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UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Online Toolkit

Guide 6 Managing the development of tourism infrastructure



Welcome to the UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Toolkit

Sustainable planning and management of tourism is one of the most pressing challenges concerning the future of the World Heritage Convention today and is the focus of the UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme.

These 'How To' guides for World Heritage Site managers and other key stakeholders will enable a growing number of World Heritage Site communities to make positive changes to the way they pro-actively manage tourism.

How to use this guide

These easily accessible 'How To' guides are focused on best practice approaches to sustainable economic development through tourism. The first of their kind, the 'How To' resources offer direction and guidance to managers of World Heritage tourism destinations and other stakeholders to help identify the most suitable solutions for circumstances in their local environments and aid in developing general know-how for the management of each destination.

The 'How To' guides bring best practice knowledge to the full WH community, so that site managers, tourism professionals, conservation professionals, and communities around the world understand the possibilities of sustainable tourism and what key issues have already been achieved.

These resources are a valuable asset to site managers in particular, who often lack the tools and know-how to effectively manage and maximise tourism benefits, while minimising its negative impacts.

Our series of guides have been structured as a step-by-step process for site managers.

Guides 1-4 establish the basic foundations for sustainable tourism (these are coloured yellow).

Guides 5-10 are tailored to more specific issues, which will have greater relevance at some sites than at others (these are coloured orange). We recommend that site managers explore each guide, however, as sustainable tourism is a holistic process, addressing all issues in a strategic manner.

Strategic Foundations

Guide 1
Understanding



Guide 2
Strategy



Guide 3
Governance



Guide 4
Engagement

Core Delivery (Only works if steps 1 to 4 are undertaken)

Guide 5
Communication



Guide 6
Infrastructure



Guide 7
Value



Guide 8
Behaviour



Guide 9
Investment



Guide 10
Monitoring

Our Objective

The goal is to stimulate local solutions in communities through capacity-building in best practice. With the immense scale and variation of World Heritage Properties around the globe, coupled with scarce human and financial resources, this is now more important than ever. Site managers and other stakeholders in the tourism sector must have access to these types of innovative sustainability tools in order to develop and formulate their own successful results.

Ideally, site managers and other users will begin to navigate through this system by learning basic ideas and guidance. The system then enables the user to delve deeper into any given subject that falls in line with their local interests, needs, and aspirations.

Our objective for these guidance resources is to enable the growth and success of an entire community of World Heritage Properties, making positive changes to their local surroundings and pro-actively managing tourism in their areas. In parallel, by establishing this community, we aim to facilitate knowledge exchange of the most progressive ideas, and encourage their implementation and evolution.

The driving ethic for the 'How To' guides is to explain critically important ideas for sustainable tourism in World Heritage sites in a clear and concise manner, conveying the key knowledge and processes in a reading time of under 20 minutes per idea. Our goal is to make implementing the ideas of sustainable tourism easier to understand and put into practice for all parties involved.

Getting started

We understand the complex range of different societies in which World Heritage sites exist, and the many challenges site managers face on a daily basis. While the intention is to encourage each site to undertake most, or at least many, of the tasks included in the guides, considering them together all at once may seem daunting and even impossible.

We have developed this tool as a source of guidance and inspiration. It is a menu of ideas from which you, the user, may choose to put into practice, helping your World Heritage site become more sustainable for its current and future visitors.

Getting to know these 'How To' guides will move your site towards better self-management and sustainability rather than demand a level of sophistication that might simply be unattainable for some World Heritage sites. We would urge all site managers to read through these resources thoroughly and begin to think about what positive steps can be taken to implement these changes. Again, we remind each user that results will differ for each site, and the circumstances of the local environment and community must always be taken into consideration.

Sustainability is a complex system to navigate. Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the information provided in the 'How To' guides, or send us your feedback. We are here to help.

Guide 6: Managing the development of tourism infrastructure

This guide will tell you why infrastructure is vital to sustainable tourism and how to begin the process of developing appropriate infrastructure.

Why this matters

According to the World Tourism Council, **infrastructure is the single most important key to tourism growth and performance**. Tourists use a tiny fraction of their overall visitor spending at the actual heritage site in most destinations; **main tourism spending goes towards transport and travel**, accommodation, food and drink, and retail and leisure. Understanding the tourism market is not normally the job of **heritage managers**, but to gain the most economic benefit from visitors they **need to develop products**, services, or partnerships that return more financial value. This extra revenue would, in turn, support site management and sustainability.

You should **undertake destination development with an awareness** of the commercial realities of your destination: **how can you sustainably encourage increased spending** from tourists to benefit your site and/or local community? You also need to be aware that **tourism often results in massive increases in the population** of some communities, especially during the peak seasons, and this raises many issues about the sustainability of the destination as a whole.

1. Begin a master-planning process to ensure the infrastructure is fit-for-purpose for future tourism development and does not negatively affect the OUV

Identify the key stakeholders who can influence the physical development of the destination in the future. Stages 1 and 2 should have established whether tourism growth is appropriate, manageable at your destination, and how best this might happen. **This will often require a long-term approach** to managing the development of infrastructure.

With some sites experiencing growth of visitor numbers at 20-40% per annum, **some destinations will have to make big decisions** about curtailing growth or developing the infrastructure to deal with it. **You might need to involve people with expertise** in water, waste, transport, and tourism trends and markets analysis, so the different elements of the destination are effectively interlinked.

Start by identifying what is needed to make the current tourism sector more sustainable, and what might also be needed for any projected or desired growth in visitor numbers. **There is no point having unachievable goals**, but if the current or future demand exceeds the capability of the current infrastructure, then something has to give. It may mean some form of control to manage numbers, or the need for new infrastructure.

If people cannot get to your site or have no place to stay – no matter what you do to encourage them – **they simply cannot visit**. Many destinations have high room occupancy in peak season and cannot (without new hotels, etc.) accommodate more visitors. If there is no spare capacity, or it is not sustainable to increase capacity, then your destination is left with two options:

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Use your World Heritage and your site's story to attract visitors in the non-peak months, which would sustain tourism jobs for local people year-round.

Simply do not try to increase visitor numbers. Instead, develop and implement a strategy for changing the visitor profile to higher spending, more sympathetic and more sustainable visitors, using WH Status as a driver.

Some sites with little or no hotel infrastructure have developed a system of 'home stays', which enable visitors to stay with local people. This also means that the host community secures a greater share of visitor spending.

Making tourism more sustainable requires careful thought about the transport infrastructure in order to minimise CO₂ emissions and congestion. It also **demands that accommodation minimises its ecological footprint** through good management practices and strategic thinking about water, renewable technologies, and food and waste management. **Provide tourism businesses with clear guidelines** about the need for appropriate systems to treat, re-use, or safely release waste water or solid wastes, as well as other forms of pollution (such as light and noise pollution). You can also **encourage businesses to publicise** their energy reductions and sustainability commitments. If analysis of your infrastructure does not look at tourism in its widest sense, then it will be flawed and poorly developed.

2. Develop a spatial masterplan for the destination

Invest in a master-planning process that takes account of the constraints and responsibilities of a World Heritage site. Many destinations will experience development that has a capital cost of many hundreds of millions of dollars. Given this scale of investment, **it makes good sense from both a commercial and a conservation perspective** to have a masterplan that sets the parameters of growth. **This often requires specialist support, or at least a combined effort** of specialist heritage staff and planners who can work together to develop a plan that makes it clear to everyone:

Where things can and cannot happen

What the requirements would be of any development

Why these decisions have been made

It is essential that stakeholders **believe the future of the destination can be shaped**, influenced, and ultimately designed to be fit-for-purpose – this is how great destinations secure the outcomes they desire. **It is about developing a progressive vision for tourism** that protects, conserves, and respects important heritage and delivers outcomes that are desired by the host communities. The alternative is a laissez-faire approach in which conservationists will always be fighting a reactive battle against the negative effects of tourism growth.

Publish the masterplan so that tourism businesses, the community, and conservationists all know what kinds of development are appropriate in any given area of the destination. **No tourism business enjoys being told its growth is potentially constrained** by its location, but it is worse to invest large amounts of money in plans and ideas that are not likely to be approved because they may have a negative effect on the OUV of the site. There are times a great deal of money allows projects to go ahead. **However, by damaging the heritage, you ultimately waste that money** by destroying the OUV, which is the attraction of that destination to tourists.

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3. Plan ahead for the infrastructure you need, to achieve the strategic goals you desire

Location matters. The location of tourism infrastructure – airports, railway stations, bus depots, hotels, B&Bs, restaurants, bars, cafes, museums, retail outlets, etc. – usually defines where visitors will spend their money, who will benefit from it, who will not, and where the ecological footprint of the visitor is experienced. **Changing the location of infrastructure can have profound positive or negative impacts** on the heritage, the host community, and their culture and quality of life. If the strategic goal is to offer improved economic opportunities for local people, then **it is imperative some of the tourism infrastructure** where money is spent **is in locations that local people can own, manage, or work.** For heritage management reasons, it may be necessary to relocate infrastructure away from the heritage, or to develop new infrastructure at some distance to ensure that resources, such as water and waste can be managed effectively. Keep in mind where this happens, there is a risk of the host community being excluded from significant economic benefits.

Some sites are already serviced by **infrastructure located some distance away** from the site, and this has **both benefits and costs** – the cost being that much of the economic impact is lost as visitors stay, eat, drink, shop, and relax elsewhere. **In these situations, there can be a mismatch** between those who suffer the costs and constraints of the site, and those who benefit and profit. In these instances, some mechanisms to return revenue to the host community are often needed (see Guide 9 on Fundraising and Investment). **If your tourism infrastructure is in the wrong location, you need to consider either:**

Working within your infrastructure constraints

Or creating a ‘payback’ mechanism to link the distant tourism infrastructure to the costs of the site.

“It is not beneficial for the local people or visitor experience if the products, services, and experiences offered are provided entirely by external or foreign businesses. **Destinations should create opportunities for local people to establish their own businesses and enter the marketplace.**”

Scale matters. Larger businesses are less likely to be locally owned, but they are often more efficient, productive, and return higher wages to the local community. Because of their scale, **larger businesses can deliver service** to a larger numbers of visitors at lower prices, **but economic sustainability suffers** as profits from the business are often not retained locally, regionally, or even nationally. On the other hand, local sustainable tourism initiatives are small and lack the scale and capacity to cater to the majority of visitors to a destination. Critically, small businesses may not be able to offer the year-round, skilled employment, salary, or career progression opportunities larger businesses can.

The challenge for your site is to find the balance between the benefits of large scale businesses that can provide high quality employment and tourist services, and the smaller sustainable businesses, which are much more likely to be locally owned and managed.

Support host communities to develop their businesses to have the necessary scale to maximise benefit. **One solution** is to explore different ownership models for hotels and other areas of infrastructure so the host community or groups of residents can develop a share in the destination.

Quality matters. **Cultural and World Heritage tourists are more economically valuable**, but they also have higher expectations about quality. The **ability to secure the maximum benefit** from tourism in a destination **is inextricably tied to the quality of product**, particularly the accommodation your destination offers. If your site lacks enough quality accommodation, it could significantly affect the economic profile and impact of the tourists visiting your site – **the more visitors to your destination that stay in good quality accommodation, the greater their spending.** You need to understand if the quality of your accommodation stock is limiting the economic potential from particular types of visitor, and then **work with businesses to improve quality.** Some destinations have developed quality improvement programmes with support and incentives for businesses willing to invest their own money in raising standards. **Accreditation can be a powerful way to reward** investors for doing the right kind of development – with incentives for those who go the extra mile, such as promoting the most sustainable businesses prominently on the World Heritage website.

Capacity matters. Your work on understanding tourism (Guide 1 Understanding Tourism) should have revealed what the capacity curve for your destination looks like. In most cases, **there is a peak period**, when the existing accommodation is close to capacity, **and ‘shoulder’ or off-peak seasons**, when it is running well below capacity. **One of the most sensible ways to improve** the economic performance of a destination, and ensure local people have all-year-round employment, **is to promote off-peak season visits.** This requires little or no new infrastructure, and it can make a big difference to the efficiency of the destination. Simply building more peak season capacity can often be misguided and unsustainable.

Ownership matters. In many destinations the opportunities for local people are limited to low skilled and lower paid roles, so when developing plans for the future of your destination, **explore** whether or not some of **the desired infrastructure can be developed** in ways that will benefit the host community. **There are a range of ownership models** that enable communities to own elements of the tourism infrastructure or be shareholders in it.

Some destinations have strong cooperatives of individuals or businesses that offer products, services, or experiences, and they have invested in such models **to empower local people**. Ownership gives local people more control and a share of the profits. However, it should also be pointed out that ownership is not always critical. Most turnover for a hotel is in wages, with the profit being only a small margin of that turnover.

Transport and routing matters. **Being able to influence transport is crucial** to creating a sustainable system at many World Heritage sites. **It is important that destinations develop itineraries** with transport providers that encourage more sustainable transport, **but also influence where people stop** to spend their money and where they have their environmental impact. **Simple things** like having a rest room break before entering a site **can reduce the water usage** and waste disposal issues within a site

4. All growth needs to be in the context of respecting and conserving the OUV of the World Heritage site and its environs

Above all, **it is the responsibility of the destination to protect the heritage from irresponsible development** through planning or 'development control'. The World Heritage site, itself, and the designation are key assets for any destination – **all plans for developing infrastructure need to be based on a deep respect** for, and understanding of, the World Heritage site. It is crucially important that the sense of place and distinctiveness are protected. These guides are based on the assumption that sites value their World Heritage status and have planning control systems that can protect the heritage from development that is not appropriate. **Work hard to retain the sense of place**, distinctiveness, and authenticity of the destination. When you do have to build new infrastructure, **work closely with planning control officers** so they understand the need to balance heritage conservation and the demand for development.

5. Secure and encourage investment to make your plans a reality

Encourage the private sector to develop the infrastructure. The role of destination management is to define the parameters of growth – setting out what is appropriate (and where) in a tourism destination. This will often mean that the development that does take place will be commercial.

Develop a Community Fund to help local people and communities secure the capital needed to offer goods, services, and products to visitors. Relatively small amounts of seed capital can give local people a foothold in the marketplace (See Guide 9 Fundraising and Investment).

Identify any public realm or free-to-access infrastructure needed and find a way to deliver it. In this case, it is critical that an effective case is researched, well-crafted, and specific to the investment sought (See Guide 9 Fundraising and Investment).

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Guide 6 Case study

Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape (United Kingdom)

Baseline situation

The Cornwall and West Devon mining landscape was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2006, comprised of 10 different mining landscapes across the area. As the largest World Heritage site in the United Kingdom, covering almost 20,000 hectares, **the diverse site needed an effective tourism infrastructure to address challenges** of multiple ownerships, limited core resources, and unlocking the full potential of the World Heritage site. Furthermore, these issues had to be addressed and implemented during one of the most severe global financial crises in history.

What did they do?

A substantial coordinated investment was needed to begin building the proper visitor infrastructure for this new World Heritage site. In 2007, the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) opened a funding programme and the World Heritage site submitted an Expression of Interest. Their submission **identified the need for proper infrastructure using an integrated approach** not simply for tourism, but also product improvement, business, engagement, and promotion. With the invitation for a formal bid, the site was able to secure £2.4m, **which resulted in the 'Discover the Extraordinary' (DtE) project**. This initiative began in January 2010, and over £1m was invested into improving visitor facilities at 11 partner mining attractions, as well as refining interpretation of the wider landscape as a whole, with the aim to help tourists understand the story of Cornish mining and its significance as World Heritage.



Strategic priorities

Improve the World Heritage site destination “product” and the visitor’s experience through improved visitor facilities and enhanced information, interpretation, and orientation.

Implement the World Heritage site Key and Area Centres to provide strategic World Heritage site interpretation and orientation for visitors.

Build relationships across the wider tourism industry and enable rural tourism businesses to benefit from World Heritage site status.

Communicate the enhanced tourism offer to target markets.

Encourage visitors to choose environmentally sustainable options.

What worked?

The investment in infrastructure allowed for the DtE program to put money towards **developing a highly functioning integrated marketing strategy, that focused on building connections across the tourism sector and widely promoting the site as a cultural tourism destination.** This had a significant impact on the 11 visitor attractions within the site, and also resulted in business growth across the tourism sector throughout the supply chain. Their activities have produced concrete numbers that have shown increased exposure, visitor spend, job creation, and an upward trend for continued growth. **For example,** throughout the implementation of the project **the visitor spend grew 20% among heritage related business in the area, with an average increase of 138% in visitor spend/income for those same businesses.** Visitors also cited World Heritage site specific information as their reason for visiting Cornwall, which saw an increase from 14% to 32%, with 8 out of 9 attractions expecting to see an increase in visitor numbers.

What was tough?

The Cornwall and West Devon WHS was forced to initiate plans and operate amidst one of the most extreme financial crises in history. It found itself navigating through the turmoil and confusion of a swiftly changing and extremely unpredictable economic environment in regards to: visitor behaviour, visitor interests, and visitor spend. Furthermore, the programme also had to deal with unstable data. **Local authority resources were not what they had previously been, and local businesses were forced to re-prioritise to meet the challenges brought on by the economic recession.**

How did they get buy-in?

Those working in the DtE program knew that **success of this project relied largely on continued strategic communication with all relevant stakeholders,** encouraging involvement and engagement, especially with the special economic situation in which they would have to work. This open dialogue allowed for local businesses and governing authorities to **get involved at step one and become owners of the initiative,** building the necessary relationships across the value chain.

What are the results?

The 3.5 year project has resulted in benefiting the community of Cornwall and West Devon across all sectors – the physical infrastructure of the facilities, wider stakeholder engagement, and participation in multiple fields (heritage, arts, tourism, landscape, and community partnerships). **Over 400 local businesses are currently active and directly working together within the programme.** This has resulted in the creation and access to high quality digital tools for both the visitor and local businesses, as well as providing a platform to communicate a deeper understanding and quality experience of the WHS.

In fact, this past November, the World Heritage Partners were recognized for the second year in a row for its achievements at the Cornwall Tourism Awards under several themes, including a double gold champion as a self-catering, sustainable tourism destination.

What lessons can others take from this?

When developing an infrastructure for a World Heritage site, **consider what relationships will be necessary to make this process a smooth transition.** It is not only securing investment for improvement that is important in optimizing the visitor experience. Cornwall and West Devon recognized this fundamental aspect. **Funds would pay for changes, but the pace would be much slower without buy-in and support from local businesses and authorities.**

With **community and business cooperation across all sectors,** Cornwall and West Devon was able to implement and execute a clear and achievable integrated marketing strategy throughout an economic recession—not only surviving, but thriving. This theme of ‘community buy-in’ is discussed thoroughly throughout this Toolkit for a reason. It leads to success. **Remember it as a necessity for your own site** and destination when you formulate your Tourism Strategy and Implementation Plan.

Find more information about the “**Discover the Extraordinary**” (DtE) in their [Project Evaluation Summary](#).

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To read the complete toolkit visit
whc.unesco.org/en/tourismtoolkit



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