



SCOTLAND
FOOD & DRINK
PARTNERSHIP

FOOD & DRINK TRAILS FOR SCOTLAND

A practical guide to developing food and drink trails



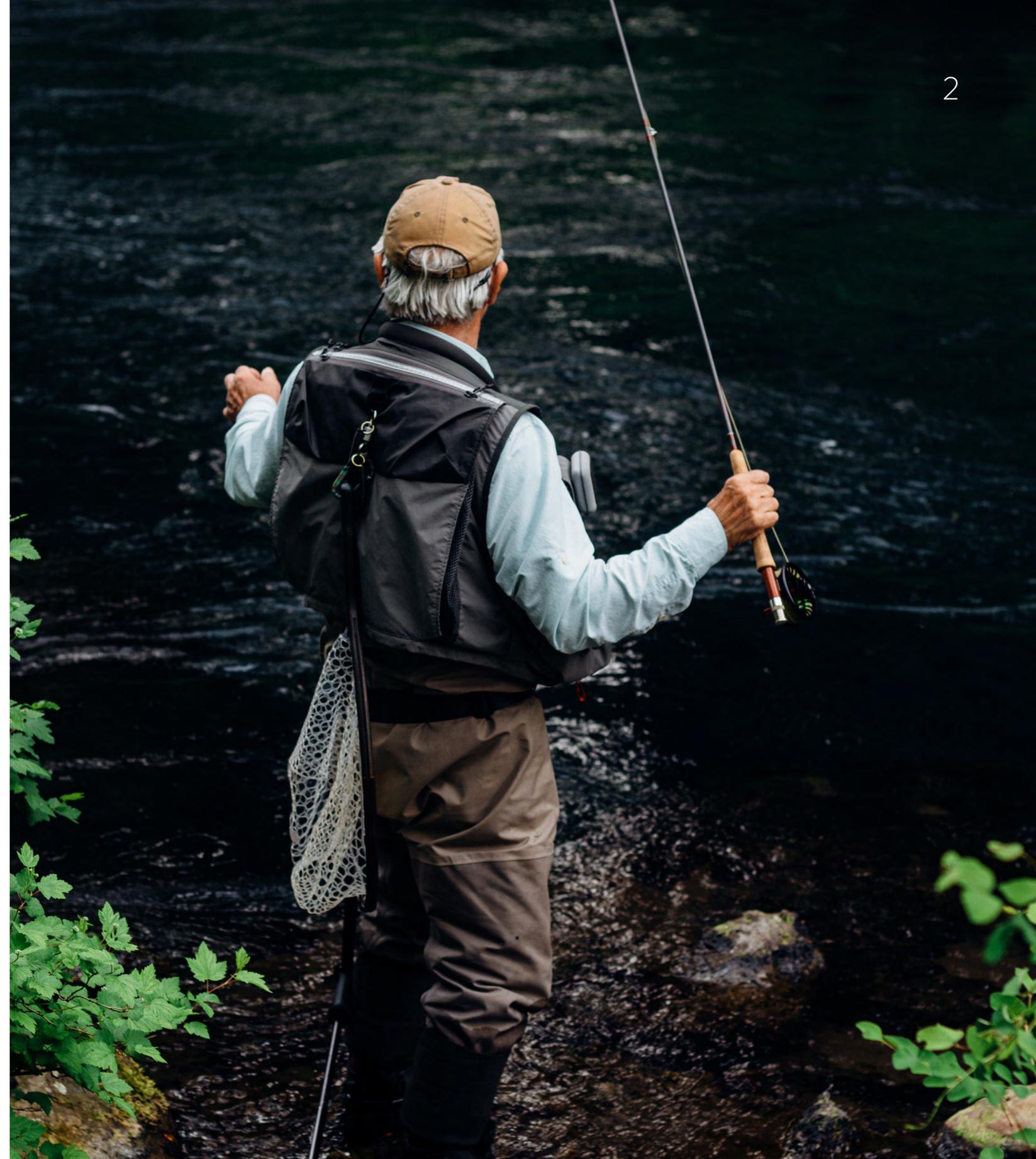
YOU ARE ALREADY INSPIRED...

You know just how good your local food and drink is.

You know the people, places and processes that make it so good.

All around you there are people who are truly passionate about the food and drink of your place.

Together, you have a great story to tell.



YOU WANT TO INSPIRE OTHERS...

You want to make it easy for visitors to experience all that you have to offer?

You'd like to invite people to visit and give them an opportunity to be part of your food and drink story?

Then a Food & Drink Trail really is something to consider.

Trails provide inspiration for people to come to your place to experience the unique food and drink of your place. Visitors know that food and drink experiences play a significant role in their trip. Bringing your food and drink story together in a singular proposition will help your place to truly stand out in the mind of the visitor.



TRAILS CAN HELP YOU...

- Share your distinctive food and drink story with the world
- Inspire more visitors to visit your place
- Increase participation in your local food and drink experiences
- Increase visitor expenditure on food and drink
- Generate solid economic impact for your area



IT'S ALL IN THE STORY...

Think of a trail as the story of your place. Think of each stop on the trail as a chapter in that story.

- ✓ What is the title of your story?
- ✓ What is the theme that connects all the stops?
- ✓ What will inspire visitors to dive in and become part of the story?

Trails are the story of the place told through a series of connected food and drink experiences.



Scotland's food tourism ambition

“It's 2030 and Scotland is a globally recognised food tourism destination where high quality, memorable food and drink experiences are delivered by proud and passionate local ambassadors.”

Food Tourism Scotland, *Creating a global food tourism destination and unlocking a £1 billion growth opportunity (Scotland's Food Tourism Action Plan)*

What is food tourism?

The enjoyment of food and drink based experiences where a person learns about, appreciates, or consumes food and drink that reflects the history, heritage and culture of a place.

This includes the active pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences encompassing everything from trying local food at a restaurant or café to visiting a whisky distillery or going on a beer trail. It also includes attending a food festival, street food or agricultural event to taking a cookery class to visiting a farm or orchard, as well as agritourism activities that connect what is being produced in an area to what is being prepared, served and enjoyed by locals.

Food Tourism Scotland

Food & Drink Trails are an essential element of food tourism

Trails make it very easy for our visitors to understand what each region of Scotland has to offer. Great trails also make it easy for visitors to find those food and drink experiences and build them into their stay.

Our food and drink can offer our visitors an unrivalled sense of place. Through connecting a series of food and drink experiences within a region, trails are an ideal way to share the story of your place.

IS THIS GUIDE FOR YOU?

If you would like to establish a Food & Drink Trail or if you already manage one, this guide is for you.

It offers a 10-step approach to help you work through the essential stages of setting up and maintaining a quality food and drink trail that can endure over time.



What if we already have a trail?:

Great news! You have probably done a lot of the work already. The 10 steps are still really useful. They provide a framework for reviewing and evaluating your Trail's performance year-on-year. Step 10 brings you right back to Step 1 – as you know, managing and maintaining a Trail is a continuous process!

The 10 Step Approach

1. Develop a Vision for your Trail
2. Hold an initial Stakeholder Consultation Meeting
3. Develop a Trail Management Plan
4. Invite providers to join the Trail
5. Create the Trail Story and how it will be told
6. Map the Trail
7. Organise Trail activity
8. Market and sell your Trail
9. Maintain member and stakeholder engagement
10. Measure and communicate success

ABOUT FOOD AND DRINK TRAILS

What is a Food & Drink Trail?

The word 'trail' suggests a route, usually one that has been planned and marked out for a particular purpose.

A Food & Drink Trail means an association of different food and drink providers who share a common story and are located along a particular route. The providers may include producers, processors, retailers and restaurateurs who are usually located in relatively close proximity to each other. They market the trail collaboratively and sell a complementary range of products, foods, drinks, events and experiences.

What is the purpose of a Food & Drink Trail?

Food and drink trails provide a framework for collaboration between the food and drink industries and the tourism industry. Food and drink trails bring food and drink providers into the realm of tourism. Trails serve a number of purposes:

1. They attract visitors to a destination.
2. They encourage visitors to stay longer and spend more in a destination.
3. They help conserve local food and drink heritage, traditions and stories.

Trails are primarily about visitors and visitor experiences. Trails are gateways through which great food and drink experiences can be delivered.

Trails give visitors an enjoyable means of experiencing a destination through the food, drink and people of that destination. Trails open up the route through which a visitor can understand the food heritage, eating habits, local delicacies and culinary traditions of a place. They allow visitors to get behind the scenes and meet the authentic makers, growers and creators of your area.

ABOUT FOOD AND DRINK TRAILS

What are the essential features of successful food and drink trails?

- ✓ They are built on cross-business and multi-stakeholder collaboration.
- ✓ They include experiences, products and events that visitors can book and buy.
- ✓ They include a map or similar directional mechanism that help visitors navigate the destination.
- ✓ They tell the story of the place through food and drink.
- ✓ Their story is told in a compelling way and is shared consistently by all providers on the trail.

Sustainable Tourism

Visitors are interested in discovering authentic, local and seasonal produce that allow them support the economy of the destination. Food trails based on the local produce, heritage and stories of an area are a vibrant expression of sustainability principles. Trails should seek to showcase and encourage food and drink with low food miles. Trails can also consider how to maximise transport efficiency between stops and how to enable sustainable modes of travel such as walking and cycling.

10 STEP GUIDE

to developing a Food & Drink Trail



STEP 1

Develop a vision for your trail

The idea of a Trail usually starts in the minds of a few people who then start to seek the support of others in order to progress the idea. It seems like an obvious thing to do: “we have so much great produce, so many wonderful providers, such a great food and drink story...let’s set up a trail that brings them all together.”

At this stage, it is vitally important to answer three fundamental questions:

- a. Why do we want a Food & Drink Trail in our place?
- b. In what ways would a Food & Drink Trail enhance the visitor experience?
- c. How do we ensure that our Food & Drink Trail has economic impact locally?

Step 1, developing a vision for your trail, is about casting an eye towards the future and painting a picture of what success would look like.

It’s about developing a clear vision for the Trail that can motivate and inspire others to come together.

Sample vision statement

Our trail offers a collection of outstanding and distinctive food and drink experiences that reflect the heritage and culture of our special place, contribute to our economy and encourage visitors to stay longer and spend more with us. Our place offers a year-round calendar of events and experiences that not only attract visitors, but also ensure that our local food and drink culture remains vibrant for future generations.



Top Tip before moving to Step 2:

Write a vision statement for a food and drink trail that you can use to invite others to get involved. This does not have to be set in stone. It simply sets the scene for a wider conversation and allows key stakeholders decide if they want to be part of this conversation.

STEP 2

Hold an initial stakeholder consultation meeting

Trails are all about collaboration and they require buy-in. To succeed, it is essential that people and organisations become invested in their success.

The earlier that people have an opportunity to contribute to the trail concept, the greater their buy-in will be over the longer term.

Invite as many stakeholders as you can think of to the initial consultation meeting. Think broadly in terms of who your stakeholders are: businesses, community groups, local residents, historians, local food groups, tourism associations, food and drink associations, local politicians, the local council, Visit Scotland, the local enterprise agency, potential funders, destination marketers, other food trails.

The Initial Stakeholder Consultation Meeting is an opportunity to:

- Share the vision
- Invite people to be part of developing it further
- Gather and share ideas
- Tap into the creativity and experience of the group



Structure the meeting to ensure it delivers tangible outputs. If you can, secure the services of an independent facilitator who can keep the meeting on time, note all contributions and guide participants through a number of key questions, such as:

1. How would you fine-tune the vision statement?
2. What are our strengths and opportunities?
3. What is the story of our trail/our place?
4. Who and where is the potential audience?
5. How could the trail deliver economic value?

Finally, this meeting should identify who would like to get involved in developing the idea further. This can mark the beginning of the Trail Steering Committee.



Tips for securing engagement:

- Choose a date, time and location that works for most
- If you can, offer a choice of dates and venues – run the first meeting twice or three times, if necessary
- Communicate the purpose of the meeting clearly in advance.
Distribute an agenda in advance
- Consider making a recording and sharing it with those who can't attend
- Note all ideas, document them and share them with all participants shortly after the meeting



Top Tip before moving to Step 3:

Share the outputs from the Initial Stakeholder Consultation Meeting with all stakeholders on your email list. Let everybody know what was agreed and who is now involved in developing the trail idea further. Advise what the next steps will be and how others can still get involved.



STEP 3

Develop a trail management plan

The trail needs to be managed, now and at all points in the future. This step is the absolute cornerstone of all future work so invest as much time as is needed.

Four key areas need to be determined:

1. Administration
2. Funding
3. Goals and objectives
4. Eligibility criteria

You will need a small, focused group to work on this step. It may take a number of meetings and some time to complete. The group may consult with wider stakeholders to help develop each area.

1. Administration

If you are establishing a trail independently, you may need to set up an oversight committee to manage the administration. A Destination Management Organisation (DMO) may already have governance and administrative systems in place that the trail can fit into. Even in that case, you may wish to consider setting up a committee involving stakeholders outside of the DMO.

- Appointing a chairperson, secretary and treasurer (where relevant)
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities of all involved
- Setting a schedule of regular meetings and annual review meetings
- Creating a communications plan i.e. how often will we communicate, to whom, about what and using what channels



2. Funding:

Consider what funding and supports are available to you for both the initial and ongoing investments. Sources of income include grants, participation fees and sponsorship. A successful trail needs to have a source of self-generated revenue. Funds will be needed for a variety of things such as design, copywriting, printing, marketing, content creation and photography.

3. Trail goals and objectives:

The goals and objectives should flow from the agreed vision statement. Goals may be viewed as the ‘big-picture’ outcomes and impacts you want the trail to have.

Objectives are the specific milestones you need to reach if you are to achieve those bigger goals.

Stakeholders have different priorities, and the process of agreeing goals and objectives is the mechanism for getting all stakeholders on the same page. The trail cannot be all things to all people, so this element is the process of setting the boundaries on trail activity. They define what it is you are seeking to achieve together, and they help manage the expectations of a diverse group of people.

Sample trail goals

- To make our region synonymous with great food and great food experiences in the hearts and minds of key audiences.
- To create a strong relationship in the mind of the visitor between high quality sustainable food and our unique landscape.

Once agreed, the objectives determine your actions - any action taken by the trail should clearly relate to one of the agreed objectives.

At this point, spend quality time on researching and identifying your target audience as precisely as possible. Establish where they are located, what their travel preferences are, what their lifestyle and disposable income is like what the best channels to communicate with them are.

When setting objectives, it is also important to think ahead to how you will sell and market the trail and ensure that the trail has inbuilt mechanisms for generating economic impact locally.

The objectives you set are the basis for measuring and reporting on progress (Step 10). When you set an objective, decide how you will measure your progress. This is your metric or your Key Performance Indicator.

Sample trail objectives

- To achieve one national media feature for our trail within the next 6 months.
- To host a flagship food and drink festival this Autumn that attracts at least 2000 visitors to our region.
- To sell 10 Trail Experiences in July and August of Year 1.



4. Eligibility criteria

Food and drink trails are not a directory of all food and drink available in your area - or at least, they should not be. You will need to determine the criteria for eligibility and document them clearly.

The criteria reflect the standard you wish to set for the trail. They are important for ensuring continuity and consistency across your trail stops. They become the basis for differentiation of the trail, and allow potential applicants and visitors know what to expect.

It will require resources to monitor and validate that businesses meet the agreed criteria. The level of resources you have at your disposal may affect how stringent your criteria can be. At a minimum, participating operators can be asked to adhere to a common set of practices and principles.



Top Tip before moving to Step 4:

Create an application form for those who would like to feature on the trail. Use the form to ask operators to provide copy and images. Ensure everybody fills out the same form – this means you will gather consistent information that can be more easily collated. The form should include a statement of the eligibility criteria, practices or principles (including fee if applicable). Include a space for the applicant to sign and declare compliance and commitment to the ethos of the trail. If you are charging a fee, set up a trail bank account.

STEP 4

Invite providers to join the Food & Drink Trail

By now, you should have the essential framework and management of your Food & Drink Trail in place. You are ready to invite food and drink providers in your region to opt in to the trail.

You may already have a good idea of your trail theme, although that is not essential at this stage. For example, if it's a drinks trail, then that narrows down who is eligible. If it's a geographical trail, then providers from all types of food and drinks will be eligible to participate, once they are within the geographical boundaries.



It is wise to open the invitation to every provider who is possibly eligible. Clear criteria will help providers establish if the trail is a good fit for them.

You will need a small review committee to assess applications received and establish whether an applicant provider meets all criteria. It is important that the decisions are seen to be objective and unbiased. Stakeholders from food and drink associations or tourism associations may be available to be part of a review committee.

Don't worry about the number of members at this stage. When you develop a trail, it's better to have a small number of quality members than a large number of members who cannot uphold the criteria or promise of the trail. A small group of providers is enough to provide a strong visitor experience and to set the standard for others who wish to join in the future.



Top Tip before moving to Step 5:

Communicate the list of trail members to all members once you know them. Congratulate them for being involved and for meeting the standard. Encourage them to connect with each other – perhaps you may be able to create some opportunities for them to do so.



STEP 5

Craft your trail story and how it will be told

Now that you know who is involved, you are ideally positioned to further develop the trail theme and trail story.

Trail themes tend to be based on a) the food or drink e.g. a Cheese Trail or a Whisky Trail or b) the place or a particular geography e.g. Edinburgh or Arran. Both work well and sometimes are combined.

Every trail needs a story that ties all the stops on the trail together. The story pulls out what it is they have in common and why they are connected on this route. The story is a key differentiator for each trail – it's a source of competitive advantage.

Quite often, what connects the different providers is the story of the place itself focusing in on how the place/landscape/terroir shaped the food and culinary traditions of the area and how the people involved came to live and work there.



Think about bringing trail members together to talk about their shared story and contribute to shaping the final narrative. Trail members will enjoy being part of this process and the discussion and brainstorming phases will help build trust and relationships between participants. Again, securing the services of a facilitator to guide these conversations will pay dividends.

Places to tell the story at the destination level

- ✓ Webpages
- ✓ Destination marketing websites and apps
- ✓ Social media platforms
- ✓ Local, national and international media,
- ✓ Conferences and webinars
- ✓ Working with influencers

Places to tell the story at the provider level

- ✓ Menus
- ✓ Chalkboards
- ✓ Websites
- ✓ Décor e.g. photo-walls
- ✓ Social media
- ✓ Signage
- ✓ Conversations between staff and visitors



Think of the story as ‘the narrative of your trail’. The narrative includes all the words, phrases, tales and imagery that can be used to tell the story at the provider level and also at the destination level. The Trail Story is part of the Trail Brand. Treat it with the same respect as you would any other brand. Guide members in what they can say and how they can say it so that the visitor receives a consistent experience at every point on the trail.



Top Tip before moving to Step 6:

Invest time in writing the story into a single coherent paragraph that can be shared with all stakeholders, included on marketing material and in business and destination communications. Complement the story with a selection of high-quality images that communicate the story visually and that trail members have permission to use in their communications. Think about creating a short training programme that helps everyone get familiar with the story and get comfortable in telling it.

STEP 6

Map the trail

What distinguishes a food and drink trail from a food and drink directory is that it includes a route or pathway for visitors to navigate different elements of the destination story. How will visitors navigate the trail?

An essential requirement of a trail is to make it possible and enjoyable for visitors to travel the route or part of it, uncovering the delightful stops along the way.

Wayfinding methods to consider:

- ✓ A downloadable or printed map
- ✓ Printed or digital passport
- ✓ QR codes
- ✓ Suggested itineraries
- ✓ On-road signage
- ✓ On-site signage
- ✓ Destination app



Think about the logistics:

- ✓ What is the distance between stops?
- ✓ What modes of transport are viable and available?
- ✓ How can you make sustainable transport options, such as walking and cycling, workable?
- ✓ What about visitors with varying mobility levels and accessibility requirements?
- ✓ Put yourself in the shoes of the visitor – how can you make sure the map helps them to plan a 1 day, 2 day or even a week in your place?

Build trail recognition:

Invest in a recognisable logo and colour scheme that can be used in all wayfinding material. This allows the visitor to clearly connect the various elements of the trail together.



Top Tip before moving to Step 7:

Require members to display the trail logo outside and inside their premises, as well as on their websites and social media platforms. This will reassure visitors that they have found the right place.



STEP 7

Organise trail activity

A trail is just a trail and a map is just a map. To build a sense of ‘must-see’ and ‘must-do’ around the food and drink trail, consider creating a calendar of events or maybe even a festival. This has the advantage of prompting visits at particular times and also provides content for great news stories.

Planning and hosting a calendar of events is a great way to bring members together and allows them the satisfaction of contributing and collaborating with others.

Events could be held at each stop on the trail over the course of a year, for example. A well-timed annual festival could be an occasion to celebrate with visitors, trail members, media and stakeholders.

Events have great potential to attract media attention, to build local community interest and, of course, to generate revenue.



Top Tip:

Ensure to signpost potential visitors to the events section of your website. Remember to update the event dates every year!



Top Tip before moving to Step 8:

People and providers who opt into your food and drink trail are motivated by collaborating and contributing to something greater than their own business. Make sure you create opportunities for members to make a contribution and that that contribution is recognised as part of the trail communications.



STEP 8

Market and sell your trail

Not only do you want to get visitors onto the trail and into member premises, you also want to make it easy for them to spend money both while they're there and after they visit.

Serious and considered effort must be invested in marketing and selling the trail if it is to have a tangible impact in your destination and for participating businesses.

Think about the visitor

Trails appeal to a wide spectrum of guests : local residents, day trippers, domestic tourists and international visitors. It is useful to distinguish four different types of visitor to help tailor your marketing and sales activities:

Type of Visitor	Potential ways of reaching them
Local residents or day-trippers from surrounding areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local radio and press - Google My Business - Posters - Maps or leaflets - Trail members referring each other
Person on holiday in your area planning what to do today or tomorrow.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Map or leaflets - Posters - Google My Business - Front of house staff in accommodation and visitor attractions - Trail members referring each other - Destination app
Person planning a holiday in your area who plans and books in advance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Destination websites - Member websites - Websites of major attractions in the area - Suggested itineraries - Local tourist offices - Downloadable maps and leaflets - Social advertising - National radio and media campaigns/coverage - International media coverage
Person planning a holiday in your area who books through a travel agent or similar intermediary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building relationships with travel trade - Creating experiences that can be booked and sold on online platforms.

* For more detailed research and insights on visitor segments and how to communicate with them, check out VisitScotland.org.

Ask ‘What can trail visitors actually buy?’

The key to being able to sell and market your trail is to ensure the trail includes a number of experiences and products that are fully buyable, either online or in person. Some options to monetise the trail might be:

- Partnering with a local tour guide who can host Trail Tours.
- Helping the travel trade/tour operators link with trail members to offer exclusive experiences, e.g. Meet the Maker, Private Tastings.
- Working with incoming tour operators to include specific aspects of the trail on their itinerary.
- Partnering with accommodation providers to package a tour with a stay in the area.
- Securing sponsorship for a festival or event.
- Creating merchandise that members can sell such as recipe books, aprons and culinary tools.
- Working with members who have e-commerce capability to sell trail hampers, baskets and other merchandise, particularly post-visit.



- Create trail events and experiences that are only available at specific dates and times, making them bookable online.
- Encouraging restaurants to have a trail signature dish or signature drink, prominently displayed on menus and in the premises.
- Having mini-trail days, where visitors can enjoy a portion of the trail and be encouraged to return again for more e.g. Meet the Maker Day, Discover our Food Story Day.

Checklist of what makes a great trail experience:

- Multisensory
- Immersive
- Story-based
- Gives visitors an opportunity to learn something new and taste something new
- Has a clear connection to the place or premises
- Has a definite price and is clearly bookable and buyable



Top Tip before moving to Step 9:

List all the ways in which your trail can create opportunities for visitors to spend more money and more time in the destination. Share these with trail members and encourage them to leverage these opportunities in their own pre-visit, in-visit and post-visit communications.

STEP 9

Maintain member and stakeholder engagement

Food and drink trails are dynamic. Existing members leave and new members join. The external environment is changeable and uncertain. It's wise to invest intentionally in maintaining and strengthening stakeholder engagement. Here are a few tips:

- ✓ Create opportunities for members to meet and work together. Many food and drink providers relish the opportunity to tap into the knowledge and plans of their peers in the industry. Many appreciate the opportunity to showcase their own products, knowledge or food and drink philosophy.
- ✓ Have a training plan to build the capacity of current members and help aspiring members meet the eligibility criteria. Training is a great way of bringing providers together – it allows them get to know each other better and also builds their skills and competence. Online training and networking can work well when blended with a small number of face-to-face events.



Top Tip before moving to Step 10:

Seek input from members on your plans. They are experts in their area, can offer informed insights and your request will help them feel valued and involved.



- ✓ Encourage businesses to actively promote and celebrate their participation in the food trail, supporting them to become ambassadors for the trail. Provide brand assets:
 - Sticker or plaque
 - Trail logo for their own marketing material
 - Shared hashtags
 - Sharing trail map
 - Staff training
 - Opportunities for staff to experience the trail for themselves
- ✓ Intentionally build member pride in the trail and in each other. Organise familiarisation trips that allow trail members visit each other and experience the offering in the way a visitor would.
- ✓ Apply for awards and relevant recognitions. Seek to generate credible media coverage. These all help build member awareness and pride.
- ✓ Build in regular reviews (see Step 3). Let members know how you are progressing towards your stated goals and objectives. Monitor changes, opportunities and challenges as they arise and let members know how you are adapting to meet them.

STEP 10

Measure and communicate success

It is essential to determine the metrics you will use to assess the success of your food and drink trail. These should be directly linked to the objectives you set at the outset. In Step 3, it is suggested that you set metrics at the same time that you initially set your trail objectives.

Stay focused on those objectives when measuring progress. Members and external stakeholders may be interested in other opportunities that arise. It is important to remind all on a continuous basis of the trail objectives and what is being done to achieve them.



Commit to communicating to all members and stakeholders at defined intervals. An email once a quarter may suffice. A newsletter may be an option. A quarterly or annual meeting also provides a good forum for progress reporting.

Monitor both qualitative and quantitative data. Members views, opinions and levels of business confidence provide rich insights on the impact of the trail. Ask members to ask how the trail is contributing to their business, to their marketing. Ask if any new initiatives or partnerships have been implemented or planned due to their participation in the trail.



Top Tip:

A continuous review process (at least annually) naturally brings you back around to Step 1. Based on the outcomes of your review, you may choose to re-visit the vision and re-align the trail objectives. Remember, this is a journey of continuous improvement and change.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Policy & strategy documents

Ambition 2030: Industry Strategy for Growth | Scotland Food & Drink

Scottish Agritourism A Strategy for Sustainable Growth (visitscotland.org)

Scotland Outlook 2030 - Scotland's tourism strategy (scottishtourismalliance.co.uk)

Food Tourism Scotland | Scotland Food & Drink

VisitScotland research & business supports

VisitScotland - Scotland's National Tourist Organisation

Scotland's Year of Stories 2022 | VisitScotland

Scottish Tourism Statistics & Research | VisitScotland.org

Business Events Scotland - MICE Tourism in Scotland (visitscotland.com)

Improving Your Digital Skills | VisitScotland.org

Sustainable and responsible tourism

Sustainable & Responsible Tourism in Scotland | VisitScotland

Scotland's Pathway to Net Zero | VisitScotland.org

Promoting sustainable business tourism | Green Tourism (green-tourism.com)

Euan's Guide - Disabled Access Reviews (euansguide.com)

Business Advice and Guidance

Business Gateway | Business Gateway (bgateway.com)



Remember:

Connect with your regional food group or local destination management organisation!

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