

Welcoming Walkers and Cyclists to your business



Contents

- Walking and Cycling in the Kent Countryside
- Why Walkers and Cyclists
- Walker and Cyclists Profiles
- Needs and Adjustments
- Marketing
- Putting it all together – the checklist
- Further Resources and Contact information

Walking and Cycling in the Kent Countryside

Kent is a fantastic place to walk and cycle. With outstanding landscape and countryside, an extensive network of footpaths, and excellent transport links it provides an easily accessible way of finding your space in the countryside.

The Kent Downs AONB is a nationally protected landscape. Its special characteristics include its dramatic landform and views, rich habitats, extensive ancient woodland, mixed farmland, historic and built heritage and its tranquillity and remoteness. The Kent Downs AONB covers a quarter of Kent and welcomes 20,000,000 visitors, a third of all visitors to Kent. The High Weald AONB also extends into Kent.

In addition to a dense network of footpaths (7,000km) Kent has many high profile walking routes: the Saxon Shore Way, Greensand Way, and three pilgrimage routes including the Pilgrim's Way and the Via Francigena – the only European cultural route in the UK.

The North Downs Way extends through the country to Dover from Farnham in Surrey and is one of 15 National Trails. National Trails are long distance walks through some of the very best landscapes the UK has to offer. They are special – they have been designated by the Government and are managed to a set of Quality Standards that set them above other routes. It follows an ancient pre-historic route, and includes the Pilgrimage Routes.

https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/trails/north-downs-way/

In addition, a new England's Coast Path which runs from the Wash through to Southampton, is opening up in sections, including Kent:

https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/england-coast-path-route-description-landing-page/

There are also great cycling routes, such as the National Cycle Route 1 from Dover to the north of Scotland, and regional routes that are great for day trippers.

Discover more of Kent's routes on Explore Kent <https://explorekent.org/>



Walking and cycling are green forms of travel and by encouraging visitors to explore on foot or by bike they will explore further and stay longer in this beautiful countryside in a more sustainable way.

Why Walkers and Cyclists?

Walking and cycling are the two most popular outdoor pursuits¹ and they are increasing markets:

Pre-COVID 19 there was already an increase in people spending time outdoors², and recent events have meant more appreciation for the countryside, whether this is for mental or physical health, finding something for the family to do, or meeting up with friends and family safely.

Walking and cycling tourism can encourage visitors to explore less visited areas and stay longer, and is a good way to increase visitors numbers during the Autumn and Winter. Experiencing an area by foot allows visitors to become fully immersed in the environment, promoting interaction between visitors/tourists and the local landscape, community culture and nature.



By recognising Walkers and Cyclists needs and motivations you can help them feel welcome and provide a hassle-free experience. Leading to good reviews, increased spend and repeat visits.

¹ VisitEngland Discover England Fund Research Outdoor Activities (2018)

²Monitoring Engagement with the Natural Environment

Who are they?

It is worth recognising that this sector is diverse and there are different types of walkers and cyclists. Broadly they are:

Walkers	Cyclists
<p>Enthusiast Driven by completing a challenging distance. They tend to follow a linear route, and national trails are a draw. They make up about 10% of all walkers. They prefer budget accommodation and may not stay more than one night. Whilst they are harder to engage with other activities besides walking, they do need refreshment stops and will take in important places of interest.</p>	<p>Touring On long linear or circular journeys. They stay min one night, generally travel by bike or combine with train. Carrying everything with them.</p>
<p>Adventurer Driven by a more challenging outdoor activity such as rock climbing, windsurfing, for example. They are primarily interested in doing the activity. They may combine walking and cycling with this, especially more challenging cycling. Tend to be younger, pre-children.</p>	<p>Enthusiasts Mountain bikers, or road cyclist. They bring the bike in the car for a short break.</p>
<p>Explorers Slightly older approx. 45+, either have older children, grown up or no children. Still want a challenge, but want to combine it with comfort, or a treat. Can be a couple or, increasingly groups of friends. They are looking for shorter walkers - <5miles. Walking is part of the experience rather than the sole experience, therefore an itinerary that includes interesting walks, places to visit or things to do plus refreshment are appealing.</p>	<p>Casual Part of a longer holiday, they might borrow or hire a bike when they arrive.</p>
<p>Day trippers This includes families and casual walkers, out for leisure and quality family time. Often includes multi-generational groups so catering for something for everyone.</p>	<p>Day trippers (including for events). May include cycling clubs, including from south London, all stopping for coffee and cake! As well as more casual cyclists out for a short cycle that they can feel safe doing.</p>
<p>Others: Group Travel – groups can be organised walks by the Ramblers, or walking festivals, or guided tours, or they can be Walking tour organisers or the larger travel trade operators. Its important to know how you might welcome groups, such as set menus, a separate place to gather, or a special guided tour or introduction.</p>	
<p>Dog owners – many walkers are dog owners, so being dog-friendly will increase your appeal. Some ideas for being dog-friendly include:</p>	

- Water and food bowls for each pet
- Area where dogs can be 'toiletted' with suitable disposable equipment
- Dog cleaning
- Storage for animal crates
- An exercise area which is secure.
- Details for vets, pet supplies, local walks, and local places which welcome dogs.
- Make it clear on your website if you are 'dog-friendly'.

Key needs for walkers and cyclists:

Local route knowledge. It is important for you to know what your local walking and cycling routes are, and know the variety of terrain and difficulty levels.

A good walk for Explorers for example includes:

- Less than 5 miles
- Great views
- Interesting things to see or do
- Refreshment stops – midway or at the end

Whereas Enthusiasts are more interested in where the next stop may be on the North Downs Way or other long distance route.

To find routes visit:

- Explore Kent: <https://explorekent.org/> - you may find a published route on your doorstep.
- For the North Downs Way - https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/trails/north-downs-way/
- Ordnance Survey maps
- Apps such as Kent Connected (which also shows public transport links), ViewRanger and All Trails may show popular routes near you.

Local area knowledge

As we have seen for many visitors walking and cycling is just part of a wider visit, and you can help them discover what else is available locally. This will make your area appealing and encourage longer stays. You might create a suggested itinerary for people taking in a popular walk with other things to do.

Other interests for walkers and cyclists include:

- Cultural and natural heritage – not just the big honeypot sites, but less well known sites such as churches, archaeological sites or sculptures, as well as places with cultural associations with artists, writers or historic figures or ways of life. Areas of important natural habitats, or opportunities to spot wildlife.
- Local life – farmers markets, events and festivals
- Food and drink – local and sustainable
- Gardens and parks
- Wellbeing activities – yoga, forest bathing, meditation
- Other outdoor activities – walking tours, watersports, boating, horse-riding.

Your location

Make it easy and obvious to find your business – include travel and directions on your web-site, including from public transport and links to timetables. You could use an app such as [what3words](#) to pinpoint your location if it is hard to find. Include what is special about your area, and if you are in the Kent Downs, or along the North Downs Way.

Weather

There's no such thing as bad weather just the wrong clothing! but make sure people are warm and cosy when they come in (or cooled down when it's hot!)

If the weather is too bad for long walking or cycling suggest alternative easier routes or indoor activities.

Suggested Adjustments

Below are a number of low costs suggestions, these are not exhaustive, and you may find ideas by researching other walking/cycling friendly businesses.

For everyone: **A warm and empathetic welcome, whatever the weather!**

- Information before they arrive online about walking and cycling in the area
- Information at the venue – maps, access to route information, recommended routes.
- Space for drying outdoor clothing and footwear
- Boot scrapers, and/or access to water and a stiff brush for cleaning
- Water bottles filled for free, and hot water for flasks
- Somewhere safe to store backpacks
- First aid kit for minor scrapes (you do not have to administer) and details for nearest doctors/physio etc.
- Wi-Fi throughout so that routes can be found online

For cyclists

- Knowledge of local cycle routes, and level of difficulty
- Knowledge of nearest cycle repairs shops
- Nearby cycle hire
- A safe place to lock up bikes, (consider lockable and well lit storage if overnight)
- Bike washing facility (eg a hosepipe)
- Basic tools such as a puncture repair kit and pump available
- Signposting to laundry facilities

The Extra Mile

Comfort

- Epsom salts for baths and foot spas
- Book ahead massages or treatments
- Foot coverings (slippers) or fluffy mats
- Boot cleaning service
- Sell basic walking supplies such as socks, hats, capes, water bottles etc.

Food and drink

- Walkers and cyclist may not be able to fit in with your meal times – try and be flexible.
- Early or packed breakfast (from 7am)
- Packed lunches with local produce and drink (at a charge)
- Special walkers themed big breakfasts/ploughmans or hearty dinners
- Onsite laundry facilities

For Cyclists

- Ebike charging
- Mechanical Knowledge
- Roadside support
- Bike hire – either directly from yourself or by pre- arrangement with local company.

Other

- Discounts for those arriving by foot, bike (or horse!)
- GPS devices to borrow
- Walkers/cyclists/countryside magazines and books to inspire
- Visitor books for walkers to leave notes on their favourite walks.
- Guided tours to explore the landscape or places 'off the beaten track'
- A baggage transfer services (at a charge)
- Bike or backpack lockers
- Raincoats to borrow
- Shower facilities

Encouraging longer stays and higher spend

- For walkers on linear routes suggest a rest day and extra night
 - 'Netwalk' with other local businesses to develop itineraries and the walking offer locally so that visitors can stay 1 or 2 days longer. Use your local knowledge to pass on to visitors and send them to places you think are great too.
 - Offer transport options so that they can do a linear or circular walk in another location
 - Make contact with a walking tour provider to offer your accommodation or businesses.
-

Marketing

Social media and online marketing impact has had a huge impact on how visitors research trips. It has transformed decision making thanks to sharing of experiences and enabling businesses to reach visitors directly in a cost-effective way. Here are some tips on how you can improve your online marketing.

Create engaging content

Ensure your website reflects your personal story – people love and trust personal contact, so share why you set up your business and what you think is special about it.

Post engaging stories about the routes in your area, what there is to see, or local events such as farmers markets or walking festivals so that visitors see there are other things to see and do in the area.

Mention your location, whether you are on popular walking trails, and what the local walking and cycling is like.

Inspire by using images that reflect the experience of walking and cycling – landscapes, local life, people in walking gear.

Research your SEO keywords – use words like ‘walking/cycling in Kent’, best walks in Kent, Best pub/tours/accommodation for walkers and cyclists, North Downs Way and Kent Downs, Kent Countryside etc

Highlight your facilities for walkers and cyclists.

Make it as easy as possible to make a booking, or contact you – the less clicks the better. And to find you! Use apps such as what3words to pinpoint your entrance.

Research other websites from similar businesses in other areas of the country, particularly around national trails and national parks to give you ideas.

Link to other websites from places that target walkers, and ask a reciprocal link.

Promote

Social media is one of the best ways to promote your business as it reaches people directly who are interested in walking and cycling at little cost apart from time. Choose your channels – Instagram and Facebook are the most popular, and less accounts are easier to manage. You can also link your Instagram feed to your Facebook account.

Create content related to walking and cycling in your area. Post stories on Instagram featuring hidden history, best views, walkers tucking into tea and cakes or cyclists enjoying a local ale (at the end of the ride). Try and take good quality pictures.

Share other people’s posts related to walking and cycling. Encourage your visitors and guests to tag you in their posts.

Tag similar organisations such as Kent Downs, National Trail, Explore Kent, Cycling UK, for example together with other businesses in the local area, and any tourism groups such as Visit Canterbury or White Cliffs Country – you may also have a local tourism group that is well followed already. Or set up your own! Post to local community groups, as they often has friends and family to stay and are looking for things to do.

Keep your personal and business accounts separate and follow relevant businesses or people.

But, with increased social media comes a higher expectation for response, so be prepared, and set up posts when people will be looking at their phones – first thing in the morning and in the evening for example and be present to respond to questions and queries and to thank people for nice comments.

Consider paid Facebook ads, but always check return on investment. Social media posts may be enough.

Join the Cycling UK Cyclists Welcome Directory.

Find out if there are local walking and cycling groups in your area and ask them to come to you and share their experiences. Network with other businesses and share their information.

Use customer email listings – but check that you have permission.

If you are on the North Downs Way National Trail you can add your details to the website: [National Trail North Downs Way](#) – click on ‘add information’ in the top menu and register.

Review

Monitor what is working and what is not. Ask people where they heard about you. Ask for feedback on services. Use quotes from good reviews, and post high ratings from TripAdvisor for example.

Check Google Analytics (a free service) to see where website traffic is coming from. Monitor increase in followers and which posts they responded to.

Keep updated and see what people are talking about by subscribing to popular walking magazines, and web-sites.

Ask your customers what they thought and what they could improve. Either face to face, or a short on site or follow up survey.

Putting it all together

- Research your routes, the surrounding area and wider offer
- Review your facilities offer using the checklist below
- Update your web-site, and any other listings and promote!

Walkers and Cyclist Checklist

Standard level of support	Already have ✓	Want to do ✓
Friendly environment, a warm welcome.		
Staff briefed in welcoming walkers and cyclists		
Happy to accommodate cyclists and walkers kit, space for rucksacks, clothing, and helmets during their visit.		
Basic first aid essentials such as plasters, treatments for minor grazes, blisters, stings, bruises and cuts available for visitors (you are not expected to provide first aid just offer supplies).		
Willing to refill water bottles/flasks free of charge with hot/cold water		
Boot scrapers/water and stiff brush		
Cycle stands or secure structures where bikes can be chained up.		
Personal knowledge of local routes		
Free Wi-Fi		
Have information available such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Ordnance Survey maps. • Local area maps and leaflets, walks and cycle routes (for reference or for sale) • Refreshment/ accommodation/ places to visit information • Details of local bike or walking supplies, repairs, and hire. • Details for local public transport and taxi facilities. • Weather information 		
Is it easy to find me, are directions and travel information clear online?		

Enhanced support	Already have ✓	Want to do ✓
Extra comforts Mats, bath salts, foot spas etc		
Themed food and drink offer		
Puncture repair kit and bike tool kit.		
Overnight lockable cycle storage		
Bike washing		
Lockable backpack storage		
Baggage transfer service		
Boot cleaning materials and kit		
Provision of packed lunches/ breakfasts		
Guided tours		
Inspirational magazines and books		
Visitor book with route feedback		
Laundry facilities		
Network with other businesses		
GPS units		
Bike hire		
Raincoats		
Showers		

Additional notes/ideas:

Contact information

Cycling UK

Website www.cyclinguk.org

Email Experience@cyclinguk.org

Explore Kent

Website <https://explorekent.org/>

Email explorekent@kent.gov.uk

Kent Downs AONB

Website: kentdowns.org.uk

Email: Rebecca.rees@kentdowns.org.uk



kentdownsaonb



kent_downs_aonb



KentDownsAONB

Further Resources



Cycle Friendly Places

Does your hospitality or accommodation business go the extra mile to welcome cyclists?

Cycle Friendly Places are recognised and celebrated for excellence in service and facilities for cyclists.

Exclusive training, resources and promotion to Cycling UK's network of 71,000 members

Stay up to date: [Cyclinguk.org/cyclefriendlyplaces](https://cyclinguk.org/cyclefriendlyplaces)

Contact us at Experience@cyclinguk.org

Walkers Accreditation Schemes

At present the Kent Downs AONB or Explore Kent do not run accreditation schemes. Instead we hope to encourage a broad range of businesses to review and promote services to walkers, so we can be confident in featuring their business on our website, and the North Downs Way website. There are however two schemes which run nationally in the UK which may be of interest.

- Visit England have a Walkers Welcome scheme for accommodation businesses who are already quality assessed by VE:

<https://www.visitenglandassessmentservices.com/our-schemes/welcome-schemes/>

and,

- The Walkers are Welcome Scheme is for towns and villages who, collectively would like to be welcoming to walkers. <https://walkersarewelcome.org.uk/>

EXPERIENCE

Experience is a new tourism project to develop a long-lasting experiential off-season visitor economy for Kent. Opportunities for your business include:

- Experience Product development support – do you have expertise or passion that you could turn into a tourism product to meet a growing market for local and authentic experiences. These could be anything from forest bathing, bread baking, wood crafting or artisan workshops to name a few. Visit Kent and the Kent Downs AONB are offering development support – see here [Visit Kent Experience Development Programme](#) and <https://www.kentdowns.org.uk/our-projects/experiencebusiness/>
- Further training – including North Downs Way Ambassador programme.
- Promotion of the walking and cycling offer in the Kent Downs through Experiences and Inspirational Itineraries
- Be part of a network of businesses that have shared values for protecting the landscape

See our website for more details and to sign up: [Kent Downs Experience](#)



EUROPEAN UNION

Co-financed by the European Union and the European Regional Development Fund.