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## Tourist Information Centres

and National Park Visitor Centres for the Newcastle Diocese area:

Alnwick 01665 511333	Amble 01665 712313
Bellingham 01434 220616	Berwick-Upon-Tweed 01289 330733
Corbridge 01434 632815	Craster 01665 576007
Haltwhistle 01434 322002	Hexham 01434 652220
Ingram 01665 578890	Morpeth 01670 500700
Newcastle 0191 277 8000	Newcastle Airport 0191 214422
North Shields 0191 2005895	Once Brewed 01434 344396
Otterburn 01830 520093	Rothbury 01669 620887
Seahouses 01665 720884	Whitley Bay 0191 200 8535
Wooler 01668 282123	

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This booklet has been prepared by Andrew Duff for the Church Tourism Task Group of the Diocese of Newcastle.

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# Mission: Visitors

## How to raise the profile of your church for potential visitors

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### Introduction

Ministry to visitors is a key part of the church's mission, and an opportunity to strengthen links with the wider community. There is some good advice around on how to take a fresh look at what might appeal to visitors to your church, also on how to develop your visitor 'welcome'. But how do potential visitors find out about your church in the first place?

For many this happens naturally through family connections, visits to friends, or simply passing by and seeing the door open (assuming it is open...!). However, to reach those who are not already familiar or on the spot, you need to build your profile amongst those who are already actively engaging with potential visitors to your area, i.e., the tourism sector.

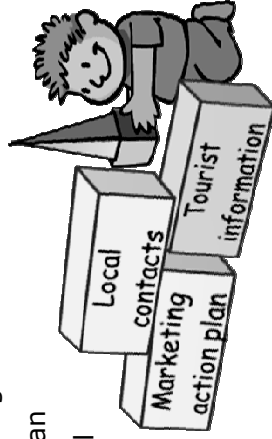
So what do we mean by 'tourism', and are there any easy ways to get involved? Well, happily there are some relatively simple steps you can take, and at very little cost, to build your profile with the local tourism community and reach new visitors.

This booklet sets out a range of ideas for you to consider and to choose those most relevant to your aims and needs.

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**How to build your profile** in the visitor market can be summarised in the following 'building blocks':

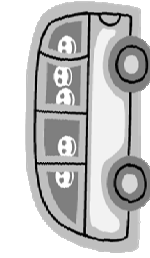
- Prepare a marketing action plan
- Get your church onto the local tourism information database
- Build links with local tourism networks



These 'building blocks' are explained in more detail later on, with step-by-step guidance and some 'insider' tips to help you on your way.

But first, here is a brief introduction to tourism, and how this is supported in Newcastle and Northumberland:

## What do we mean by 'tourism' anyway?



The Tourism Society definition of 'tourism' is:

*'the temporary short term movement of people to destinations outside places where they normally live & work, & their activities during their stay at these destinations'.*

Thus anyone who visits a church that is not their own local place of worship is technically counted as a 'tourist' – even though most of us would probably rather talk in terms of visitors, or better still, pilgrims, and would certainly want to include local people too.

Understanding just a little bit about tourism may, however, prove helpful when speaking with those involved in mainstream tourism who are potential allies in helping to make your church or chapel known to visitors.

It is worth noting, for example, that One North East research shows that visitors identify four key strengths of the North East region: the people; coastline; history and heritage; and countryside. Christian heritage has also been highlighted as one of the most important strands in the region's heritage.

## Tourism associations and trade associations

- **Allen Valleys Tourism & Visitor Network** promotes the area and provides visitor information. Contact Verona Woodhouse on 01434 683362; [info@allendale-holidays.co.uk](mailto:info@allendale-holidays.co.uk)
- **Alnwick Tourism Association** is a voluntary organisation promoting tourism to the area for the benefit of businesses and local community. Website [www.visitalnwick.org.uk](http://www.visitalnwick.org.uk)
- **Gilsland & Greenhead Tourism Partnership** is a network of tourism related interests around the villages of Gilsland and Greenhead. Website: [www.hadrianswallvillages.org.uk](http://www.hadrianswallvillages.org.uk)
- **Hadrian's Wall Network** is a group of tourism related interests in the Mid-Tyne Valley. Website: [www.hadrianswallnorthumberland.co.uk](http://www.hadrianswallnorthumberland.co.uk)
- **Haltwhistle Partnership** is a charitable company that aims to bring about projects and activities to benefit people living in Western Tynedale. Website: [www.haltwhistle.org](http://www.haltwhistle.org)
- **NewcastleGateshead Initiative** is a private/public sector destination marketing partnership for NewcastleGateshead, with 160 members. Website: [www.newcastlegateshead.com](http://www.newcastlegateshead.com).
- **North Northumberland Tourism Association** was founded in 1985 to help small tourism businesses support each other and inform visitors. Website [www.nnta.org](http://www.nnta.org)
- **Rothbury & Coquetdale Tourism Association** is a voluntary organization consisting of diverse businesses in and around Rothbury and in Coquetdale. Website: [www.visit-rothbury.co.uk](http://www.visit-rothbury.co.uk)
- **Welcome Northumberland** is a mutual association formed in 2007 to promote its members and Northumberland via its website: [www.welcomenorthumberland.co.uk](http://www.welcomenorthumberland.co.uk)

Also, for the hotel/accommodation sector only:

- **NE Hoteliers Association.** Chairman, Damon Roberts, Tel: 0871 3769029. Email: [damon.roberts@thistle.co.uk](mailto:damon.roberts@thistle.co.uk).
- **Whitley Bay Hoteliers Association.** Website: [www.whitley-bay-hoteliers.co.uk](http://www.whitley-bay-hoteliers.co.uk)

A new tourism association is also planned for South East Northumberland.

businesses and public agencies to promote the area and ensure that visitors enjoy the best possible destination experience. Their vision is to establish Northumberland as England's premier rural tourism destination, and for example they highlight the County's 'peace and tranquillity' as a key factor in the visitor experience. Website: [www.visitnorthumberland.com](http://www.visitnorthumberland.com)

Northumberland Tourism, Micklewood House, Longhirst Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 3LL.  
Tel: 01670 794525  
Email: [info@northumberlandtourism.co.uk](mailto:info@northumberlandtourism.co.uk)

**Tourism Tyne and Wear:** This public and private sector partnership works on behalf of tourism businesses and public agencies to ensure that visitors enjoy the best possible experience when they visit the North East, and that the destinations within Tyne & Wear are promoted effectively to attract overnight and day visitors. Website: <http://www.visitnewcastlegateshead.co.uk>.

Tourism Tyne & Wear, 4th Floor, Central Square South, Orchard Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 3AZ  
Tel: 0191 243 8833  
Email: [ngi@ngi.org.uk](mailto:ngi@ngi.org.uk)

**Local authorities** remain responsible for local rules and regulations, licences, planning, environmental health, health and safety, rates and a wide range of other business information. Some also run Tourist Information Centres in their area. Northumberland is undergoing re-organisation in 2008, so local tourism information services may be subject to change.

**Northumberland National Park Authority** looks after the landscape, heritage and culture of Northumberland National Park, and seeks to support communities and businesses in and around the Park with good advice, guidance and funding. They are happy to talk to anyone who is planning a new visitor-related project in the Park area. Website: [www.northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk](http://www.northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk).

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There are also a number of private sector associations that promote an area or provide a business network. Those known to exist at the time of writing are listed on the next page.

*Our places of worship offer opportunities to encounter Christian heritage, architecture and fine arts, social and family history, as well as a chance to meet local people and hear their stories!*

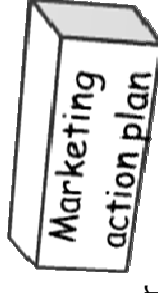
In 'tourism-speak', churches may be regarded as 'places of interest', 'visitor attractions' or even 'tourism businesses'. The important thing is to decide if you really would like to develop a 'ministry of welcome' for more visitors, who may simply be interested in local history, family ancestry or nice old buildings, but all of whom are people loved by God and on a spiritual journey of some kind, knowingly or otherwise.

The tourism and hospitality sector is also a key contributor to the regional economy, providing 7% of jobs, hence the investment being made to strengthen this sector. Some churches may also see working with the tourism sector as a positive part of their engagement with the community.

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Back to those 'building blocks' then:

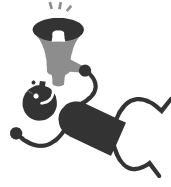
### Building block 1: Visitor marketing action plan



Here is a 'menu' of possibilities to consider when preparing a simple marketing action plan for your church:

- Take a look at what you have to offer visitors - the key features, stories and the way it feels to pay a visit to your place of worship, in order to reflect this in your communications.
- Analyse your existing visitors. Who are they, where do they come from? What do they do when they visit? What needs or desires are you fulfilling?
- Look up the latest research about visitors (from tourism organisations, see below). What are their interests, and what motivates them to choose where to visit? Are there visitors you are missing out on? Are there specialist visitors you could target, e.g., family history, decorative arts societies?
- Don't forget the potential for educational visits involving local schools. What materials would they need?

- Consider your 'brand' message – the way you highlight the experience you offer and connect this with the mind of the potential visitor. Is there something obvious you could use to appeal to visitors, e.g. a person, a Saxon cross, a historic event that would distinguish your church from others in the area?
- Give priority to the other 'building blocks' described in this paper – your budget for marketing is likely to be very small indeed, so exploit these options first.
- Other marketing actions worth considering include:
  - producing a simple third-A4 flier for local distribution
  - having a website that includes a visitor information page



- sending a press release to a local paper when you have a story to tell - e.g., have someone do an analysis of your visitor book, where people come from, etc, and link to the launch of a new 'open season'.

#### A word about internet promotion

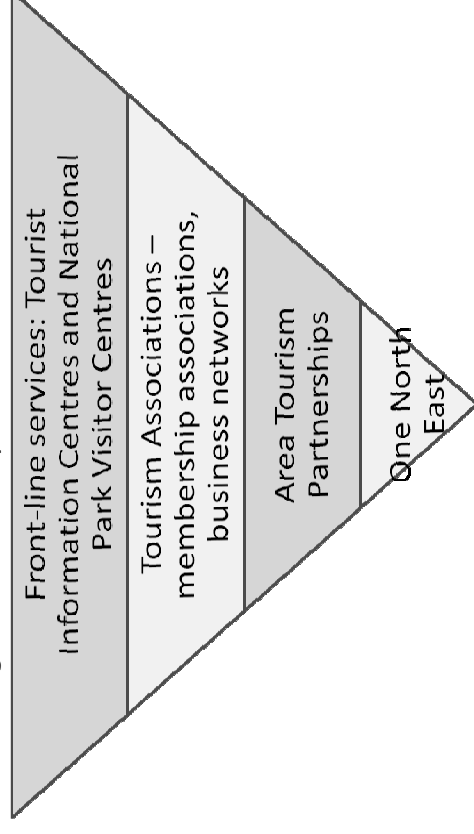
More people than ever are using the internet to help plan their holidays. Six out of ten households in Britain are now online. So getting your information online where visitors are looking is important. This can include having your own church website, for which guidance is available via the CTA website: [www.churchestourism.info](http://www.churchestourism.info).

But first, don't overlook the opportunity to have your church featured in tourism websites driven by the official tourism database – see Building Block 2 for details.

'User generated content' websites such as Flickr or YouTube are growing in popularity. The Flickr photo-sharing website features more than 12,000 photos of churches in England. An example of a short slideshow on YouTube for St Michael's Church, Alnwick, can be found via this short link: <http://tinyurl.com/9ogtu4>

#### A brief tour of local tourism organisations

To help you to work with others in your area, here is a mini-guide to the organisations that help to support and promote tourism and visitor activity in and around Newcastle and Northumberland. Websites are given to enable you to find out more about each:



The Regional Development Agency **One North East** is the channel for Government funds for tourism development and responsible for supporting tourism delivery structures within the region. Website: [www.onenortheast.co.uk](http://www.onenortheast.co.uk).

Much of the work is channelled via '**Tourism Network North East**', which is made up of five organisations: the One North East Tourism team and four Area Tourism Partnerships or 'ATPs'. The Network is recognised as the official tourism support process for North East England by government, VisitBritain and Local Authorities. Website: [www.tourismonortheast.co.uk](http://www.tourismonortheast.co.uk).

**Area Tourism Partnerships** are your first point of contact for enquiries about the official tourism database. 'ATPs' relevant to Newcastle Diocese are:

**Northumberland Tourism:** Representing the county's tourism industry, their aim is to promote a truly compelling Northumberland 'brand'. Their mission is to be the voice of tourism in Northumberland, working in partnership with tourism

- Call in to your nearest Tourist Information Centre (TIC) and ask them about their experience of visitors to the area, what events are happening, and offer to supply a visitor information leaflet (if you are planning one!)
- Consider the scope for collaboration in a local 'cluster' or themed trail, Heritage Open Days programme, or - in the case of Northumberland - local Market Town Welcome initiative.
- Get involved in support of local festivals or visitor welcome initiatives - see local newspapers or their websites for clues as to who to contact.
- Make direct contact with local tourism businesses, e.g., pubs, guest-houses, local tour guides, etc. Why not hold a special 'welcome' event in spring just for them, to launch a new leaflet and show them what you have to offer visitors?

**Of course these actions take time, so it is worth considering whether someone connected with your church has an aptitude to take this on and be the point of contact on tourism matters.**

More advice and information can be found via the Tourism Business Toolkit - a new online resource for all kinds of tourism enterprise in the North East of England:

<http://www.tourismnortheast.co.uk/site/business-toolkit>

### **Welcoming people from different cultures**

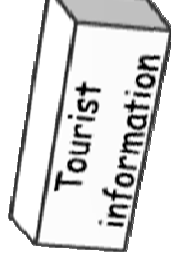


A small, but growing, number of visitors to your church are likely to come from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. If you would like to understand more about those backgrounds in order to improve the sense of welcome you are able to offer, you may find the following website useful:

<http://www.multicultural.co.uk/index.htm>

There are sections on welcoming specific nationalities such as Chinese visitors, as well as sections on faiths such as Islam.

## **Building block 2: Tourism information database**



The North East's regional tourism database, known as 'Desti.ne', holds information about all accommodation, places to visit, events and tourist facilities that are likely to be of interest to visitors planning a holiday or leisure trip in the region.

This database is the 'bread and butter' underpinning all the work of the tourism bodies in this region and beyond, so if your place is not on it you are likely to be missing out.

The system is driven by information provided by businesses and places of interest, and the information thus provided is then used in a number of ways:

- To populate official tourism websites such as [visitnorthumberland.com](http://visitnorthumberland.com), [visitnortheastengland.com](http://visitnortheastengland.com) and various campaign and special interest websites
- To feed information into the national VisitBritain and EnjoyEngland websites
- To embed searches in other websites such as DFDS Ferries
- To provide content for a range of tourism brochures, and
- To provide information to Tourist Information Centres

One North East also works with partners like VisitEngland to get information out via other channels such as Google Local and satellite navigation service TomTom.

The amount of distribution is powerful, but the good thing is that once your information is entered into Desti.ne this can be updated at any time, and every connected outlet, website or Tourist Information Centre will automatically be updated.



The Northumberland annual holiday guide is based upon information in the regional Desti.ne tourism database.

If your church is not already on this database and you feel it should be, please contact your local Area Tourism Partnership, see contacts below.

Once you have an entry on this, you can update your information online through Desti.ne Extranet or Desti.ne Frontdesk, or via the annual Tourism Network North East Registration and Information Collection questionnaire.

Website for more information:  
[www.tourismnortheast.co.uk/site/desti.ne](http://www.tourismnortheast.co.uk/site/desti.ne)

Key contacts:

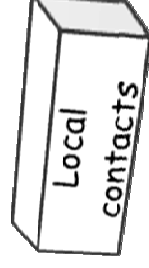
#### **Northumberland Tourism**

Liz Askell, Data Steward & Admin Assistant  
 Tel: 01670 794521  
 E-mail: [liz.askell@northumberlandtourism.co.uk](mailto:liz.askell@northumberlandtourism.co.uk)

#### **Tourism Tyne & Wear**

Emma Hallington, Data Steward/Administrator  
 Tel: 0191 243 8833  
 E-mail: [emma.hallington@tourismtyneandwear.co.uk](mailto:emma.hallington@tourismtyneandwear.co.uk)

### **Building block 3: Work with others in your area**



There are lots of people to help you. Work together with tourism businesses around you – especially nearby accommodation providers – to share information and ideas, collaborate on joint promotion, and make sure that staying visitors make the most of what's on offer. You'll be pleasantly surprised at how supportive local tourism businesses may be – after all, your church being open and welcoming to visitors provides another good reason for their guests to stay and enjoy the area!

Ensuring you have a good local profile will help you reach your share of staying guests and day visitors.

So how do you go about working with others in your locality? Here are some suggestions to start you off:

- Join a local tourism association or business network in your area – see list of contacts below. This may open up opportunities for collaboration on tourism issues, access to trade seminars, local area website listings, etc.

#### **Examples of church tourism collaboration**

- The 2008 Golden Age of Northumbria events programme in Berwick district involved several churches and Christian heritage sites.
- 'In the Steps of the Saints' trail in north Northumberland featured seven churches and Christian heritage sites.
- A series of Heritage Walks centred on St Andrew's Church Heddon-on-the-Wall feature other churches and heritage sites in the area.
- Many North East churches take part in Heritage Open Days.
- St Oswald's Way website features two of the many churches along the route.
- Several churches have been represented in Northumberland Tourism's Market Town Welcome initiative.



VisitBritain intends to restrict promotion of visitor attractions via the EnjoyEngland and VisitBritain.com websites to those that have signed up to the National Code of Practice for Visitor Attractions.

The code provides an industry-wide standard for what constitutes a good visitor experience. Churches that wish to benefit from national tourism promotion should therefore consider signing up to this.

For more information and a copy of the Code, see VisitBritain's [tourismtrade.org.uk](http://tourismtrade.org.uk) website. Short link:

<http://tinyurl.com/bcm1fj>