



European Union
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Sperrin Mountains – Northern Ireland

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“Use of Natural Heritage for Rural Tourism” – 16/02/2022

Rural Tourism

“A type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s experience is related to a wide range of products generally linked to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle / culture, angling and sightseeing.

Rural Tourism activities take place in non-urban (rural) areas with the following characteristics: i) low population density, ii) landscape and land-use dominated by agriculture and forestry and iii) traditional social structure and lifestyle”

(United Nations World Tourism Organisation)

Rural Tourism Experiences

Visitors to rural areas are seeking authentic, unique experiences and local lifestyles and want to experience natural, unspoiled landscapes and stay in authentic accommodation. Experiences and interaction with locals are becoming increasingly popular, as well as agri-tourism and farm stays.



Rural Tourism Challenges

- Rural areas can be challenged by seasonality of the destinations, a lack of vibrancy in villages and an evening economy plus community capacity and visitor management challenges
- Rural tourism businesses can struggle to attract staff for reasons of transportation (they maybe more expensive and challenging to get to) and staff retention can be challenging for reasons of area vibrancy and seasonality.
- Transport connections. Public transport in the rural areas is extremely poor; in particular the lack of public transport from NI airports, lack of public transport on Sundays, lack of regular connections to/between rural areas.
- Restriction to broadband access and 4G mobile phone coverage.
- Industrial threats eg gold mining/windfarms

Rural Tourism Opportunities

- The opportunity to grow tourism with unique experiences that are market ready and available
- Food tourism is a significant economic sector in Northern Ireland that should be explored further.
- The new era of travel post Covid19 will provide opportunities for rural tourism and bolster the domestic tourism market
- Very good community infrastructure in place/ closely connected to Government
- Partnership working between rural communities, statutory agencies and SMEs can play a more significant role in developing new rural tourism products and experiences that can contribute to wider economic diversity within our rural area.

Rural Tourism in the Sperrin Mountains

The region has developed a number of experiences to allow the tourist to participate in the activities, lifestyles and traditions of the Sperrin Mountains especially relating to experience and connections with people, food, drink and local folklore & traditions.



Discover Dart Mountain walking tour for example brings the visitor to a number of ancient sites and habitats to discover Giant`s graves, Fairy forts and some Celtic plant lore. Another tour highlight is an insightful visit to the Dart Mountain artisan cheese facility,

Rural Tourism in the Sperrin Mountains

Visitors can also experience local life and culture in the Sperrins by staying on a working sheep farm which allows visitors to immerse themselves in the stories of four generations of a family hill farm.



Other visitor experiences which have been developed include participation in local traditional craft skills such as wood turning and basket weaving.

Rural Tourism in the Sperrin Mountains

The Ulster American Folk Park is an open-air museum located in the Sperrin, with more than 30 exhibit buildings to explore, the museum tells the story of three centuries of Irish emigration. Using costumed guides and displays of traditional crafts, the museum focuses on the culture and traditions of those who left the area for America in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.



The demonstrations that take place showcase the day-to-day tasks and skills of those who lived in the era such as blacksmithing, candle-dipping, embroidery, spinning, printing, and open hearth cooking.

RAMSAT Action Plan – Potential Project

Oakfire Adventures intend to develop their centre and increase their facilities by developing a new Discovery Centre and services hub based in the heart of the rural area. The new Discovery Centre will include expanding parking facilities and the development of toilets, changing facilities and a picnic / food hub.



They also intend to develop a bespoke foraging tour of the Faughan & Ness Valley and offer an artisan food experience Finally; the centre would also act as incubation hub for new experience providers

- Increase visitors to natural heritage of area
- Increase investment into area
- Increase linkages of people with natural ancient woodland
- Promote local artisan food



RAMSAT Action Plan

Objectives

- Use action plan as a working tool to develop future specific strong alternative tourism business projects.
- Develop good practice policy tools and skills development recommendations to grow alternative tourism sector.
- Create better private public and community tourism connectivity through new private public tourism cluster.
- Identify new funding sources and shelf ready costed projects.
- Identify wider tourism outcomes, evaluation process and legacy of the Action Plan

Our RAMSAT Action Plan will facilitate the sharing of good tourism development ideas, exchange of good practice and knowledge on public policy. It has a real on the ground practical focus and will help develop innovative and alternative tourism products in the Sperrin Mountains region.

Our Action Plan is currently in draft form and will be completed in May 2022.



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Thank you!

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Questions welcome



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