

Adding Value to the Tourism Experience - Walking, Cycling and Mobility for all

Introduction

In the latest visitor survey 'scenery and landscape' was the top reason (91%) for coming to Exmoor. Short walks (75%) were the top activity followed closely by longer walks (42%) while staying here. 89% said they are planning to come again. Cycling also was enjoyed by 7% of those questioned. But I believe this is a growing marketplace.

Walking and cycling are activities tourists are already wanting to do and Exmoor is without question one of the best places to enjoy both. But this is still not that well-known. We need to be pro-active in telling people.

Marketing yourself

Adverts have had their day for small operators. Your website is probably the main way you promote yourself. Does your own website have anything telling people what they can do while staying with you? Do you specialise in any activity? Do you then have a dedicated page on your website promoting this and optimised for the relevant keyword phrases? Do you have lots of outward links to relevant activity providers?

Do you have full details of all your visitors? At the very least their email address and name. Do you email them with your special offers, your themed holiday, maybe a walking or cycling holiday? Offer incentives for their recommendations. Do you promote events and festivals that are taking place near you to attract visitors to your business? Do you create a holiday based on them?

The modern tourist wants a holiday handed to them on a plate. They do not have time to trawl the internet working out what they might want. They do not want to just lie on a beach – much good that will do them recently! The 'staycation' is here to stay for a while. Even the 'nearcation' is now increasing with people finding the cost of driving adding considerably to the cost of their holiday. Our productive catchment area is shrinking to Bristol, South Devon, Dorset and Cornwall.

Relevant inward links are important for your website, but very difficult to get in the tourism trade. This is where the large destination websites have value. The cost of advertising in them is worth it simply for that inward link. It gives you one-upmanship in the search engines eyes. Don't use link farms and don't ask all your friends to link to your site, they are not relevant and will do much more harm than good. Lastly, is your website properly optimised for your relevant keyword phrases?

Are you thinking of doing anything special? Like an activity holiday. Have you put it on your website? But that alone will not work. Have you emailed all your contacts with an attractive e-newsletter? Have you done PR? This can be most effective. If it is an activity, go to the Outdoor Writers & Photographers Guild website <http://www.owpg.org.uk/> and look for the journalists that specialise in that activity and this area. Invite them to come and experience what you offer. If they then do a write up in their own or other publications, the effect is like a recommendation – assuming it is good! Don't forget your Facebook and Twitter accounts and start talking about it!

So, how to start with activity holidays? We will start with Walking and Cycling. Other activity ideas you may wish to pursue will follow a similar pattern.

Walking Holidays

What to offer guests

- Clothes drying facilities
- Old newspapers for stuffing wet boots
- First Aid kit, particularly blister packs, to keep at the premises
- Nearby self-guided walking routes
- The local OS Explorer Map OL9 for Exmoor
- Local weather each day, go to <http://www.weatheronline.co.uk/EnglandWest/ExmoorNP.htm> and print out
- Choice of packed lunches, flask filling
- Public transport to enable linear walks, where appropriate
- Evening meals, if no local pubs or restaurants
- Add walking information as a special page on your website with links to local suppliers and guide booklets

QiT Walkers Welcome

- Are you already inspected by QiT?
- Include Walkers Welcome in your inspection to be accredited
- Include logo on your promotional material and website
- Get involved with Walkers are Welcome Towns (Ilfracombe, Lynton, Porlock, Dunster)

Packages

- Create walking holidays that include everything a walker wants
- 4, 7, 10 and 14 day packages to include B&B or ideally BBEM (my average stay was 8.3 nights)
- Range of self guided walks to choose from, usually 5-8 miles long, use local walk guide booklets written by experienced local guides (support local businesses)
- Consider guided walking holidays using local qualified guides (support local businesses)
- Give talks in the evening on local flora and fauna, heritage, history – ask NT to give them and give a donation to their cause
- On guided walking holidays – give a day off for 7 days, 2 days off for 10 days, 3 days off for 14 days
- Fixing dates reduces take-up, try and be flexible – only possible on self guided holidays
- Use Moor Rover to provide transport for linear walks back to your premises
- Use West Somerset Railway for linear walks (if appropriate)
- Price to include everything – difficult for guests to compare with your standard tariff
- Keep price attractive – don't overcharge
- Attract groups of walkers, Ramblers groups <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/> , <http://www.walkmag.co.uk/> , <http://www.livefortheoutdoors.com/Our-walking-and-climbing-magazines/Country-Walking-Magazine>
- Be ready to book them back in for next year before they go – have tariff and dates available – if they weren't a group initially, they often rebook as a group.
- Be aware of the Packaged Travel Regulations 1992

Walking Festival <http://www.exmoorwalkingfestival.co.uk/>

- Festival in its 16th year
- Takes place over the May Day Bank Holiday, 30th April – 8th May 2016
- Grew to attracting 630 individual walkers in 2009
- Shrunk back in last few years in line with tourism spend
- Festival covers North Devon AONB area, Exmoor and some of Dunster Crown Estate
- About 30 guided walks on offer in 2015
- Get involved by promoting it on your website – makes a cheap guided walking holiday
- Support the festival by advertising in the festival brochure or sponsor a walk
- Offer a discount voucher in the festival brochure

South West Coast Path <http://www.southwestcoastpath.com/>

- Take advantage of the coast path with walkers
- Start/end of the 630 mile route is here
- Be part of Luggage Transfers <http://www.luggagetransfers.co.uk/> to attract more walkers
- Support the South West Coast Path Association <http://www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk/> who oversee the coast path for the users

Coleridge Way <http://www.coleridgeaway.co.uk/>

- 51 miles walk joining The Quantocks with Exmoor
- 4 – 7 day walking holiday
- Tie in with other accommodation providers on the route
- Offer luggage transfer between providers
- Make a 6 day/7 night walking package with other accommodation providers along the route

Two Moors Way http://www.devon.gov.uk/walking/two_moors_way.html

- 102 mile walk joining Dartmoor and Exmoor
- Between Ivybridge and Lynmouth
- Be part of Luggage Transfers <http://www.luggagetransfers.co.uk/> to attract more walkers

Walking information

- ExploreMoor website <http://www.exploremoor.co.uk/> has car-free walks, local timetables, Moor Rover details and more!
- Combe Walks <http://www.combewalks.com> has walks booklets for long and short day walks, cycle rides based on the Tarka Trail and Picnic Spot booklets. There is also plenty of advice for walkers.
- The Exmoor National Park website <http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/enjoying/walking> has information for walkers and useful links.
- The walking festival site <http://www.exmoorwalkingfestival.co.uk/> has the festival walks and information. The walks are left live to give people ideas of where there are some great walks.
- Richard Medland is a professional walk guide and you can find out more on his website <http://www.exmoorwalkguide.co.uk/>
- The Exmoor Perambulation takes place each June, attracting about 200 walkers. For more information go to <http://www.exmoorperambulation.co.uk/>

Cycling or Mountain biking Holidays

What to offer guests

- Lockable cycle storage with enough room to work on bikes
- Some relevant tools for bicycle maintenance, including bike stand
- Clothes drying facilities
- First Aid kit, to keep at the premises
- Nearby self-guided cycling routes
- Nearby cycle shops and hire
- The local OS Explorer Map OL9 for Exmoor
- Local weather each day, go to <http://www.weatheronline.co.uk/EnglandWest/ExmoorNP.htm> and print out
- Choice of packed lunches, water bottles
- Evening meals, if no local pubs or restaurants
- Add cycling information as a special page on your website with links to local suppliers and guide booklets

QiT Cyclists Welcome

- Are you already inspected by QiT?

Include Cyclists Welcome in inspection to be accredited

- Include logo on your promotional material and website

Packages

- Create cycling holidays that include everything a cyclist wants
- 4, 7 day packages to include B&B or ideally BBEM
- Range of self guided cycle rides to choose from, usually 25 – 40 miles long, use local cycle guide booklets written by experienced local guides (support local businesses)
- Consider guided mountain biking holidays using local qualified guides (support local businesses)
- Don't try guiding road cyclists, cyclists cycle at too many differing rates
- Use Moor Rover to provide transport for linear rides back to your premises
- Use West Somerset Railway for linear rides (if appropriate)
- Use the Exmoor Cycle Route if you are within reach of it
- Price to include everything – difficult for guests to compare with your standard tariff
- Keep price attractive – don't overcharge
- Attract groups of cyclists, CTC <http://www.ctc.org.uk/>
- Be ready to book them back in for next year before they go – have tariff and dates available – if they weren't a group initially, they often rebook as a group.
- Be aware of the Packaged Travel Regulations 1992

Cycle hire establishments

- Exmoor Cycle Hire, Minehead
- Exmoor Mountain Bike Hire, Brushford
- Pompys Cycles, Minehead
- Porlock Cycle Hire, Porlock

Cycling events in this area

- Exmoor Beast Cycle Challenge, end of October, 100 miles
- Exmoor Beauty Cycle Challenge, in April, 70 miles

Cycling Information

- Exmoor Off-road Cycle Map, £9.95
- Combe Walks cycle routes, including an Exmoor Challenge of 12.6 miles, £5.95
- Cycle leaflet for Wimbleball Lake, £0.30p
- Exmoor Cycle Route, 60 miles, Tour of Britain route 2007
- Exmoor Adventures provide mountain biking days and courses
http://www.exmooradventures.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=4
- The Exmoor National Park has put together a website page on mountain biking <http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/enjoying/mountain-biking>

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