories:
 - natural assets: places of natural beauty from land to seascapes
 - experiences, ordered under the following sub-categories
 - culture and heritage
 - food and drink
 - outdoor and adventure (including world-class golf)
 - wellness
 - visitor attractions
 - events and festivals

- accommodation providers
- places to eat and drink
- ways to get around: from public to private transport options
- positioning NMD via communications as a
 - global leader for sustainable tourism (ensuring that tourism businesses are equipped with the knowledge, support, metrics and roadmap to act as confident communicators of NMD's sustainable/regenerative tourism ethos and approaches)
 - primary outdoor/adventure destination in Ireland
- ensuring that communications are used proactively and effectively to connect and promote positive relationships across NMD's
 - tourism industry
 - local community and
 - national/global collaborative partnerships
- the adoption of a "ground-up" approach that showcases NMD's tourism industry from the human perspective of local people who work within it

Strategic Priority 1.1: Redefine a New Destination Brand for NMD

During the consultation process, the ask to redefine the destination's brand became clear. As the specific purpose of this plan is to provide the strategic guidance that can enable NMD to maximise opportunities as a tourism industry and destination, a separate consultation process was conducted to address the destination's branding.

With the aim of ensuring that NMD aligns with premier level regional destinations in Ireland (e.g., Causeway Coast and Glens, the Burren, Connemara, the Boyne Valley) and globally (e.g., Loire Valley), the brand that emerges via this process will be the destination's defining brand for the future.

As the redefined destination brand will align with Northern Ireland's Embrace A Giant Spirit destination experience brand, which in turn aligns with other Ireland brands including Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, Ireland's Ancient East and Dublin Surprising by Nature, all relevant internal and external stakeholders and authorities (e.g., Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland) will be informed of NMD's revised branding and how to engage with same.

Strategic Priority 2: Invest in NMD's Community and Partners

For the purpose of the Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2028, NMD's community references:

- tourism industry businesses/entities
 - including accommodation providers, experience and activity providers, visitor attractions, event/festival providers, places to eat/drink and tourism-relevant transport providers

- the local
 - resident community
 - business community
- tourism agencies: Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland
- engagement with councils in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland
- visitors from Ireland and global markets
- professional travel buyers: leisure and business tourism
- engagements with partnerships and alliances in Ireland and globally that benefit NMD

Stakeholder engagement with tourism businesses confirms that over the past five years, a lot has been achieved to promote connections and collaboration. For example, significant progress has been made with developing alliances and partnerships:

- between NMD tourism businesses (e.g., via networking events and professional development programmes)
- via alliances that benefit NMD tourism businesses (e.g., Strangford Lough cluster)
- by working in close collaboration with national tourism agencies, Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland
 - ensuring that their strategic guidance informs NMD's tourism strategy
- via cross-council initiatives (e.g., the Memorandum of Understanding with Louth)
- between NMD tourism businesses and professional travel buyers (e.g., via attendance at trade events in Ireland and global markets)
- via global partnerships and alliances (e.g., Atlantic CultureScape intangible cultural heritage experience development global partnership project)

In the upcoming years, NMD intends to expand on this collaborative approach. For example, via consultation for this plan, NMD's tourism industry has requested to increase partnership opportunities by scheduling networking/familiarization trips during low season periods.

While maximising opportunities via leisure tourism will remain the primary focus, NMD will additionally explore the destination's potential for business tourism. In this regard, establishing connections with NMD's local business community will be key for securing corporate meetings, conferences, incentives and events from Ireland and global markets.

Engaging NMD's local resident community with the destination's tourism industry and offering will be a key priority over the coming years. The purpose of this action is to raise awareness within the community about

- what NMD's tourism offering is and how it can benefit local people
- the makeup of NMD's tourism industry and how it is comprised of local businesses
- how NMD successfully competes in domestic and global markets
- the expectations of visitors and how to engage with them

Under this priority, initiatives such as Local Experts Programmes should be considered so that community-based networks are created that are

- informed about NMD's tourism offering
- equipped with the know how to
 - share knowledge about NMD's tourism offering
 - interact positively with visitors to NMD
 - engage and partner with representatives from NMD's tourism industry

Strategic Priority 3: Maximise Commercial Capability

Building on the successes achieved to date, the upcoming years (2023-2028) are critical for positioning NMD as a landmark tourism destination in Ireland. While all five strategic priorities in this plan contribute towards achieving this goal, improving commercial capability is especially important as this has a direct impact on supporting livelihoods, job creation and the local economy via revenue generation.

In tourism, commercial capability is a vast landscape where smart choices must be made aligned with expertise and resources (time, human and financial). Maximising opportunities via commercial capabilities is about being goal-focused and knowing how to expertly integrate diverse sales channels, markets, customer segments, and commercial functions (e.g., sales and marketing) to match the specific needs of the tourism destination and its industry.

Within this framework, via the Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2028, a multi-layered, two-pronged approach is proposed that focuses on maximising commercial capabilities to win leisure and business tourism opportunities a) from within NMD's tourism industry and b) at destination-level, coordinated by NMDDC as follows

- a. maximise commercial capabilities within NMD's tourism industry:**
 - **tourism businesses:** support the creation of tailor-made commercial strategies aligned with the unique resources and expertise of each business
 - **tourism industry:** ensure that tourism businesses across NMD collaborate and form partnerships to maximise commercial opportunities
 - **tourism industry and the local community:** raise the profile of NMD's tourism offering among the resident and business community to maximise collaborative and commercial opportunities
- b. maximise commercial capabilities at destination level** via a targeted commercial plan that is coordinated by NMDDC to
 - raise the profile of the destination and its tourism industry
 - support revenue generation in NMD's tourism industry
 - complement/reinforce the commercial activity of NMD tourism businesses at destination level

Under this key priority, NMD will focus activity on growing market share from the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland (ROI) markets. NMD's intention to win share from the ROI market aligns with Tourism Northern Ireland's strategy which sets a target of winning 10% of ROI's market value, equating to £193 million (+€47.2 million and +7.6% CAGR).³

Regarding global market share, for 2023-2028 NMD will focus its priorities on the following:

- Great Britain
- North America
- Nordics and Netherlands (strong English-speaking competency)

As there is a need to increase capabilities in NMD for the effective management of non-English speaking markets (e.g., by delivering experiences in global languages), the German, French, Spanish and Italian markets that are key for Ireland will thereby be a secondary focus for NMD. Nonetheless, throughout 2023-2028 it is recommended that NMDDC supports its tourism industry with a) understanding/addressing the needs of these markets and b) the benefits of engaging with these markets so that

- competencies for engaging in these markets are improved during this plan's lifetime
- potential opportunities via these markets are maximized 2023-2028
- NMD is placed to win opportunities via these markets beyond this plan's lifetime

Strategic Priority 4: Engage in Data Collation and Analysis

As a key priority for 2023-2028, NMD should embed data collation and analysis in its tourism culture so that (whenever possible) objectives, goals and targets can be objectively assessed and measured ensuring that

- strengths are identified and maximised
- weaknesses are identified and corrected
- threats are identified and addressed
- opportunities are identified and targeted
- sound data analysis is available to
 - inform future NMD tourism strategies
 - support NMD grant applications
 - attract investment into NMD (e.g., hotel investment)

The status of targets set via NMD will be determined via diverse methods of measurement ranging from community and customer sentiment data to economic data. For 2023-2028, the inclusion of the following data collation sources should be considered:

- Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)
- Relevant data available to NMDDC such as
 - NMD's resident survey
 - Visitor counter data (e.g., gathered at events/festivals)

³ Tourism Northern Ireland's Republic of Ireland Market Strategy 2021-2026

- Market research data (e.g., conducted at events/festivals)
- Tourism Northern Ireland data analytics and reviews
- Tourism Ireland data analytics and reviews
- External data intelligence and global benchmarking (e.g., independent hotel benchmarking)
- Data submitted centrally to NMDDC via NMD tourism businesses according to an agreed mechanism

The habit of collating and analysing tourism-relevant data needs to be established a) within independent tourism businesses and b) at destination level via NMDDC. The outcomes of this activity must be used constructively to benefit NMD's tourism industry by

- providing tourism businesses with bespoke supports so that they are informed about
 - what data to collate
 - what mechanisms to use for recording data
 - how to use data to make informed decisions that can maximise opportunities
- providing summary updates (e.g., annually) of data collated centrally via NMDDC so that the tourism industry has a) an objective assessment of the destination's performance and b) robust direction for new and evolving actions and strategies that can benefit tourism businesses and NMD as a destination.

Strategic Priority 5: Prioritise investment in tourism-related infrastructure

While NMD has the clear potential to progress as a tourism destination 2023-2028, to maximise this opportunity continued investment is required in tourism-related infrastructure. Under this strategic priority, NMD should

- **elevate the quality of the tourism offering and infrastructure:** by continuing to invest in similar projects initiated over the past five years (e.g., Tyrella beach, Delamont Country Park, Camlough Lake Recreational Hub, Castlewellan Historic Demesne, Narnia Experience Rostrevor, and Mourne Gateway Project)
- **proactively seek investment in quality 4- and 5-star hotel accommodation:** noting that
 - hotel accommodation represents just 26% of total bed inventory in NMD (61% of accommodation is provided by self-catering and guesthouse/bed & breakfast) ⁴
 - over the past ten years, there has been a limited increase in hotel rooms, with NISRA data showing that 33 rooms (providing 70 additional beds) were added between 2015 and 2019 ⁵

⁴ www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/LGD-Infographic-Newry-Mourne-Down-2019.pdf

⁵ NISRA Northern Ireland Local Government District Tourism Statistics 2013-2019

- without this investment, the opportunity to increase visitor dwell time in NMD and associated spends will be significantly curtailed
- **continue to invest in NMD's hub communities** which encompass the destination's city, towns, villages, and rural communities. This action should include:
 - continued investment in the design and delivery of public realm improvements across city, towns, villages, and rural communities ⁶
 - integrating the hub communities with the wider tourism offering (e.g., by enabling residents and non-tourism businesses to understand and refer local tourism experiences and places of interest)
 - ensuring that NMD can achieve its ambition to become a landmark tourism destination by improving the quality of the visitor experience in Newry as NMD's only city (this action has been called out strongly via consultations, for example via professional travel buyers)
- **continue to improve wayfinding and signage in NMD** so that places of interest and tourism businesses can be easily found by locals and visitors

It is important to note that investment in tourism-related infrastructure provides wide-ranging benefits that encompass:

- improving the experience for visitors
- maximising opportunities for NMD's tourism industry
- improving the quality of life (including the generation of social and economic benefits) for NMD's local community
- achieving the growth targets set out in this plan
- attracting and retaining high-spend customers
- increasing dwell time and spend by visitors in NMD
- ensuring that NMD achieves its ambition to become a landmark tourism destination

1.4. Growth Target

At the time of writing this report, the global tourism industry is in an uncertain place due to a wide variety of factors ranging from the unprecedented disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic to global economic and geopolitical unrest.

Within Northern Ireland and NMD, diverse challenges are manifest including

- the cost-of-living crisis emerging as a primary concern among customers ⁷

⁶ NMDDC's Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy 2022-2025

⁷ Tourism Northern Ireland Consumer Sentiment NI Market April 2022 Report

- evidence of the erosion of Northern Ireland's value for money rating ⁸
- the trend toward last-minute booking, making it difficult to predict future performance
- limited hotel capacity in NMD, impacting the potential to increase dwell time and maximise commercial opportunities
- the absence of concrete data against which robust economic baselines and future forecasting can be established, noting that
 - via national tourism agencies
 - there are currently no overarching economic forecasts set for Northern Ireland
 - Tourism Ireland forecasts that global visitors will return to 2019 numbers by 2025 (a forecast that is limited solely to global markets)
 - the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the collation of data, including via NISRA

While the challenges are clear, in the current environment these co-exist with more optimistic considerations including

- World Travel & Tourism Council Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2022
 - predicting a strong decade of growth
 - estimating that the sector's performance in Europe could surpass 2019's level in 2024 when Travel & Tourism contribution to the region's GDP could reach 4.1% above the pre-pandemic amount
- Tourism Northern Ireland reporting
 - strong forward bookings by hotels and tour operators
 - a 26% increase in hotel revpars for January-May 2022 compared with the same period 2019
- NMD is well placed to reap the benefits of proactively promoting the destination's profile over the last five years. For example
 - via extensive engagement with travel trade (e.g., trade shows and familiarisation trips)
 - by consistently promoting offers and things to do through digital sales channels (e.g., NMD website and social media channels)
 - by partnering with organisations that can raise NMD's profile (e.g., Ireland's Association of Adventure Tourism Conference November 2022 and Taste of Tourism February 2023 in association with the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation)
 - by positioning NMD as a new tourism destination offering in Ireland that (following its first ever tourism plan 2017-2021) is undergoing a growth

⁸ Tourism Northern Ireland Tourism 360° July 2022

phase, with leverage to escalate growth over the period 2023-2028 and beyond

Bottom line

At this point in time nobody can predict with confidence what will happen in the future. While reports and opinion vary, NMD's tourism industry has asked for ambition. Conscious of rising inflation, the industry has also cautioned against standing still. Instead, they have emphasised the need to

- maximise opportunities for NMD via continued promotion in Ireland and globally
- achieve the revenue generation required to a) maintain existing tourism jobs and b) drive new job creation

Following an analysis of historic data collated by NISRA combined with diverse consultations (including with Tourism Northern Ireland and the Ulster University's Economic Policy Centre), NMD has set a target to increase revenue generation via tourism by 28% in 2028 compared with 2019.

The following chart indicates how this target can potentially translate for overnight stay revenue generation in NMD.

Table: Revenue Generation via Overnight Stays 2019 versus 2028

Heading	2019	2028
Revenue Generation ⁹	£84,000,000*	£107,520,000
NOTES:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This measurement is based on revenue generation via overnight stays in NMD<ul style="list-style-type: none">- *£84,000,000 equates to 1.6m bed nights• The chart serves for comparison purposes only<ul style="list-style-type: none">- any potential future changes to hotel inventory (e.g., via investment that increases bed capacity) are not factored in• Data source: NISRA 2019 statistics		

Data collation

Under *Strategic Priority 4: Engage in Data Collation and Analysis*, the collation of data in NMD will be proactively encouraged at a) tourism business level and b) at destination level, via NMDDC. Therefore by 2028,

- individual tourism businesses in NMD can assess performance against this target
 - including accommodation providers, experience and activity providers, visitor attractions, event/festival providers, places to eat/drink and tourism-relevant transport providers

⁹ Revenue generation 2019: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

- NMD as a destination can assess performance against this target (via data centrally collated by NMDCC)
- NMD will have a record of district-specific data and trends that can reliably inform future growth and targets

1.5. Benefits of the Plan

The benefits that can flow from this Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2028 are

- maximising opportunities for NMD (generating economic and social benefits)
- positioning NMD as
 - a landmark tourism destination with a
 - wealth of natural assets
 - beautifully crafted, market-ready authentic experiences including food/drink, culture/heritage, outdoors/adventure and wellbeing
 - vibrant annual events/festivals calendar
 - vibrant hub communities (city, towns, villages, and rural communities)
 - an integrated tourism offering with a team NMD approach that connects
 - accommodation providers, experience and activity providers, visitor attractions, event/festival providers, places to eat/drink and tourism-relevant transport providers under a defined brand
 - global leader and advocate for sustainable/regenerative tourism (supported by tourism businesses that are confident communicators of NMD's sustainable/regenerative tourism ethos and approaches)
 - a primary outdoor/adventure destination in Ireland
- maximizing social, promotional and economic opportunities/benefits via a
 - targeted communications and commercial strategy
 - strong alliances and collaboration
 - within NMD's tourism industry
 - within NMD's local community and
 - via national/global collaborative partnerships
- enabling NMD to make informed strategic decisions based on sound data
- improving the quality of living standards for the local community and the experience for visiting customers
- putting NMD in a position to attract investment

2. Vision & Value Proposition

The vision statement and value proposition form the foundation for all activities conducted by NMD in collaboration with tourism stakeholders.

While the vision statement summarises what the destination represents and what it intends to become in the future, the value proposition is created from the visitor's perspective. Accordingly, the value proposition serves to

- identify the benefits that NMD can deliver for its customers
- differentiate NMD and its tourism offering in the marketplace
- clarify NMD's target customers and markets

Strategic plans, annual plans, and actions must align to the vision statement and value proposition. They are ideally used when engaging with diverse stakeholders (e.g., domestic/global tourism associations and partners) and procuring diverse services (e.g., PR opportunities and advertising) so that the destination's offering, aims, and objectives are well understood.

The vision statement and value proposition noted below have been created following consultation with NMD's tourism industry. These are working documents and can change over time as the destination evolves and as the external environment changes.

2.1 Vision Statement

As a warm and welcoming people, we are proud to live in a destination of outstanding natural beauty with more than 100 miles (160 kilometres) of coastline and 600 square miles (1,600 kilometres) of premier outdoor landscape.

Situated in a prime north-eastern location mid-way between Dublin and Belfast, our community encompasses the people, vibrant hubs, land and seascapes of counties Down and Armagh, with awe-inspiring expansive panoramas from the Mourne Mountains and Ring of Gullion to Strangford and Lecale.

Abundant with a sustainable rich cultural heritage, outdoor and adventure experiences, locally crafted artisan food and drinks, world-class golf, and a vibrant calendar of year-round events and festivals, our home is captivating.

Our story is like no other. As a people, we are earthy, grounded, creative and resourceful. The hallmarks of who we are today have evolved over centuries through repeated significant moments in history. These include

- Ireland's earliest farmers who chose to settle in our community more than 5,000 years ago due to an abundance of fertile soil and pure water

- Saint Patrick who in 432AD, chose our community to establish his first church in Ireland, singling us out as the cradle of Christianity
- the poets, musicians and storytellers of Oriel who in the 18th and 19th centuries ignited a cultural renaissance in Ireland
- the stone masons who with their bare hands, achieved the remarkable feat of building the 22 mile long (35-kilometre) granite Mourne Wall across 15 different mountains (1904- 1922)

Building on the legacy of our ancestors, our modern rhythm of life is defined by a rich heritage, authenticity, resilience, and integrity. Collectively, we work hard for our achievements and are united in our goal for our home to become a renowned year-round sustainable tourism destination in Ireland for our local community, our partners, our leisure, and business visitors.

2.2. Value Proposition

Through tourism, we share the story of people and place. This tourism destination thereby firstly represents and serves the local community while extending the warmest of welcomes to visitors from Ireland and global countries.

Encompassing counties Down and Armagh, with three designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Mourne, Ring of Gullion, Strangford and Lecale) this visibly beautiful place has its own natural rhythm of life founded on traditions, authenticity, sustainability, resilience, and a giant-hearted spirit.

Home to the Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark, within 600 square miles (1,600 kilometres) of premier outdoor landscape and 100 miles (160 kilometres) of coastline, this destination offers a wide menu of activities and tourism experiences for locals and visitors including

- **culture and heritage:** from being the beating heart of Saint Patrick's story to crafts, farming, music, sports, and language
- **food and drink:** from Ireland's first craft chocolate factory to award-winning breweries, distilleries and a cidery, clover farms and beekeepers, world class chefs, bakers, and foragers
- **adventure/outdoors:** from walking, biking and horse-riding to world-class golf and water activities
- **wellness:** from mindfulness experiences to luxury spa escapes
- **events and festivals:** a year-round calendar of community and large-scale events

Complimented by a wide range of private and public transport options, restaurants, cafes, bars and accommodation from high-quality glamping, self-catering cottages, B&Bs and guesthouses to 3, 4 and 5-star hotels, this destination is naturally suited to the leisure traveller including individuals, couples, families, adventurers, golfers, culture and heritage enthusiasts, foodies, special-interest, and inter-generational groups.

The destination is also ideally suited for business tourism travellers – with event spaces for up to 700 delegates and capacity for small meetings, conferences, and incentive groups for between 8 and 300 people.

For the local community, leisure, and business tourism visitors, this destination promotes sustainability as a core destination hallmark through a balanced and holistic approach that

- safeguards the environment
- supports the local community
- supports livelihoods and the economy

We welcome everyone who shares our ethos and values.