



**Mourne
Mountains
& Ring of Gullion**

VISIT MOURNE

TOURISM MARKETING PLAN 2021 - 23

Visitmournemountains.co.uk

[Facebook@VisitMourneMountains](https://www.facebook.com/VisitMourneMountains)

[Twitter@VisitMourne](https://twitter.com/VisitMourne)

[Instagram@VisitMourne](https://www.instagram.com/VisitMourne)

Contact us:

[E: info@visitmournemountains.co.uk](mailto:info@visitmournemountains.co.uk)

T: 03301374046

CONTENTS

0.1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4 - 5
0.2 GOALS	6 - 9
0.3 CONTEXT	11 - 12
0.4 STRATEGIC POSITIONING	14 - 16
0.5 TARGET AUDIENCE	18 - 21
0.6 MARKETING APPROACH	23 - 27
0.7 EVALUATION	29 - 30





01
EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The outlook for tourism in Northern Ireland is optimistic, with predictions that a return to 80% of 2019 levels could be achieved by the end of 2022.

While the Covid-19 pandemic has, and will continue to, impact the Visit Mourne destination, the possibility to rebuild the value of tourism through the opportunity now offered by the staycation market is important.

Visit Mourne with its three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty supports sustainable travel, and offers opportunities to engage in the wealth of outdoor activities, geology, cultural and natural heritage the areas offer.

The emphasis will be on developing outstanding products and experiences that will differentiate the destination and ensure Visit Mourne is a strong component of the Northern Ireland Embrace the Giant Spirit brand.

This Marketing Plan will support the destination and local businesses to grow the value of tourism in a collaborative approach through delivering marketing campaigns and activities.

Having a clear 360 marketing plan that puts visitors front and centre, along with being fluid to allow for Covid-19 changes, will help drive the success of the destination through increased spend and increased length of overnight stays in Visit Mourne.

The tourism sector faces many challenges at the moment. However, with the region's current plans for UNESCO Global Geopark status and strong outdoor locations and activities, it positions the region well for attracting Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland visitors now and Great Britain and international visitors in the future.

The new destination management platform for Visit Mourne Marketing will support the delivery of campaigns and marketing activities. It will enhance the customer experience in securing information on the destination, providing quality content using the strength of the Visit Mourne and Embrace A Giant Spirit brands.

Campaigns will mainly deliver content through digital and social media channels using market and audience insights to target the people most likely to be warm to the variety of experiences on offer. The use of video will be a key tool in inspiring visitors and engaging them with the region. The Council tourism team will work closely with strategic partners to provide a series of seasonal digital campaigns targeted at specific audiences in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland that will be future proofed for Great Britain and international markets.

The campaigns will drive potential visitors to the Visit Mourne website.

This Marketing Plan also sets out key trade and consumer events in which the Council, alongside industry colleagues, will represent the destination, engaging prospective visitors and inbound tour operators.



A woman with blonde hair, wearing a pink polo shirt and sunglasses, is smiling and pushing a golf cart through a field of tall grass and yellow wildflowers. The cart is filled with golf bags and equipment. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a clear blue sky. The text '02 GOALS' is overlaid in white on the right side of the image.

02
GOALS

WHAT WILL BE ACHIEVED THROUGH THIS MARKETING PLAN?

This Marketing Plan sets out to achieve the following objectives:

01

Promote Visit Mourne as a premier destination on the island of Ireland.

02

Support industry and our community to grow the value of tourism in a sustainable and responsible way.

03

Inspire visitors to support our destination by experiencing more by extending their length of stay and spending more.

04

Support seasonal extension and regional dispersal

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE?

Achieving clearly defined key performance indicators to show what success looks like for the set objectives is central to this Marketing Plan, with 2 key indicators:

01

Drive increased spend within the district from visitors.

02

Increase the duration of stay by visitors within the district.





03
CONTEXT

CONTEXT

Several factors are affecting the travel and tourism market right now. Visit Mourne has situated the Marketing Plan within this context and is looking to exploit any opportunities to position the destination in the visitors' mind. The Marketing Plan has been informed by current research and detailed industry insights from domestic, national, and international markets.

COVID-19

Covid-19 has created challenging times for the tourism and travel industry, with countrywide lockdowns and travel restrictions creating uncertainty for the sector and visitors. The rollout of the vaccine across the UK and Republic of Ireland and travel opening up across Northern Ireland creates positive opportunities for the tourism sector in Northern Ireland. 33% of people believe they will not get abroad until 2022. (Guardian, 2021)

Tourism Northern Ireland's (TNI) April 2021 Consumer Sentiment Survey articulates that audiences in our key target areas are starting to get exploration confidence back, and we can capitalise on encouraging Visit Mourne's commitment to visitor safety. "Almost two-fifths (39%) believe the worst has passed, with an even more positive outlook among the 44 plus age group with no kids (47%), ABC1s (45%) and Natural Quality Seekers (44%)." (TNI)

MACRO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

Covid-19 has had major economic effects, with a number of businesses being closed and significantly affecting the tourism sector – along with having to adapt their business suitability in response to COVID-19. There is uncertainty for millions of people who have been on the furlough scheme or have lost their jobs due to the effects of the pandemic.

11.5M people in the UK have been on furlough during April 2020 to May 2021 cumulative. (Statista.com, 2021) There are a number of other outcomes to highlight, the strength of the pound to Euro rates, the successful rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine. It's important to note that with the UK formally leaving the European Union on 31 January 2020 (Brexit); it is imperative that this Marketing Plan paves the way for tourism recovery for the local industry.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

"Consumers are increasingly seeking sustainable experiences and Northern Ireland is well placed to fulfil these needs and bring benefit to local businesses and communities alike. It is important that, as we plan for recovery, sustainable development is a core principle of everything that we do and we continue to invest in our visitor facilities and experiences to respond to these changing consumer expectations." (Tourism Recovery Action Plan, 2021, Tourism Northern Ireland)

As visitors seek sustainable experiences, Visit Mourne is ideally positioned to support sustainable opportunities and engage visitors in the wealth of outdoor activities, geology, cultural and natural heritage the region offers.

COMPETITION

There is significant competition from the staycation market throughout the island of Ireland and from Great Britain. Destinations across the globe have also experienced the impact of COVID-19, and as tourism opens up, they will be seeking a share in the market. Visit Mourne is perfectly placed as it borders the Republic of Ireland and can attract day visitors.

BREXIT

The UK left the European Union on the 31 January 2020 and entered a transition period which was to end on 31 December 2020 however this was extended. In January 2021 a new relationship with the EU began. After the transition period ends, there will be changes whether or not an agreement is reached on the new relationship between the UK and the EU. Visit Mourne will continue to work with its strategic partners to support the tourism industry during this transitional phase.





04
STRATEGIC
POSITIONING

STRATEGIC POSITIONING

BRAND POSITIONING

Within the overall promotion of Visit Mourne being a premier destination on the island of Ireland, we will work collaboratively with our partners to develop an economically and environmentally sustainable tourism economy to be enjoyed by visitors and our community now and in future years to come.

STRENGTHS

Our strength lies in our three areas of outstanding natural beauty: Mourne AONB, Strangford Lough and Lecale AONB and Ring of Gullion AONB, and our bustling economic hubs and quiet rural escapes found in our city, towns and villages that are steeped in history, culture and heritage.

The region is currently operating as an Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark - recognition as a place of unique landscape and cultural heritage. Crucial to that recognition is sustainability in tourism around Visit Mourne.

We are the land where St Patrick planted his first church, we host the largest statue in the world of St Patrick, and have the the only centre in the world dedicated to St Patrick; all situated beside his resting place here in Downpatrick. We are also the land that has inspired storytellers from C. S. Lewis, who turned Visit Mourne into the magical world of Narnia for generations of readers, to the modern-day makers of Game of Thrones® itself, and many other films and TV programmes captured within this picturesque landscape.

It's a land of makers, too, inspired by a long tradition of farming, dry-stone walling, shipping, fishing, weaving, brewing and distilling – traditions that continue to thrive in one shape or another today.

It's also a land made for golfers, with the number one golf course for the fourth consecutive year, Royal County Down championship course in Newcastle, Co. Down.

Our people make our place. Living here in partnership with nature, the people of Visit Mourne are to be found every day in their craft breweries and distilleries, their artisan shops, and on farms that produce some of the finest local food on the island.

It's these people who have helped create so many of the treasures that Visit Mourne offers; from the farm shops and the world class produce, to the activity trails, adventure parks, cafes, restaurants and accommodation choices that help make every visitor here feel so special.

Our Giant Events in the past have been rich in stories rooted in the geology, culture and natural heritage found in abundance here in Visit Mourne. And as we seek to reimagine these giant events into smaller scale experiential events, we will seek to reassure visitors whilst still delivering meaningful and authentic storytelling experiences.

We will deliver this through our continued adoption and promotion of the 'We're Good to Go' certification. 'We're Good To Go' is the official UK mark to signal that a tourism and hospitality business has worked hard to follow Government and industry COVID-19 guidelines and has a process in place to maintain cleanliness and aid social distancing.

Our geographical position on the island of Ireland, just 45 minutes' drive from Belfast and a little over an hour from Dublin offers easy access to the Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland and Great Britain visitor. And as international markets open up, we will collaborate with our strategic partners to position Visit Mourne within the wider Northern Ireland offering in keeping with the Tourism Northern Ireland's 'Embrace a Giant Spirit' brand for Northern Ireland.

STRATEGIC MESSAGING

Visit Mourne is a premier destination on the island of Ireland that can be enjoyed responsibly all year round.

Visit Mourne offers world-class, sustainable visitor experiences that will meet visitors' expectations now and into the future.

Visit Mourne is a safe and welcoming place to visit.



A photograph of a small, stone church with a bell tower and a stone wall in front of it, set against a clear blue sky. The church has a gabled roof with a small spire on the ridge. The bell tower is on the left side, featuring a bell. The church has a circular window with a decorative pattern and a door with a semi-circular window. There are three tall, narrow windows on the side. The church is built with rough-hewn stone and is surrounded by a low stone wall. The foreground is a grassy hillside.

05
AUDIENCE

PRIMARY TARGET AUDIENCE SEGMENTS – NORTHERN IRELAND

SOCIAL INSTAGRAMMERS (15%)

Younger segment is likely to be aged under 34 with largest numbers 18-24. They like to go places with a buzz and atmosphere, they seek nightlife with good pubs and bars. They like to take short breaks and are an important part of their lives. They want to broaden themselves with new experiences. They are likely to stay in Airbnb accommodation, and getting a good deal is important to them. Staying connected is vital too, so good Wi-Fi/5G is important to them.

NATURAL QUALITY SEEKERS (15%)

They are mostly going to be over 55 with a high disposable income, with older children. Quality is key to these visitors and having good quality accommodation is vital to them. They enjoy nature and being outdoors. They like gentle activities that are not too active. They like to plan and to have a clear itinerary for their trip. Short breaks are a part of their lives.

SECONDARY TARGET AUDIENCE SEGMENTS – REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

OPEN TO IDEAS (18%)

Young family or independent couples 30-45 with medium to high disposable income. These travellers like to research online and enjoy activities such as the outdoors, music, and history-related experiences that are easy to get to and scenic as nature is important to them. They value being organised and like to have active experiences but not extremely adventurous. Value for money is important and they like to get a good deal.

OPEN MINDED EXPLORERS (17%)

They are older travellers 50+ with medium to high disposable income. They enjoy researching and planning trips using more traditional methods over using websites. High quality experiences, hotels and food is important to this segment. Travel helps them seek out unique experiences which can teach them something. They enjoy learning and engaging with local people and local cultures. They appreciate nature and scenic beauty.

ACTIVE MAXIMISERS (10%)

They are typically in their 20s and enjoy short breaks with lots of experiences. They like being active with their activities and have a strong sense of adventure. They are passionate about the outdoors and being in nature. They are looking for unique experiences that broaden the mind. They are very digital savvy and do online research and it's important for them to have good Wi-Fi access when travelling. They value getting a good deal on the price of their travel.

SECONDARY TARGET AUDIENCES – GREAT BRITAIN

Great Britain continues to be an important market for tourism. According to Tourism Northern Ireland, before COVID-19, in 2019, almost 1.5 million Great Britain visitors were welcomed to Northern Ireland, generating £369 million in revenue.

SECONDARY TARGET AUDIENCES – REST OF WORLD

Traditionally two markets have stood out for Visit Mourne: the US and Germany. As Covid-19 and travel restrictions ease we will continue to be informed of our direction of travel from our strategic partners and robust data and insights.

Visit Mourne will continue to work alongside our colleagues in Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland, to exploit any collaborative marketing opportunities that arise from these markets.

We will work with our industry to showcase the Visit Mourne destination on a global stage through continued participation in Direct Sales Missions, Business to Business (B2B) networking opportunities and Business to Consumer (B2C) Platforms. We will open up further opportunities to attract tour operators, online travel agencies, wholesalers, MICE Groups, Luxury Travel and FIT markets.

We will prioritise hosting and engaging Great Britain and international media to ensure we gain success from a blend of audience segments.

Visit Mourne will also continue to work with industry to curate targeted itineraries and deliver unforgettable experiences for visitors.





06
MARKETING
APPROACH

MARKETING APPROACH

Sustainable and responsible tourism will underpin our marketing approach. Our plans will need to flex and be agile to respond to new challenges and opportunities as they develop. Our short-term focus will be on closer to home markets in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland, which will help our tourism economy recover whilst looking to medium and long-term growth in Great Britain and 'Rest of World' as markets open up.

We will continue to collaborate with our industry and strategic partners to exploit any cooperative marketing opportunities that arise. These campaigns could be larger scale to build brand awareness or smaller tactical campaigns targeting visitor intent. We will also encourage our communities and visitors to share their experiences and become ambassadors for our destination by curating user-generated content.

INFORMED BY RESEARCH & INSIGHTS DRIVEN

Our marketing approach will be informed by research and insights driven. We have a wealth of data from our owned channels at our disposal, but equally, we look to our strategic partners' research and data to inform our future direction. In particular, we will continue to monitor the impact that COVID-19 is having on the global tourism industry, its effects on the future travel landscape and what travel trends are influencing visitor behaviour.

THEMES:

- Giant Adventures
- Our underpinning themes will link to:
- Responsible Tourism
- Authentic, Sustainable Experiences (Outdoor Activities, Golf, Food & Drink)
- Geology, Cultural & Natural Heritage

ADDITIONAL THEMES:

- We're Good To Go

MARKETING ACTIVITY

We will adopt a 360 approach to our marketing activity using owned channels, seasonal and burst campaigns, industry partnerships, collaborative marketing opportunities, trade shows and events and our Giant Events programme.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Visit Mourne's social media channels includes Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, with a significant following from domestic, national and international audiences. Visit Mourne will have a renewed focus on growing its social channels audience to increase awareness of the Visit Mourne brand.

Our social strategy will focus on high quality, engaging content and user generated content that adds authenticity to the promotion of the destination.

We will adopt five key content strands that will help build consistency and engagement with current and new followers across our owned social channels. The five strands include:

1. User generated content and visitor content reshared
2. Campaign content hero locations & experiences
3. Hidden gems & lesser-known locations and experiences
4. New experiences
5. Events across region large & small.

OWNED CHANNELS

Visit Mourne will adopt a top of mind 'always on' approach delivered through Visit Mourne's channels.

In April 2021 we launched an upgrade to our web platform visitmournemountains.co.uk. A web presence with a familiar look and feel to discovernorthernireland.com but customised to reflect Visit Mourne's unique branding, imagery, multimedia and content, the website includes our world-class giant experiences, accommodation sector, attractions and events.

The website is enhanced by an extensive SEO support programme to ensure visibility and that content development meets the industry and consumers' needs. Future developmental opportunities will include assessing the potential for eCommerce integrations to support our sustainable tourism environmental and economic goals.

Our integrated [MailMinder](#) software enables us to communicate latest news and information directly to the inbox of our visitors, our local community and our industry.

VISITOR INFORMATION NETWORK

Our Visitor Information Network will continue to provide relevant and accurate information to inform, reassure and inspire visitors to experience the best of our destination. Visitor Servicing staff offer high-quality, personalised customer service to all visitors through face-to-face interaction via telephone service, email, and website enquiries.

Visitor Services staff have an in-depth knowledge of the local area. They ensure visitors maximise their holiday experience whilst in the destination and are happy to make suggestions to encourage visitors to stay longer, spend more and participate in local events and activities. Staff provide inspirational and practical tips about travelling in the area. They also seek to inspire visitors to return to the area and explore more.

The Visitor Information Centres are conveniently located, and visitors can access interactive touchscreens, pick up maps and brochures, and purchase quality gifts made by local craft producers. The Visitor Information Centres are places where visitors can gain insight into the destination and communicate with experienced staff.

Our Tourism Team and Marketing Team will continue to work with the industry to ensure that their listings, offers and events are promoted via the Visit Mourne website, social channels and campaigns to add value to the visitor experience.

SEASONAL & BURST CAMPAIGNS

To support our 'always on' activity and promote seasonal extension, Visit Mourne will undertake additional campaign activity throughout the year. This approach will be a mix of larger-scale cooperative marketing campaigns and more focused smaller-scale, burst campaigns to support new experience development or to exploit any opportunities as they arise.

In addition to using our own channels, we would anticipate incorporating the following marketing channels into our campaign activity.

PAID DIGITAL & SOCIAL MEDIA

To drive brand awareness of the Visit Mourne destination, we will utilise paid digital and social to reach users throughout the funnel. Our focus on digital media channels will include social, display and search, taking target audiences on a journey from awareness to consideration and action.

INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

We will continue to work collaboratively with our industry through our own channels, campaign platforms and third-party channels to reach our target markets.

We will aim to deliver campaigns that support seasonal and regional extension targeting our priority segments in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland and future-proofing our offer for Great Britain and International markets.

Visit Mourne will also continue to support our industry in their role as ambassadors for our destination through the curation and sharing of their content to gain increased brand awareness and inspire our key target audiences.

PR, MEDIA RELATIONS & INFLUENCER MARKETING

We will stimulate demand using digital PR and media relations and tap into the growing influencer community to reach audiences that otherwise could not be reached via Visit Mournes channels. We will have a renewed focus on working with media and digital publishers and facilitating fam trips with our strategic partners. We will work with our industry to develop inspirational experiences to showcase the destination to its fullest potential.

PRINT, OUTDOOR & RADIO ADVERTISING

Visit Mourne will from time to time use a range of print, outdoor and radio advertising specific to our campaign objectives. All our channels, both online and offline, will target our visitor segments in line with our sustainable development objectives.

These will be considered through an optimum balance between social, environmental, and economic factors.

SEASONAL & BURST CAMPAIGNS

TRADE SHOWS & EVENTS

Through our trade shows and events programme, we will work with our industry to showcase the Visit Mourne destination on a global stage to promote economically and environmentally sustainable tourism for future years to come.

Visit Mourne will continue to participate in Direct Sales Missions and attend B2B networking opportunities and B2C Platforms targeting our core markets. We will showcase the region at key tourism platforms to open up further opportunities to attract tour operators, online travel agencies, wholesalers, MICE Groups, Luxury Travel and FIT markets. We will achieve this by attending tradeshow which offer the most effective business to business networking opportunities for international travel professionals.

Keeping these lines of communication and relationships open is essential to ensure that Visit Mourne is well placed to continue building and attracting international and domestic visitors.

GIANT ADVENTURES

Our events programme throughout the region will help to attract visitors to spend time and money here. It will be important to have flexibility within event planning to allow for changes driven by Covid-19. As we work to reimagine our Giant Adventures programme, we must ensure that outdoor events and Covid-19 safety measures are key considerations and that we reassure our visitors when the time is right.

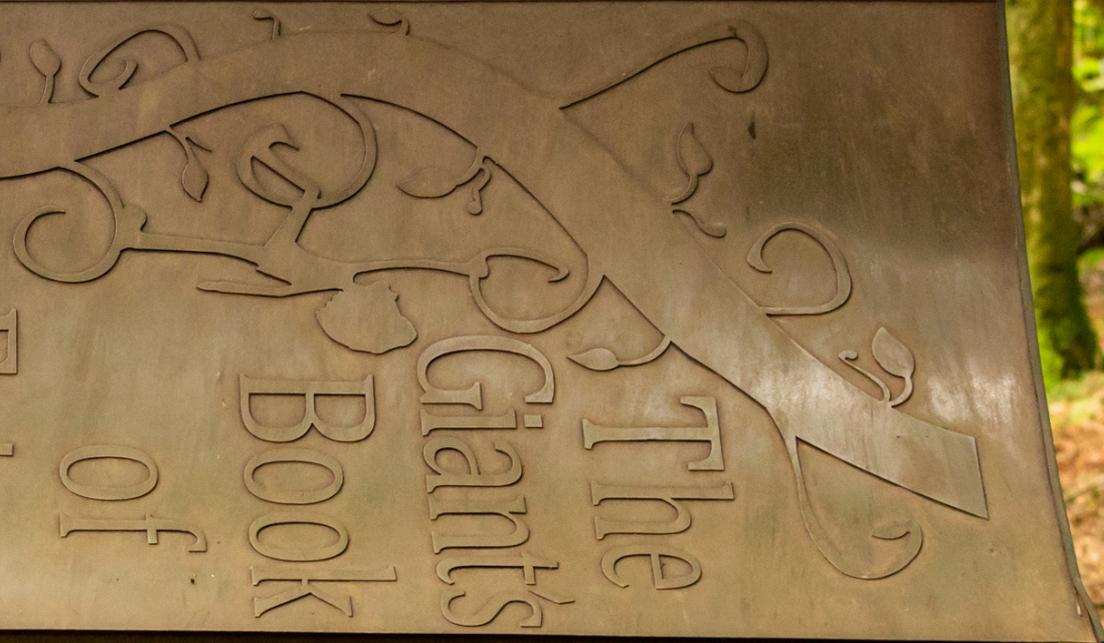
COLLABORATIVE MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES

We will work alongside our strategic partners to leverage collaborative marketing and funding opportunities to promote the destination through our ongoing partnerships with Tourism Northern Ireland, Tourism Ireland and Local Authority and Statutory Bodies.



07

EVALUATION



MEASURING PROGRESS

Our marketing is focused on working collaboratively to promote Visit Mourne as a premier destination on the island of Ireland. Tourism Northern Ireland will collect data, and we will measure success by developing key performance indicators such as visitor numbers, bed nights, partnerships and collaborations, campaign effectiveness; as well as economic and environmental impacts and benefits.

Where we have lead responsibility for campaign activity, we will identify a range of indicators to measure success looking at the impacts and benefits of all activity. Where we are supporting our industry, we will measure success through collaborative partnerships underpinned by resources, funding, support, training and/or development.

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Contact us:

[E: info@visitmournemountains.co.uk](mailto:info@visitmournemountains.co.uk)

T: 033 0137 4046





THANK
YOU!