



Biker Tourism

Attracting motorcyclists to NI





Introduction

This short booklet provides guidance for small businesses that are interested in increasing their trade by targeting tourists travelling by motorbike.

Northern Ireland already has a long tradition of attracting bikers with key events and attractions such as the North West 200 and the Joey Dunlop memorial. This pilot project is investigating whether there are opportunities to attract more bikers throughout the year and into the more rural areas.

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- Coleraine Local Action Group Ltd.
- Magherafelt Area Partnership Ltd.
- Roe Valley Rural Development Ltd.
- Rural Area Partnership in Derry Ltd.
- North Antrim LEADER Ltd. and
- LEADER+ Dumfries & Galloway

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Helen Keys

Part One: The market

Touring by motorbike is an increasingly popular activity. In 2004, 27,000 trips were made into the U.K. by motorcycle and 87,000 motorcyclists went from the UK to other destinations in Europe.

Tourists travelling by motorcycle fall into the following categories:



- Independent travellers primarily from the UK – there are over 1 million registered motorcycle owners in the UK.
- Independent travellers from Ireland and Europe (Poland and Italy have particularly high levels of motorcyclists).
- Clubs that organise tours and rallies and seek out suitable accommodation en-route – there are hundreds right across the UK and Ireland e.g. the

Quay Vipers Club Annual Snakebite rally can attract up to 2000 bikers.

- Specialist motorcycle tour operators e.g. Nutt Travel, White Rose Tours, Leisure Breaks, Northern Ireland Mototours – these groups alone are bringing 3,000+ bikers on holiday every year.
- Bikers attending events such as the North West 200 (100,000 visitors), the Ulster Grand Prix or the Cookstown 100.

If just 1% of the biker market from the UK and Ireland could be attracted to the target region it would equate to 78,271 overnight stays.

From further afield it would make sense to target those regions which have a high volume of motorcycles, a high percentage of motorcycles and which are reasonably accessible i.e. Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Greece.

It is hard to estimate the potential volume from these markets; they represent 23 million motorcycle riders. If we assume that only 42% would be suitable bikes and that the average trip length would be 5 nights, attracting 0.1% of the market from these countries alone would result in attracting 1% of the domestic market and 0.1% of the market from the overseas countries mentioned above would result in an additional tourism spend of £4,703,329.

Who are these bikers?

The traditional image of the big, hairy tattooed biker has changed.

Our typical profile for bikers taking holidays would be

- male;
- long-term or returning riders;
- riding mostly for leisure purposes;
- those who tend to attend voluntary motorcycling training courses;
- also drive a car;
- fall into a higher NS-SEC analytic class; and
- earn a high income.

We have also come across Biker Clubs for lawyers, Christian Motorcycle Associations, schoolteachers, civil servants, police and many others that break the stereotype.

Bikers tend to be very passionate about their bikes and their lifestyle. Many are in clubs that meet regularly and even go on holiday together.

Unlike most holiday-makers, for bikers, holidays are more about the journey than the destination.



What do they want?

We have found that bikers aren't all that demanding on holiday, the top priorities are the welcoming attitude of tourism providers, safe parking for bikes and quality roads with spectacular scenery.

Our research highlighted the following:

- The most important factors when choosing a holiday are value for money, scenery and time spent on the bike.
- The quality of the roads and driving conditions is more important than accommodation or points of interest.
- Bikers will visit pubs and restaurants en route but will go out of their way to see biker related attractions (e.g. race tracks or biker venues) or for a festival or event.
- A good motorcycling route was defined as having wide sweeping roads with impressive views and little traffic, frequented on fine and dry days, usually at weekends.
- The majority look for campsites, preferably 2 star although older bikers are more inclined to go for hotels, the most important factor is the attitude of the owners and the availability of secure parking. (Some useful guidance on parking is available on the British Motorcycling Federation Website www.bmf.co.uk)
- When looking for information about where to go on holiday there are two main sources – the internet and talking to others.
- Bikers look for the following facilities as a priority – secure parking, good camping, bike related activities.
- After travelling all day most bikers will not want to put their leathers back on to go out in the evening so accommodation that can provide food on site or within walking distance is preferred.
- Bikers tend to cover long distances so will either look for lots of stops in different places every night or good long runs from a central location.
- The motorbikes can be the “Pride and Joy” of the owner and they need safe and secure parking and facilities for maintaining their machines in top condition both mechanically and visually.



Biker Attractions

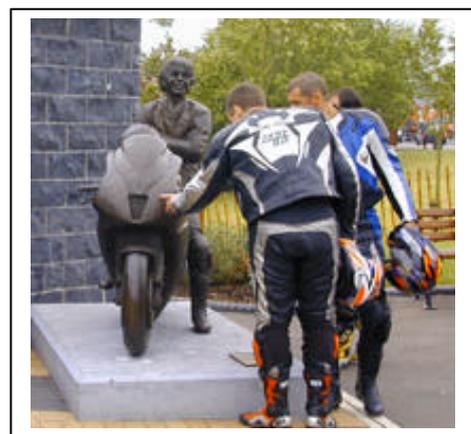
As mentioned above attractions are not high on the agenda for bikers on holiday. Our survey showed that they are most likely to visit good pubs (especially biker pubs), ancient monuments or biker related venues. However the participants did indicate that they would go out of their way or make a special trip to go to a particular biker attraction or event.

We asked bikers to comment on attractions that they would recommend to other bikers, suggestions included:

- ⊖ Giant's Causeway
- ⊖ Open bus tour in Belfast
- ⊖ Road races such as North West, Ulster Grand Prix,
- ⊖ Historic Stone Circles,
- ⊖ Galloway Forest
- ⊖ Harley shop in Ballymena,
- ⊖ Newcastle Co. Down,
- ⊖ Great roads, friendly people,
- ⊖ North West passage scenic drive,
- ⊖ Joey's Bar
- ⊖ Good bike rallies most weekends
- ⊖ Bike shops
- ⊖ Rock nights
- ⊖ Trip to Dublin for Guinness factory visit
- ⊖ Antrim coastline, Enniskillen lakes
- ⊖ The A75 to Dumfries
- ⊖ Road surfaces and racing

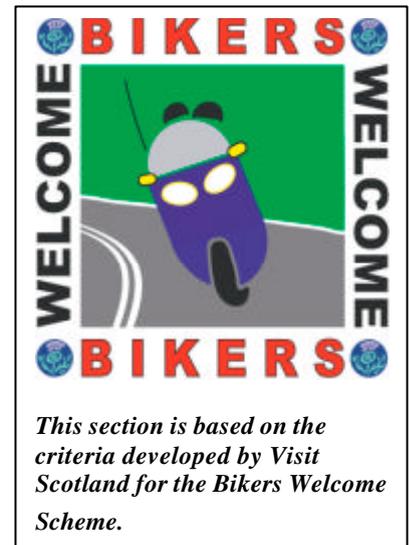
We also asked bikers what they would tell others to avoid:

- ⊖ All major cities
- ⊖ Portrush / Portstewart on Sundays due to traffic
- ⊖ Tea time traffic
- ⊖ Motorway
- ⊖ Overtaking
- ⊖ Always take a guide map or book
- ⊖ Road conditions can be poor
- ⊖ Few cheap clean places to stay
- ⊖ The month of July
- ⊖ Talking politics to strangers
- ⊖ Buying petrol in rural areas on a Sunday



Useful tips for accommodation providers

- 1 Display a positive attitude towards bikers and a genuine desire to meet and anticipate their needs.
- 2 A separate space should be available for drying outdoor clothing and footwear at an ambient temperature so clothes can dry overnight.
- 3 You should have a supply of recommended tours including Viewpoints, Visitor Attractions etc available for reference.
- 4 Visor cleaning/boot-cleaning facilities, this would mean keeping visor spray and soft cloths, black boot polish and brushes etc. Degrease handwash should be available to guests.
- 5 Wash down facilities for motorbikes should be available for guests' use.
- 6 Details of local garages and shops specialising in motorbikes. Information on location and opening times of local petrol stations and opening hours.
- 7 Motorbike books and magazines, consider motorbikers' logbook for guests to record day trips.
- 8 You should provide safe storage for motorbikes. Hard standing for motorbikes.
- 9 Daily and weekly Met Office information (or similar) should be available as well as travel and road information.
- 10 Display Safe Biking information where readily available.



FOR SERVICED ACCOMMODATION

- 11 Hot or cold drinks should be available on arrival. An early breakfast should be offered from 7.00am or for very early leavers a tray the night before.
- 12 You should be able to offer a packed lunch or filled flask if required.
- 13 You should be able to offer a late evening meal (available until 8.00pm) if there are no other meal providers within one mile, or transport to the nearest restaurants. A late night snack should be offered after 8.00pm.
- 14 Information on location and opening times of nearest local late opening eating establishments (and directions), if meals are not provided.

FOR SELF CATERING ACCOMMODATION

- 15 Flasks and cups.
- 16 Information on location and opening times of nearest local late opening eating establishments (and directions), if meals are not provided.

Part Two: Marketing to bikers

Our research shows that bikers are very internet literate and this is the primary source for information when planning a trip. The next best promotional method is word of mouth and this is made easier by the number of clubs and associations.

The key is pointing out that your facilities are open and welcoming for bikers and highlighting all the small things that you can offer to help (see previous page).

Improve your listing on www.bikerroadtrip.com

Feedback from accommodation providers listed on www.bikerroadtrip.com shows that those with good photographs and information about biker facilities get the most response.

It is worth looking through the other listings for ideas.

The internet

Our research shows that bikers are very internet literate and this is the primary source for information when planning a trip.

The internet represents a good cost effective way for tourism providers to promote their facilities to bikers for little or no cost other than time. While having a website can be useful it is more important to make sure that the facility is easy to find, either by ensuring it is high up the list on search engines or (perhaps cheaper and easier) by taking the time to link in to other biker websites that are regularly used. This can mean getting a link to their own website or just having a listing. There are hundreds of Bike Clubs who list their contact details on the web. Many of these also have lists of biker friendly events, places to stay etc.

The main Biker organisations such as the British Motorcycling Federation (www.bmf.co.uk) and the Motorcycle Action Group (www.mag-uk.org or www.magireland.org) hold lists of events, places to stay etc.

Word of mouth and direct contact

The next best promotional method is word of mouth and this is made easier by the number of clubs and associations. Bikers are extremely well networked and will meet up on a very regular basis through clubs and at events and rallies.

Many of these events will allow people to promote goods and services, some in exchange for charitable donations.

Anything that will get bikers talking to each other about a particular tourist provider will be an effective marketing tool, this could be special offers, direct contact made with bike clubs or bikers that have stayed and had a good experience.

Many of the websites mentioned above have chat facilities or message boards and again bikers use these extensively to share good (and bad!) experiences while on holiday.

Print media

There are lots of biker magazines, which are wide ranging in their target market. Advertising in these can be expensive so we would recommend choosing carefully which will access the correct target market. For example, if there is an event such as the Ulster Grand Prix or North West then magazines about Road Racing will be preferable. At other times of the year it may be more appropriate to target magazines relating to particular bikes e.g. touring bikes.

There may be ways to reduce advertising costs by being a bit creative about promotion. Is there anything unusual or newsworthy that you could use, in this way you can get some editorial rather than advertising.

Examples:

- If you already have a particularly large or unusual group of bikers to stay,
- Offer a stay as a competition prize in exchange for some photos and editorial,
- Issue a press release about new facilities especially if they are unusual,
- Sponsor a charity run or provide tea and coffee to a club doing a charity event in exchange for PR

Be explicit about welcoming bikers

In Northern Ireland there is no official 'Bikers Welcome' scheme but this doesn't stop individual providers from mentioning it on their own signage and promotional literature.

It is worth highlighting the facilities available to bikers on any promotional literature or websites. It is also worth adding 'Bikers Welcome' to signage. Often bikers don't book ahead very far in advance so there is an opportunity for drop ins. It is also likely that bikers will tell others when they have seen such signage.

Motorcycle tour companies

There are a number of companies that offer travel packages for bikers, some including ferry deals such as Nutt Travel or Leisure Breaks. There are also companies that run tours of Scotland and Ireland, some are based within the region but many also come from further afield.

(www.biketours-uk.com, www.nimototours.co.uk, www.nutttravel.com,
www.irelandbreaks.co.uk)

Key messages for marketing

One of our main findings is that there is no rocket science to attracting bikers. Provide a good experience, get them talking about it and they will tell others – much more so than any other sector.

The key is pointing out that facilities are open and welcoming for bikers and highlighting all the small things that can be offered to help.

Secure parking and proximity to good routes or biker attractions should be highlighted.

Contacts

Biker Tourism:

Helen Keys, 22 High Street, Moneymore, Magherafelt BT45 7PD, Tel: 028 8674 7908, Fax: 028 8676 7773, E-mail: info@helenkeys.com

LEADER Groups:

Coleraine Local Action Group, 89 Main Street, Garvagh, BT51 5AB Tel: 028 2955 8066 Fax: 028 2955 8130 E-mail: info@collage-ltd.com

LEADER+ Dumfries & Galloway, Community Centre, Castle Douglas, Scotland, DG7 1AJ Tel: 01556 504906, Fax: 01556 504255 E-mail: roslynm@dumgal.gov.uk

Magherafelt Area Partnership 50 Ballyronan Road, Magherafelt, BT45 6EN Tel: 028 7939 7979, Fax: 028 7939 7980, Email: info@magherafelt.org

North Antrim LEADER + Old Schoolhouse, Mill Street, Cushendall, BT44 0RR Tel: +44 (0) 28 2177 2138 Fax: +44 (0) 28 2177 2137 [email: north-antrim-leader@antrim.net](mailto:email:north-antrim-leader@antrim.net)

Roe Valley Rural Development Ltd. The Council Offices, 7 Connell Street, Limavady, BT49 0HA Tel: (028) 777 60306 Fax: (028) 777 22010 E-mail: leaderplus@limavady.gov.uk

Rural Area Partnership in Derry The Old School House, 2 Foreglen Road, Killaloo, Co Lderry, BT47 3TP Tel: 028 71 337149 Fax: 028 71 337146 E-mail: info@rapidni.com

Councils:

Ballymena Borough Council 'Ardeevin', 80 Galgorm Road, Ballymena, BT42 1AB Telephone: 08456 581 581 E-mail: council.reception@ballymena.gov.uk

Ballymoney Borough Council Riada House, 14 Charles Street, Ballymoney, Co. Antrim, BT53 6DZ. Tel: 028 2766 0200, Fax: 028 2766 0222, Email: info@ballymoney.gov.uk

Coleraine Borough Council Cloonavin, 66 Portstewart Road, Coleraine, BT52 1EY, Northern Ireland Tel: 028 7034 7034, Fax: 028 7034 7026, e-Mail: info@colerainebc.gov.uk

Derry City Council 98 Strand Road, Derry, BT48 7NN Tel: (028) 7136 5151 Fax: (028) 7126 4858 Email: info@derrycity.gov.uk

Larne Borough Council, Smiley Buildings Victoria Road Larne Co. Antrim BT40 1RU Tel: 028 2827 2313 Fax: 028 2826 0660 Email: admin@larne.gov.uk

Limavady Borough Council 7, Connell Street, Limavady BT49 0HA Tel: 028 777 22226 Fax: 0 28 777 22010

Magherafelt District Council 50 Ballyronan Road, Magherafelt, BT45 6EN Tel: 028 7939 7979 Fax: 028 7939 7980 Email: info@magherafelt.gov.uk

Moyle District Council Sheskburn House, 7 Mary Street, Ballycastle, Co.Antrim BT54 6QH Tel: 028 2076 2225 Fax: 028 2076 2515 Email: info@moyle-council.org

Tourism Organisations:

Causeway Coast and Glens 11 Lodge Road, Coleraine BT52 1LU Tel: +44 (0)28 7032 7720 Fax: +44 (0)28 7032 7719 E:mail:mail@causewaycoastandglens.com

Sperrins Tourism Ltd. The Manor House, 30 High Street, Moneymore, BT45 7PD.

Northern Ireland

Tel. 028 8674 7700 Fax. 028 8674 7754 info@sperrinstourism.com

Northern Ireland Tourist Board St Anne's Court, 59 North Street, BELFAST, BT1 1NB Tel 028 9023 1221 Fax 028 9024 0960 Text: 028 9044 1522

