

# Ashford Borough Factsheet

The Experiential Offer – Opportunities & Gaps

September 2020



The following factsheet will review:

- ✓ Key trends that resonate with the Ashford Borough offer
- ✓ Area product strengths & opportunities
- ✓ Building on the current product for Ashford, Tenterden and surrounding villages
- ✓ Ashford Borough specific
  - ✓ Opportunities & examples
  - ✓ Gaps & considerations
- ✓ Opportunities offered by the NDW & Kent Downs AONB
- ✓ Experience product snapshot grid highlighting seasonal opportunities

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# Key trends that resonate with the Ashford Borough offer

Ashford Borough benefits from good rail and road connectivity, linking London and the continent in less than an hour. Home to some of Kent’s most well-known vineyards like Chapel Down and Gusbourne, it also has a considerable section of the North Downs Way with outstanding areas such as the Wye Downs, Westwell and Chilham. This is complemented by village gems such as Smarden, Biddenden and the market town of Tenterden.

Developing travel experiences, is an effective way for a destination to reach and influence customers. From recent research we already know that:

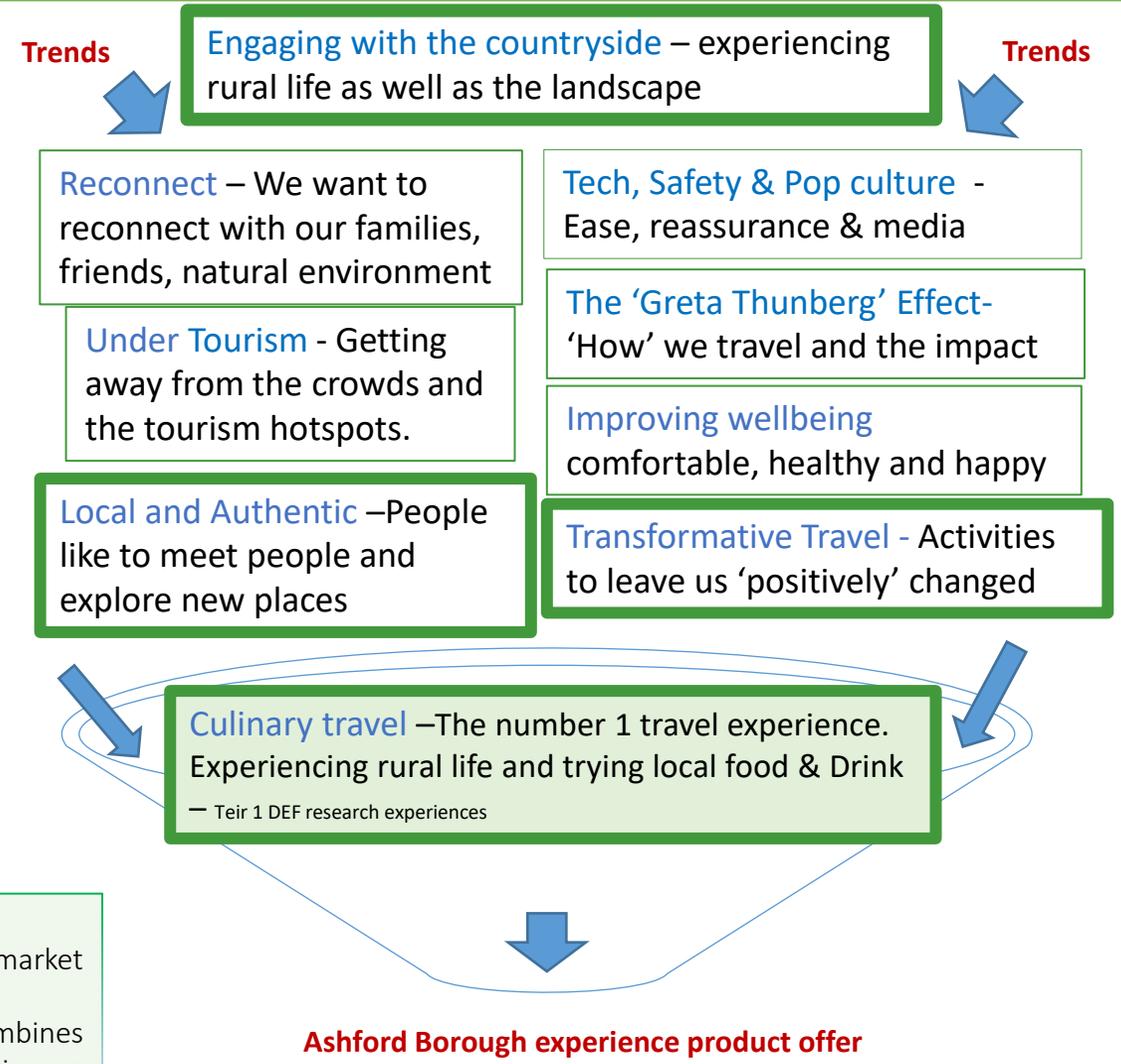
- ✓ **BOOK IN ADVANCE** - When booking an experience, 65% of the domestic market book before leaving home.
- ✓ **WILL TRAVEL UP TO 1 HOUR** - Approximately 80% of domestic customers looking to book an experience are more than prepared to travel up to an hour, any longer and the % drops dramatically.
- ✓ **EXPERIENCES INFLUENCE DESTINATION CHOICE** - Nearly 60% of the domestic market are influenced by an experience when selecting a destination

If Ashford is to position itself as a leading Food & Drink destination, then quality and authenticity needs to run through all culinary touch points:

**The Distance travelled** – Celebrating those hospitality providers who source local to ensure quality and sustainability.

**Showcasing excellence** – Food & Drink Festivals in the borough should be encouraged to showcase the best producers from the surrounding area to continually reconfirm the centre of excellence proposition to the consumer.

**The Value of Wine:**  
 UK Vineyard acreage has tripled since 2000; UK wine exports have doubled with 65% of the export market going to USA and Scandinavia, both strong inbound travel markets to the UK.  
 2020 VisitEngland new business gold award went to Vine & Country Tours , Why? Their product combines quality tours of ‘off the beaten track’ vineyards and food producers with seasonal dining experiences delivered with local passion.







# Building on the current product for Ashford Borough

**The food & drink back story** – Increasingly consumers want to know where their food and drink comes from - The close proximity of grower to retailer in Ashford Borough opens up the opportunity to combine both hop garden and brewer/ Orchard and cider maker and vineyard to winery or cow to cheese!

**The vineyard trail** – With the county’s highest concentration of vineyards and the largest number of hectares under vine; wine tourism offers Ashford the opportunity to be an experience product leader in this field.

**Food miles and gastro pubs** – The Borough is known for heritage villages & towns; where in many instances the heritage pub/ tearoom offer is the only economic engager for the day visitor. Greater focus on the local food producers and telling this story, highlighting seasonality can create a reason to travel.

**Walking through heritage** Capitalising on the NDW/ AONBs and regional routes that criss cross the area. This is a product that can be linked to the villages pubs and churches.

**Transformative and wellbeing** focus: the **new pilgrimage** to find yourself and to reconnect using the resource of the NDW walk guided or unguided linking to the above themes.

**Niche experiences** – Although niche, the creative/ rural craft courses and heritage insider experiences, such as driving a steam train, meeting a big cat or learning a rural craft have both the potential to drive off season visits and also overnight stays.

Strengthened and enhanced via a sustainable commitment



MANY OF THESE PRODUCT AREAS ARE INTERLINKED



# Ashford Borough experience product opportunities

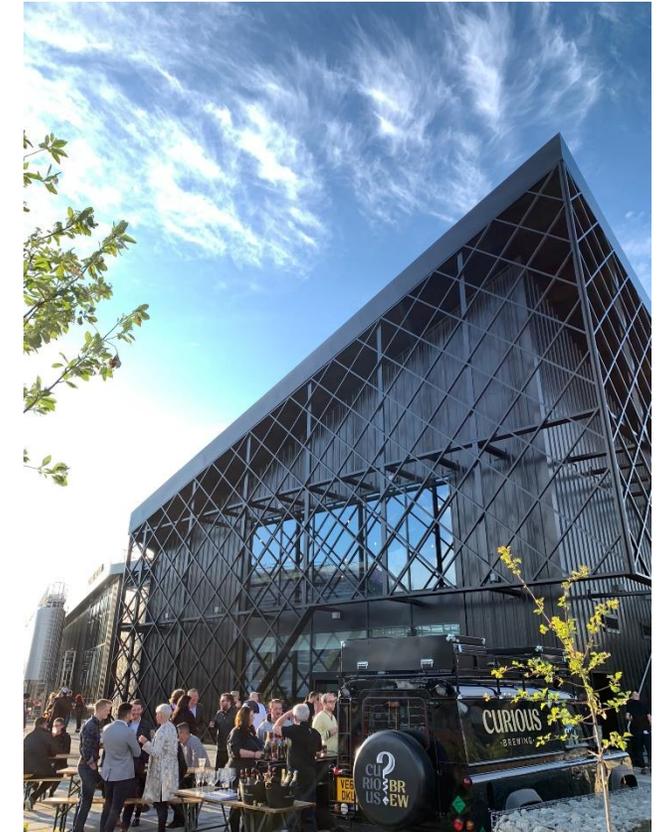
**Product Strengths:** The quality of the food & drink offer, specifically the concentration and variation of the vineyards both private and open to the public. Breadth of offer across Food & Drink from brewers, distillers, wineries as well as cider, farm shops and growers.

Experience	Lead Opportunity underutilised at present	Product example
Vineyards	Ashford district has one of the highest concentration of vineyards in the south of England, with new vineyards being planned and planted continually. Although food & drink as an experience message is strong, the density and quality of the vineyards and wineries in the district indicates that this product should stand out as a destination trigger. Wine production in the SE has increased 3-fold since 2017 with continual forecast growth, at present visitor figures show that the wine tourism market currently breaks down at 86% domestic and 14% international.	A collegiate approach to promoting an area as a leading wine region has worked effectively for the following areas: Margret River – Western Australia Willamette Valley - Oregon, USA
The wider Food & Drink Experience	Food & drink is the most popular product experience on the TripAdvisor and Airbnb platforms. But, gone are the days where we just want it to taste good! An increased awareness of the importance of traceable and sustainable food sourcing, has led to the profile of the grower being almost as important as the chef. Brewers, distillers & cider makers are offering tours and tastings, growers and farmers are offering dining experiences e.g. @the_wonky_parsnip offers a supper club in their polytunnels. Tracing from fork to fork and sharing the narrative is so important if Ashford wants to be seen as a first-rate food & drink destination.	One of the best examples of farm/ food diversification to deliver a travel experience is @florishproduce in Cambridgeshire. A multi award winning producer, educator and experience deliverer.
Walking and Cycling (incorporating village and town)	The District has one of the longest sections of the NDW along with a fair share of Landscape honeypots like the Wye Downs... all of which form the perfect backdrop to a walking and cycling product. Additional routes like the High Weald Landscape Trail, the Stour Valley and Greensand Way also offer a varied selection of walking terrain. The key appears to be delivering product that offers the consumer the opportunity to join guided groups as well as self-guided options, overcoming any fears about exploring the countryside away from home. There is also the opportunity to work collectively with other districts to raise the profile of the pilgrimage/ wellbeing product in relation to the NDW. There are numerous walking festivals that offer the opportunity to join a walks programme – e.g. The White Cliffs Festival (Dover) however to appeal to a broader customer base, joint themed festivals could engage more people e.g. Walking and Wine	SW coast path guided walking experiences on Airbnb Walk Scilly is held first week of April and incorporates a different theme on every walk over the 5 day programme e.g. Maritime history, foraging, wildlife spotting, fossil hunting etc.. Cycle UK projects
Heritage Villages & Towns	The appeal of the village pub experience is consistently ranked highly for both domestic and international visitors, yet as the villages often lack a retail experience, dwell time averages 1-2 hours - this can be extended by adding a walking route to start or finish in a village location. Independent retailers in small market towns also offer a welcome change from the major chains and shopping centres and their individual stories can be used to add a back story to the destination.	Midhurst circular walk – as a small market town with less than 50 high street businesses, they promote pre and post breakfast, lunch and dinner walking routes to engage the customer



# Ashford Borough Product Priorities – Opportunities & Gaps

	Primary Themes	Gaps analysis for selected themes
Ashford	Food and drink	<p>This is a real strength for the district, where wine is a dominant feature. Not only does the district house leading brands such as Chapel Down, Gusbourne and Curious Brew, but it also has the small family producers such as Nightingale Cider Co. and Westwell Wines.</p> <p>By focusing on the experience of visiting, learning and sampling the produce, the district can position itself at the heart of food and drink production for the county. However, there are some gaps:</p> <p>Events - The events programme delivered around food and drink should nurture and showcase homegrown talent, at present many of the food &amp; drink events are delivered by national events organisers who although try to recruit local exhibitors do not have an underlying commitment to ‘buy local’. As a result, an opportunity is missed to introduce residents let alone visitors to the borough and Kent wide offer.</p> <p>Visitors want to experience the back story as well as the food on the plate, when this comes together as a complete product it is a winning formula. Encouraging the development of experience food &amp; drink products, that takes the consumer on a complete journey and builds a relationship, and will galvanise Ashford’s position as a premier food &amp; drink destination.</p> <p>This connection with the food and drink journey is also a great way to connect visitors with the borough’s walking and cycling product, there are several vineyards located directly on the NDW, along with farm based accommodation and numerous rural gastro pubs that pride themselves to be sourcing local, so providing a great opportunity to promote culinary sections of the North Downs Way or Stour Valley Way.</p>

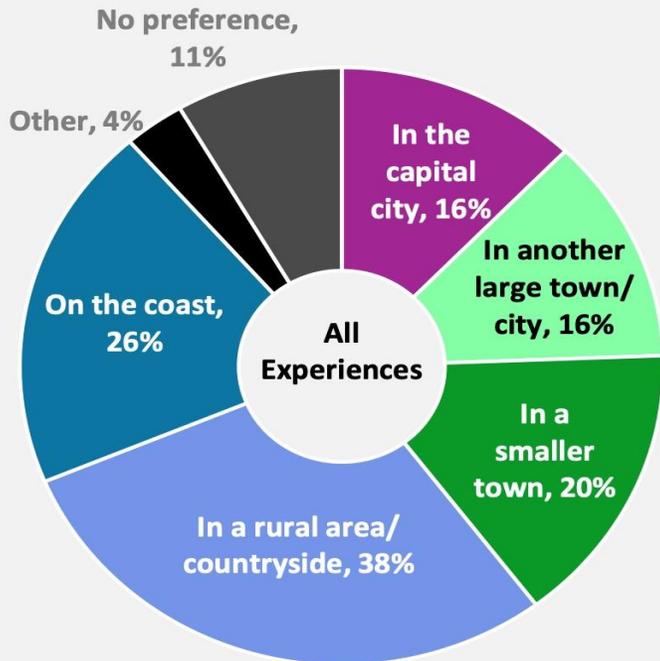


## Food & Drink

# The Value of the North Downs Product

Ashford district has a considerable section of the NDW running through the district, linking villages such as Charing, Wye and Chilham, along with key viewing points such as the Wye Downs and the devils kneading trough, all within easy access to the SE rail network. This product is all but packaged and ready to go and offers a great opportunity to encourage overnight stay. However the wider/ casual walker is still relatively unaware of the offer. We know from research that the consumer wants to engage with the countryside; is very keen on culinary tourism and welcomes the opportunity to combine a leisurely country walk as part of their visit, therefore weaving an accessible short walk/ cycle ride proposition alongside the core food & drink offer which creates a much stronger basis to extend a day trip into an overnight stay. The NDW/ Pilgrims Way also opens up the opportunity for Ashford to integrate a transformative/ wellbeing experience into its countryside offer.

## Domestic Market Interest



- ❖ The Discover England Experiences research (June 2019) highlights the potential to develop product in the rural area, capturing the following insights for shaping new experiences:
  - ❖ There is a high interest in engaging with a rural product for the domestic audience with 38% stating their preference for the countryside, rural area. International preference was less, however is still represented by 29%.
  - ❖ Journey time to an experience was a factor with 85% willing to travel up to 1 hour, any longer saw a dramatic drop.
- They want the experience to be:
- ✓ Authentic & Unique
  - ✓ Create a distinctive memory
  - ✓ Deliver cultural or historical immersion
  - ✓ Provide a challenge that they don't have access to at home

The North Downs Way & Kent Downs AONB delivers against all these consumer requirements. An authentic rural and historical experience that combines key interest points such as food & drink and the rural English pub.

## The Ashford Opportunity

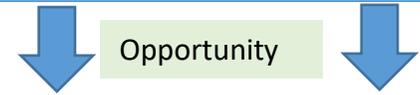
- Accessible countryside – Road and rail
- The offer included – Food & Drink, Rural, Heritage villages
- Potential for SE London Market/ European Market

### Ashford needs it's visitors to:

- Increase overnight stays & extend the season
- See the destination as a leader for Food & Drink
- Get off the beaten track and explore – Vineyards & Villages

### Tapping into current trends

- Culinary Tourism – NDW is surrounded by farms, vineyards etc
- Transformative & wellbeing experiences
- Under tourism – visitors wanting to get away from city hot spots



## The added value of the North Downs:

- Accessibility via public transport; the appeal of engaging with rural life; the opportunity to link rural based attractions with the walking route e.g. vineyards like Westwell
- Adaptation of the pilgrimage product could reposition the route as a transformative short break experience linking to Canterbury
- Pilgrims Way/ North Downs Way is an established product
- This product can be self guided or guide led – walking or cycling

## What makes a good walking experience?

- ✓ Landscape/ views/ architectural vistas
- ✓ historical or cultural insight often delivered as insider knowledge
- ✓ A chance to relax, unwind and recharge – linking to the well-being and mindfulness trend.

# Engaging the visitor with the landscape

Example experience – comparison with the Charing to Eastwell section of NDW




★ 4.93 (69) · Chichester District  
Halnaker tree tunnel and windmill walk  
Nature walk · 2.5 hours  
**From £16/person**

Experience products: E.g. Food & Drink – Hidden Heritage – Literary – Agricultural Tours – Food & Drink – Wellness

How do visitors engage with the countryside?

Lead product: North Downs  
Way/ AONB/ England coast path  
Walking / Cycling/Nature

Local  
Day visitor  
Leisure walker/ group tour  
Families  
Outdoor activity is not the main reason for travel  
Local/ Domestic/ group international  
Cross segment appeal  
Product; 1-2 hours walking combined with other attractions - often circular routes to car park with other products  
Barriers: Concern about getting lost, accessing the countryside, weather

1-2 day options combined with other product  
Repeat visitor  
Walking/ cycling as 'part of' not main reason  
Domestic 1-2 hour journey time/ rural retreaters/ active  
Product: 1/2 day - 2 days - regular walkers, time poor - mid -higher range accommodation/ Unique Airbnb/ looking to combine other experiences  
Barriers: Time, need to relax, competition from other activities, weather

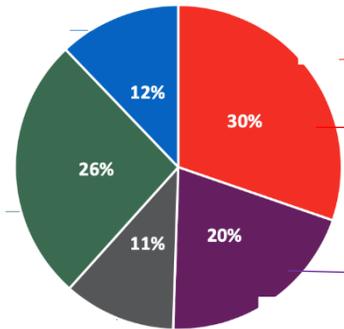
Casual / moderate walker / cyclist with limited time  
Long distance walker/ hiker/cyclist  
Solo traveller/ couples/groups  
Hikers / mountain biker/ route cyclist  
Trail collectors  
Domestic & International  
Product - self guided/ looking for planning and local knowledge assistance to assist own planning - camping, Airbnb ,B&B  
Barriers: appeal of other trails, baggage carrying service/ lack of

Casual/ leisure walker/ cyclists

## Who are the lead segments?

The countryside appeals across all VisitEngland segments, however there is greater resonance for the Ashford District offer with segments 1&2.

1. COUNTRY-LOVING TRADITIONALISTS
2. FUN IN THE SUN
3. FUSS-FREE VALUE SEEKERS
4. FREE AND EASY MINI-BREAKERS
5. ASPIRATIONAL FAMILY FUN



### 1. COUNTRY-LOVING TRADITIONALISTS

Empty nesters with traditional values, they are likely to have recently taken a countryside break in England. Good quality, secure accommodation is a priority when booking a holiday.

### 2. FUN IN THE SUN

Typically parents looking for family-orientated summer holidays where beaches play a starring role. Tend to seek cheaper, more 'social' alternatives to hotel accommodation, such as caravans or holiday camps.

Primary walking/ cycling segments - casual

# Appendix 1

## Kent/Lead District Snapshot - Strength, Opportunity and Gap analysis

– Experience led product only

Please note: This is not a definitive list of the county's tourism product, each district factsheet will have a more in-depth product snapshot.

**Strength (S)** – The product is already established but could be more experiential/ season lengthened

**Opportunity (O)** – There is an opportunity to develop this product to raise the profile of the area through experience

**Gap for development (G)** – There is a consumer interest and potential for the destination to showcase this product

Seasonality Key for product delivery (Actual and Potential)

<b>High</b>	Potential for high product delivery in this quarter – This product may not be currently delivering in this month
<b>Med</b>	Potential for Medium level product delivery in this quarter due to - weather, product, availability of local support
<b>Low</b>	Low product delivery in this quarter due to – Reliance on weather, volunteer base, product availability

Product Grid	Kent (All)	Kent Downs AONB	White Cliffs Country NDW/AONB	Folkestone & Hythe District	Canterbury NDW/ AONB	Thanet	Ashford NDW/AONB	Tun Wells	Gravesham NDW/AONB	Medway	Seasonality			
											Jan - Mar	Apr - June	July - Sept	Oct - Dec
Golf	O		S/O	O			O							
Hidden Heritage	S	S/O	O	O/S	S/O	O	S	S	S/O	S/O				
Archaeology	O		O/G		O/G					O				
Gardens/ Gardening Courses	S/O	O		O			O	S	O					
Fossil Hunting	O		O	O/S	O	O								
Military heritage	O		S	S			O		S/O	S				

Product Grid	Kent (All)	Kent Downs AONB	White Cliffs Country NDW/AONB	Folkestone & Hythe District	Canterbury NDW/ AONB	Thanet	Ashford NDW/AONB	Tun Wells	Gravesham NDW/AONB	Medway	Seasonality			
											Jan - Mar	Apr - June	July - Sept	Oct - Dec
Wildlife	O	S	S/O	S/O	S/O	O	O	O	O	O				
Walking & Cycling	S/O	S	O/G	O/G	O/G	O	S/O	O/G	O/G	O/G				
Water sports	O	O	O	O	O	O								
Food & Drink	S	S/O	O	S/O	S	O	S/O	O	O/G	O				
Multicultural	O	G	O	O	O	O	O		S/O	O				
Foraging	O	S/O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O					
Pilgrimage	O	S/O	S/O		S/O		O		O	O				
Photography	O/G	S/O	O/G	O/G	O/G	O/G	O	O	O	O				
Agriculture		S/O	S/O	S/O	S/O	O	S	S	O					
Vineyards	S/O	O	O	O	O		S	O	O					
Theatre/ Music	O		O	S/O	S/O	S/O		S/O		O				
Creative courses	O	O	O	S/O/G	O	S/O/G	O	O	O	O				

Product Grid	Kent (All)	Kent Downs AONB	White Cliffs Country NDW/AONB	Folkestone & Hythe District	Canterbury NDW/ AONB	Thanet	Ashford NDW/AONB	Tun Wells	Gravesham NDW/AONB	Medway	Seasonality			
											Jan - Mar	Apr - June	July - Sept	Oct - Dec
Art tours	O			S/O/G		O				O				
Lux escapes	O			S/O	O		O	O						
Wellbeing	O	S/O	O	O	O	O	O	S/O	O	O				
Maritime	S/O		O	O	O				S	S				
Seafood	O		O	S/O	O	O								
Outdoor pursuits			O	O/S	O	S/O								
Events	S/O		O	S/O	S/O	S/O/G	O	O	O	S/O				
Markets	O				O		O	O	O	O				
Retro culture	O		O	O	O	S				O				
Pop Culture	O			O		O			O	O				
Screen tours	O		O	O	O/G	O/G	O			S/O				
Fishing	O		O	O	O	O								
Cooking	O	O	O	S/O	O	O	S/O	O	O	O				
Family/ small group focus			O	O	S/O	S	O	O	O	O				
Bespoke tours	S	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O				

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