

HOW TO...GUIDES

How to...Go Green

"Sustainability is not about doing business differently but doing business even better" VisitEngland

1. What is Green Tourism?

Green Tourism is Sustainable Tourism – tourism that takes into account the needs of the environment, local residents, businesses, and visitors, now and in the future.

Sustainability in tourism is not only about protecting England's natural heritage enjoyed by millions of visitors every year, but also about ensuring that the people who live across the country benefit financially from tourism.

Research shows that there's a growing trend for visitors to seek out tourism businesses that take an ethical approach to the environment, and many of these visitors are prepared to pay more for 'greener' products and services.

2. Common misconceptions about 'going green'

According to the Green Tourism Business Scheme, the top ten 'eco-excuses' are:

- *It's too complicated*
- *It takes too much time*
- *It is overly costly to implement*
- *Customers don't care about 'green'*
- *My location/venue is unsuited to sustainable practices*
- *Significant staff training will be needed*
- *Benefits take too long to realise*
- *Staff won't engage with initiatives*
- *It is not an immediate priority*
- *There is a risk of my efforts being branded 'greenwashing'*

3. Definitive reasons for 'going green'

- Your business will benefit from increased efficiency. *"Most tourism businesses can reduce energy, waste and water costs by at least 10% and some have made savings of 40%"* (www.better-tourism.org)
- Green tourism attracts new groups of customers, encourages all customers to stay longer and to come back again and again.
- Small changes can make a big difference, particularly if tourism businesses work together. Things such as farmers markets, clearing graffiti, cleaning up beaches, campaigning for efficient litter collections, and encouraging wildlife.
- Green tourism supports local communities and local regions. By investing in a greener purchasing policy and 'sourcing locally', businesses are supporting the local economy and environment as well as helping to reduce their own business carbon footprint.

4. Do visitors support sustainable tourism?

2010 VisitEngland data on English consumers says:

- *58% would want to stay in accommodation with green awards/environmentally friendly practices*
- *51% say that if two hotels were the same, they would choose the one with a green award*
- *46% don't want to think about being green*
- *33% believe sustainability claims are often ways to save money and/or reduce service*
- *Only 15% think a hotel run sustainably will be less comfortable than one without green credentials*

5. Supporting Green Tourism - Increased efficiency

5.1 Increased efficiency - Saving Energy

Of all the green measures, saving energy will have the biggest impact on your costs and business efficiency as well as on the environment. According to the Energy Saving Trust:

- *Energy costs account for 40% of a business's day to day running costs*
- *Over 50% of the UK's carbon output comes from the day-to-day use of energy in our homes and cars*

There are six different areas to saving energy and reducing your carbon footprint:

- Cut energy usage and reduce wasted energy
- Insulate your premises
- Use a sustainable energy supplier
- Train staff and encourage customers
- Reduce transport: yours, your customers', your suppliers'
- Use alternate and renewable forms of energy and/or heating

5.2 Increased efficiency - Saving Water

When we live in a country that is often deluged in water, and with our recent history of floods, it can be very hard to see why we should save water. Yet, of the world's water supply, only 3% is fresh and only 1% is available for human consumption.

In order to have clean water for drinking, cooking and washing, water must be collected and held, then treated. We need a network of pipes to bring it to our taps and a network of pipes to take it away again. On top of this our water consumption is increasing; we have dishwashers, washing machines, power-showers, garden hoses, car washes etc.

It takes energy and money to build reservoirs, water and treatment plants and to pump water to our homes and businesses – the more we use the more money and energy is required.

When we save water, we save money, energy and carbon output.

As with saving energy, small changes can add up to big effects. Top water saving tips include:

- Monitoring your usage

- Making staff aware of the need to save water
- Making customers aware of the need to save water
- Fixing leaks, dripping taps and drain leaks
- Considering rainwater harvesting for toilet flushing
- Avoiding hoses and sprinklers
- Encouraging guests to re-use towels
- Only change bedding when necessary

5.3 Increased efficiency - Reducing and Recycling Waste

Reducing waste is a key part of any green strategy. Waste includes packaging, plastic, paper, cardboard, bottles, cans and food waste, cleaning chemicals, consumer electricals, building rubble, garden clippings, old furniture, old computers and printers, and much more.

There are a number of reasons to cut the amount of waste your business, staff and customers produce:

- Money – as a business it costs you money to remove all your waste. The more waste you cut, the more you save.
- Environment – we cannot continue to send such vast quantities of waste to landfill sites, or continue to unthinkingly pour chemicals into our water systems. We have to take responsibility for the way we purchase, consume and dispose.
- Legislation – new and tougher regulations to cut waste and increase recycling are being imposed all the time and they will only get stiffer.
- Customers – green issues are high on customers' minds. They expect businesses to take a visible, responsible approach to the environment as standard and they vote with their purchasing power.

6. Supporting Green Tourism - means more visitors

It's the "feel good factor" group of customers who, according to VisitEngland '*respond well to messages that show they can easily 'do their bit' or where they get a better product or service that happens to be sustainable*'.

They don't actively seek green holidays and yet they *"will avidly read about you in the press travel pages because you are interesting and different. Awards and certification reinforce that you can be trusted, one more element to influence the booking decision"*.

There are lots of ways of targeting these visitors who are keen to book a quality sustainable tourism product or service, especially if they know they are 'getting a bargain'.

Incentives such as offering a discount to customers who use the local public transport, developing a nature diary on your website, growing and cooking your own veg, offering free maps for local walks, or promoting local produce on your menus, will help customers to feel better about their purchase knowing that you have taken care of the need to be more sustainable whilst leaving them to enjoy the benefits.

Start targeting these visitors by gaining a sustainable tourism certification that gives customers an independent guarantee of your credentials, by entering tourism awards that recognise sustainability, and by publicising your green credentials.

7. Supporting Green Tourism - small changes make a big difference

Often, when businesses think about 'going green', they immediately think of the bigger green technologies such as solar panel systems, building monitoring equipment, and biomass boilers.

And yet in the UK, according to Greenwise Business, *'it's the small businesses that have been leading the way on sustainability'*. Small changes can go a long way towards making a business green, so think about starting off with things such as:

- Using low energy light bulbs
- Monitoring heating and cooling
- Changing the breakfast menu to include local, sustainable food that can be cooked in energy-efficient ways
- Encouraging visitors to use local transport
- Ensuring your building or venue has proper insulation
- Putting locally sourced toiletries in guests' bedrooms
- Recycling as much as possible
- Encouraging wildlife – it helps green spaces to thrive

Look at what other tourism businesses are doing in your region, investigate grants and funding schemes that support sustainable practices (www.greengrantsmachine.co.uk) and view Case Studies from different businesses that have already embraced 'going green' (www.youtube.com/user/TourismToolkit).

Support local 'green' campaigns that bring businesses together in creating cleaner, greener and safer destinations for visitors, e.g. cleaning up beaches (www.goodbeachguide.co.uk), clearing graffiti, and tackling litter (www.thebigtidyup.org).

VisitEngland's 'Green Start' (www.better-tourism.org) is an awareness raising, entry-level training and business review tool. It's available to all tourism businesses in England that seek to embrace sustainability and reduce their impact on the environment or community in which they are located.

8. Supporting Green Tourism – greener purchasing & sourcing locally

Saving energy, saving water, reducing waste and encouraging wildlife all dramatically affect your impact on the environment. But how you spend your money has an even greater effect.

Greener products and services are ones that:

- Use the least transport for both raw materials and final products
- Use the least energy for production and also for ongoing running costs
- Use sustainable raw materials – ones that can be safely re-grown or re-created without using up finite resources (such as coal, oil or gas) or creating pollution
- Don't utilise harmful chemicals – like toxic liquids, spays, plastics or inks
- Avoid genetic modification of plants and animals
- Can be recycled, reused or biodegrade once their life is over
- Use ethical, safe and fair human labour

And even better if:

- Renewable energy is used in the manufacturing and transport
- Raw materials are themselves from recycled sources
- Organically grown produce is used

- Produce and manufacturing is local – reducing transport to the minimum and supporting your local economy

Food tourism is becoming increasingly popular. Visitors are choosing to go to destinations to sample local food and drink specialities and well-known restaurants, or they make a point of going to food festivals, farmers' markets and recommended restaurants when they are staying away.

Supporting food tourism reflects your commitment to helping the local and regional economy, adds value to your business, celebrates great local produce, and reflects your commitment to sustainability.

9. Green Tourism Schemes and Awards

There are a wide range of sustainable tourism certification schemes in operation in England, ranging from those that have international recognition to smaller independently managed operations. With such a range it is easy for a business to become confused on where to invest time and money.

VisitEngland currently only promotes the Green Tourism Business Scheme which has undergone a rigorous verification process to ensure that it is a robust and credible programme.

The Green Tourism Business Scheme (www.green-business.co.uk)

The Green Tourism Business Scheme is the national sustainable tourism certification scheme for the UK. Originally developed in partnership with VisitScotland, it is now the only certification scheme validated by VisitBritain, through the International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT).

Businesses opting to join Green Tourism are assessed by a qualified grading advisor against a rigorous set of criteria covering a range of areas such as energy and water efficiency, waste management, bio diversity and more.

VisitEngland's Green Start tool (www.better-tourism.org)

VisitEngland's Green Start tool is available **free**, to all tourism businesses interested in understanding how they can save money, encourage greater efficiency, add appeal to their business, and begin a journey of doing business even better. It has been designed to help businesses review their performance and illustrate how sustainable practice can be part of normal business.

VisitEngland's 'Keep it Real' Toolkit

(<http://www.visitengland.org/busdev/bussupport/sustainability/marketing.aspx>)

Alongside Green Start, VisitEngland's 'Keep it Real' is a complimentary marketing and communications tool providing businesses with tips and advice on marketing their green credentials.

Comprised of five useful chapters, Keep it Real answers key questions: Who do I tell?, Why am I telling it?, What do I say?, Where do I tell? and When do I tell?

Green Tourism Awards

The North East England Tourism Awards (www.tourismbusiness toolkit.co.uk) offer a Sustainable Tourism Award category celebrating tourism businesses that have made an extra special effort towards sustainability.

Winners of the this regional Award category go on to compete in the national Enjoy England Awards for Excellence (www.visitengland.org) which are the highest accolade in English tourism.

10. Where to go for more help

VisitEngland (www.visitengland.org)

VisitEngland offers an extensive range of business support tools and resources for businesses keen to embrace sustainable practices.

Energy Saving Trust (www.energysavingtrust.org)

This public sector site contains all kinds of information on reducing energy usage, insulation and purchasing energy efficient products.

The Carbon Trust (www.carbontrust.co.uk)

The Carbon Trust site is aimed at businesses and contains information on cutting energy use and reducing carbon footprint.

Recycle Now (www.recyclenow.com)

Recycle Now gives detailed, information on what can be recycled and how, and where to buy recycled products.

WRAP (www.wrap.org.uk)

WRAP works to help businesses and individuals reap the benefits of reducing efficiency.

Taste North East (www.tastenortheast.co.uk)

North East England's not for profit food and drink membership organisation. They work with businesses of all sizes and at every stage of the food supply chain from producers and manufacturers to food outlets, restaurants, retailers, pubs and hotels to help add value to what they do.

Green Buying (www.greenbuying.co.uk)

Green Buying is a directory of ethical suppliers and products.

Wildlife Gardening (www.wildlife-gardening.org.uk)

Space for Nature Gardening Forum is for people who want to increase wildlife and biodiversity in their gardens and who want to use sustainable gardening practices.

Green Grants Machine (www.greengrantsmachine.co.uk)

A free website for information on all the latest funding schemes to enable your company to become more environmentally friendly.