

about sense of place



Why should I develop my business's 'Sense of Place'?

Over 300,000 UK visitors staying in Wales every year come here with the purpose of exploring our culture; while over 80% of overseas visitors cite heritage and culture amongst their main reasons for visiting Wales. It is therefore up to all of us to ensure that we not only fulfil their expectations, but surpass them. In a tourism climate where appreciation of the value of cultural tourism is on the increase, we have to compete hard on a global basis to attract visitors to our amazing little corner of the world.

Wales is a constantly evolving, spontaneous and living country: mixing modern cultural centres and sporting venues with award winning coastlines and traditional festivals. The uniqueness of Wales's history, language and way of life are distinctive tourism assets which help us when competing with other countries for visitors, and it is up to us all to do whatever we can to enhance our guests' sense of Wales and Welshness. This in turn spreads the word and helps enhance Wales's status in a fiercely competitive tourism market - which of course, benefits us all.

Sense of Place is profitable in more ways than one. It makes good business sense to work with what is distinctively local. As a tourism business, you will gain from adding value and improving competitiveness and profitability. You'll

also be surprised by how a Sense of Place can open up a wealth of new resources and ideas for development, create more involvement with the local community and make life much more interesting for you and your team!

How do I develop a Sense of Place?

This workbook has one main aim – to guide you through practical steps to enhance your business by developing a stronger Sense of Place.

The components of a Sense of Place can be a thousand and one things. It's the sensation you get when visiting somewhere for the first time – the first impression, the look, the feel, the atmosphere, the people. Sense of Place embraces the distinctive sights, sounds and experiences that are rooted in a country, those unique and memorable qualities that resonate with local people and visitors alike.

Being so close to it, we sometimes forget that our everyday life is someone else's adventure.

Wales benefits from having a strong and distinctive identity that challenges convention. There's an abundance of 'raw material' here with which to work. Wales's natural beauty, its mountainous landscapes, lush countryside and extensive coastline help define the country – giving it substance and identity.



Wales with its strong literary, musical, visual and applied arts traditions have inspired many others – and continue to inspire today.

Visitors to Wales love to discover what it is to be Welsh, and what makes Wales so distinctive and special. They are hungry to experience its Sense of Place – don't disappoint them!



Defining your own Sense of Place

Wales is a small country and yet it varies enormously from region to region, town to town. Therefore pinning down what is distinctively Welsh is not an easy job. A more straightforward and productive approach is to look at local distinctiveness and flavour and see the Welsh character in it.

A useful concept is that of *cynefin*, that area to which we feel we belong. It represents the idea of a dwelling place or family seat but is wider than the location of the house or home. It is made up of the land and the landscape but relates to the imprint left by people.

Another is the Latin phrase *genius loci*, which refers to the spirit of a place – its special atmosphere, associations and connections.

A Sense of Place is also bound up with the sense of *aelwyd* or hearth, that warm and welcoming family home to which we return.

Each of these terms has an elusive nature – but, by following the steps outlined in this workbook you can begin to develop your own ideas. Even if you feel you know your place intimately, it's worth trying to describe it consciously so that you can pull out some of the elements for your visitors. A fresh look could illuminate something new for you.

making the most of this workbook

This Sense of Place workbook is designed to guide you through the steps that will improve your business's Sense of Place through developing your knowledge of your area and promoting it effectively to your visitors. Of course, not every section will be applicable to your business, so the self audit at the beginning will help you to work out which combination of the following elements you should focus on first – food, history and heritage, language, the great outdoors or design and decoration.

You can choose to work through the process on your own or, if you prefer, contact us for specialist support.

Tel: 029 2047 5303

Email:

tourism.industryadvice@wales.gsi.gov.uk

The workbook is designed to help you make the most of the distinctiveness of your own place, and begin to interpret it for visitors. By definition, Sense of Place must be a personal matter, so the advice in this workbook is provided in as broad a fashion as possible. It's not a strict blueprint full of 'dos' and 'don'ts', instead, it will allow you to cherry-pick ideas suited to your preferences and business plans.

Sense of Place is relevant to all tourism businesses – whatever size or sector of our industry – in all parts of Wales.

Develop Sense of Place at your own pace

You tailor your approach and set the pace. The workbook will guide you to sources of information, provide suggestions and inspire your ideas to help you achieve the very best results. Use it as a scrapbook to keep your ideas, thoughts and useful contacts and also to record progress. You may find that it becomes a valuable resource for others in your business – a team handbook for communicating your particular Sense of Place to your visitors and customers.

The workbook isn't designed to be read from cover to cover, rather, once you have carried out short self audit and first few exercises to develop an activity plan, you can dip in and out of the workbook focusing on the areas that are relevant to your business needs, and use it to help you to implement your plans.

The Useful Contacts area in each section provides information on other sources of information and support. These details are correct at time of print, but for the most up-to date contacts please see our website: www.wales.gov.uk/tourism

the self audit

This audit should help you to gauge how effective your business currently is at promoting a Sense of Place. It should also highlight the key areas that you could most easily develop to significantly enhance your customer's experience.

To start with, you need to imagine your visitors' experience of your business from the first approach right through to when you say goodbye.

EXERCISE: describing your place

This exercise will help you to identify what aspects of your environment visitors might well be interested in, and how you can help to give them access to information and experiences that will shape the quality and depth of experience they have of their visit.

Write a paragraph as if you were a visitor to the area – possibly a visitor to your own business – like writing a postcard to a friend, or if you prefer, as if you were a travel writer writing about the area for a guidebook.

In it, think of how you would communicate:

- The commonplace, the ordinary and the everyday
- The landscapes and landmarks
- Things connected with places and people – the way they live, communicate, work and play – then and now
- Traditions and culture
- What is unique, special and noteworthy about this place?

Try wherever possible to make comments about all the things listed above. If you find you can't comment on something e.g. traditions and culture, then now is a good time to do some research. Ask someone who has lived in the area a long time, or check out your local library for books on local history, customs, famous people landscape etc. The internet may also provide an array of interesting information you never knew about your area.

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It is likely that you have just communicated the kind of things that your guests would like to find out about – the kind of elements that you are perfectly placed to provide an introduction to.

EXERCISE: sense your place

We all experience and perceive our surroundings through the senses. Sometimes the information we pick up are very subtle e.g. certain smells and sounds. Often we may not be consciously aware of these things but they all aid us in building an overall picture of our experience – of a Sense of Place

Use your senses to describe your environment – both your own premises and the immediate vicinity:

What are the significant sights of this place? What sounds are particular to this place?.....

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Is there a particular smell around – e.g. food, flowers?.....

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Are there particular tastes that are associated with this place – e.g. food, drink?

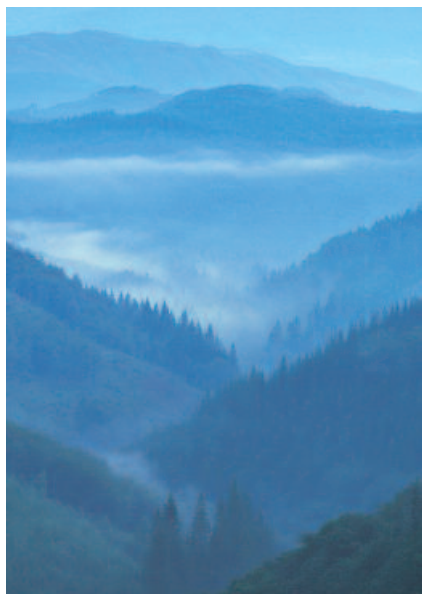
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.....

What are the textures of this place – e.g. the décor, the furniture, the buildings?.....

.....





If there are clear, significant, positive things that your senses pick up, then use and enhance them, both in the promotion of your business and in the experience you provide. If there are certain areas where there is nothing obviously significant, then this guide will provide suggestions as to how you could fill those gaps and provide a more complete and integrated sense of your place.

EXERCISE: from the outside looking in

Ask visitors, your customers and co-workers for their comments – what are their impressions of your place, what strikes them as interesting, unusual, charming or unmistakably Welsh. Jot their comments down here:

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EXERCISE: mapping out your Sense of Place

It is now time to combine what has been learnt through the audit, with exercises designed to identify possible challenges and opportunities for your business regarding introducing a Sense of Place.

First, revisit the audit.

Jot down five aspects that you scored poorly on, or that you feel you could develop further

1
2
3
4
5

Read through the paragraph you wrote for the 'Describing your place' exercise and circle five key words / aspects / experiences that you feel best typify the Sense of Place you want to promote through your business. Once you have decided on these five key things, write them down below

1
2
3
4
5

Now list three aspects that you identified through the Sense your Place exercise – positive or negative – i.e. 'no significant sounds'

1
2
3

Finally make a note of anything extra that your visitors or colleagues mentioned that was interesting, unusual or worth noting that you hadn't considered in the other exercises.

1
2
3

These answers provide the basis for developing good Sense of Place practice for your business.

In the first instance, you have identified where your business isn't performing at its best in terms of providing your guests with a Sense of Place.

Secondly, you have identified key things that visitors to your area or business are likely to be interested in. Look at how you can provide access to these experiences or give information that will lead your guests to these things.

Thirdly, you have identified how you can support a Sense of Place through the senses – where there are gaps and what things are already perceptible that you could use to help strengthen the experience

And finally you have checked your ideas and thoughts with others and added another useful dimension.

Using this information

Using these words and phrases, decide on the main impressions that stand out – perhaps there is a common thread throughout each of the exercises or a word or impression keeps appearing in different ways again and again.

Look at your business. Think about at least five ways in which you can utilise your better understanding of the components of your particular Sense of Place, and promote it or enhance it for your customers or visitors. Write down your initial ideas below – you don't have to come up with all your ideas just now - you may find that as you explore the different subject sections of this workbook further more ideas will surface, so you can continue to add to your ideas list as and when inspiration hits. Consider each of the areas below:

- **The information you provide** – that which is readily available to customers e.g. menus, information about your business, bedroom browsers, local information and promotional material. Importantly, this also includes information you and your staff communicate verbally to your customers.

How I can promote a Sense of Place through the information my business provides:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

- **Your people and how they interact with customers / visitors** – Are you and your team good ambassadors for your locality and region? Are you proactive in suggesting historic points of interest about the property, local produce, when market day is, local attractions, good places to visit, local legends, which restaurants have local or traditional Welsh dishes on the menu, good walks in the area? Can you and your team say good morning and good evening in Welsh and inform customers about what your town or village's name actually means?

What I can do to promote Sense of Place through the interaction my team and I have with our customers:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5





- **Your environment** – i.e. the external building, bedrooms, reception rooms, office, reception area, restaurant – do you have pictures that promote the locality / display the work of local artists? use local crafts to decorate your building or play Welsh music? Are certain parts of your building named after mountains or rivers in the vicinity or after people of historic note? Are signs bilingual? Are there traditional Welsh fabrics or other materials – slate, woods etc. that could enhance the surroundings?

What I can do to develop the Sense of Place using my immediate environment:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

- **The food and drink you provide** – Do you offer a selection of Welsh dishes or incorporate local produce in your food offering? Do you provide a bilingual menu and does it promote local produce or specialities in any way?

How I could develop a Welsh flavour for my business:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

- **The style of service you provide** – Do you give your visitors a very Welsh welcome? Are there any uniquely Welsh touches that you provide as part of the service you offer? Do you work in partnership with good local restaurants or accommodation providers or craftspeople to signpost their services or products to your customers? Consider this as a service not just to your visitors but also to the tourism community as a whole.

How I can improve my service style to better reflect the Sense of Place of my business

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

- **The products you sell or promote** - Do you sell local or Welsh gifts or crafts? Do you support the local economy by promoting what it has to offer in terms of food, arts, crafts, markets, events etc.?

How I can improve the product range that I sell/ promote to support the Sense of Place I am creating

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

- **The atmosphere you create** – Are you proactive in your welcome? Does it have a Welsh flavour, could you use Croeso instead of, or in addition to 'Welcome', Bore Da for 'Good Morning', Nos Da for 'Good night' and Hwyl fawr for 'Goodbye'? Are you active in signposting the very best that your area has to offer in terms of providing the visitor with a strong 'Sense of Place', do you play Welsh music in your communal areas?

How I can improve the atmosphere I create for our customers / guests to enhance the Sense of Place

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

- **How you promote your business** – Is the way you describe and promote your business to customers capitalising on your business's Sense of Place? Is there a good story to tell the press?

How I can enhance the promotion of my business by using elements of Sense of Place in my marketing material/ press activity to create a business advantage:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

The above becomes your Sense of Place 'to do' list. You needn't implement everything at once. Take it one step at a time, one theme at a time. Use the subject sections and their activities in the rest of the Workbook to help you to achieve your goals and provide more ideas and advice so that you can tick off your Sense of Place 'to do list' one by one.





understanding and defining your sense of place

Starting to use a Sense of Place

The audit will already have highlighted some areas of your business that could be enhanced through developing good Sense of Place practice, and it's quite possible that you already have some ideas.

The first step is defining what makes up your Sense of Place. If you can't define it or describe it, then there's no way that you will be able to promote it to your visitors. The term Sense of Place uses two key words – place, that which is tangible, and sense which deals with more subtle aspects and perceptions that may not be so tangible, but are key factors in building 'an experience'.

implementing a sense of place

Now turn to the workbook subject headings to find practical advice, tips and contacts that will help you to inspire further ideas as well as give you practical advice to develop your plans and implement them.

You can start in a modest way – you'll be surprised by how easy and inexpensive it is: a few words in Welsh, for example cost nothing. It can be simple, and you don't have to do it all at once. The slow and steady approach is often the best one to take.

Key things to consider for a successful Sense of Place plan:

- **Try to involve your staff** – they need to become ambassadors for Sense of Place too. The Welcome Host customer care scheme has developed a Cultural Exchange module which specifically looks at these issues. Welcome Host are listed in the Useful Contacts section.

- **Work with others**, including local tourism and community associations and local suppliers, to mutual benefit
- **Gather information**. Make sure that you know what's available and what's happening around you (attractions, sightseeing, activities, events, food and shopping) – in detail for about 20 miles and generally for about 50 miles. The internet can provide a good source of information but also try joining mailing lists, checking the local newspaper for up-to date information and working with your local Tourist Information Centre.
- **Continue to add to your knowledge and understanding** of your business's Sense of Place. Places, localities and their special attributes change over time, and you should be aware of this and continue to add new dimensions to this workbook to keep the visitor experience relevant and real.