Discover England’s South West Coast Path – Pilot Project Report 2016/17
Discover England’s South West Coast Path

1 About
The South West Coast Path
The South West Coast Path Association
Tourism in the South West

2 The Project
About the Discover England Fund
About the ‘Discover England’s South West Coast Path’ Project
About the Market
Working in Partnership

3 Products and Supporting Materials
Itineraries
Digital Resources
Virtual Reality
South West Coast Path App

4 Communicate and Distribute
Trade and Travel Shows
PR and Advertising Campaign
Press and Fam Trips
Tourist Information Centres and Ferry Routes
Events and Engagements

5 Results
Our Achievements
Next Steps
The South West Coast Path

The South West Coast Path is a world class destination, it was listed as one of the World’s greatest walks by Lonely Planet in 2009 and was the only UK walk to feature in their 2012 Book of Great Adventures. Twice running it has been voted Britain’s Best Walk by the readers of Walk magazine. More recently it was listed by CNN Travel guide as one of the world’s most awe-inspiring long distance hikes and in June 2017 it came out on top in a survey carried out by National Express which asked 1,000 walkers about their favourite routes.

The South West Coast Path Association

The South West Coast Path Association is a registered charity working to protect and promote the Coast Path to give us all the opportunity to improve our health in the great outdoors. We work to ensure the Path is one of the best walks in the world and protect it for all to enjoy. Supporting the charity and adding a voice as a member helps the Association to improve the Path and keep the way open to beautiful coastal places. We try to ensure as many people as possible know about, and have information to enjoy the Coast Path. We also fund vital improvement projects to protect the Path for future generations. All 630 miles from Somerset’s Minehead around to the shores of Poole Harbour in Dorset costs at least £1,000 for every mile to keep it open, in good shape and clearly sign posted.

Tourism in the South West

The South West Coast Path is recognised by the tourism industry - receiving the Outstanding Contribution to Tourism Award in 2014. It draws more than 8.6 million visitors and £500 million spend every year, playing an important part in sustaining coastal economies. We know the region experiences a huge peak of visitors during the main summer season. This causes problems for businesses in their need to scale up and down quickly and 94% of businesses responding to our SWCP Business Survey 2015 said that the seasonal nature of tourism had the largest impact on the profitability of their business. This impact could be lessened by encouraging more international visitors, who enjoy the peace and quiet of travelling out of peak season. However, we know from our research that the Coast Path’s length and diverse offering means that international visitors find it daunting and off-putting to decide which section to walk, work out the logistics of getting there, fitting it in around other attractions they want to visit and arranging accommodation.

Listed by CNN Travel Guide as one of the world’s most awe-inspiring long distance hikes
The Project
In 2016, the South West Coast Path Association applied for funding from Discover England in the hope we could reach out to new international audiences and help tackle the effects of seasonal slumps. Following a rigorous application process, we were delighted to become one of nine applicants selected to benefit from Round 1 funding for small scale projects and pilots. Our initial project ran from October 2016 to March 2017, and we were grateful to then receive additional funding to continue our marketing activity until July 2017.

About the Discover England Fund
A three-year £40 million Discover England Fund was announced by Government in 2015 to ensure that England stays competitive in the rapidly growing global tourism industry. In the UK, tourism delivers jobs and economic growth across the whole country – generating £106 billion a year and employing over two million people. England has seen record spend in the past year, from both domestic and international visitors, and the Discover England Fund is in place to support this increasingly important industry.

About the ‘Discover England’s South West Coast Path’ Project
We receive approximately 250 calls and e-mails to the South West Coast Path Association office every month and 85% of enquiries are for help in trying to book a trip, with 28% of these coming from international visitors. There is a clear need for improved resources in this area and with it, a great opportunity to support businesses across the South West, including our own growing business membership base. An online survey of businesses in the South West undertaken by the South West Research Company in 2015 showed 98% of businesses think that national promotion of the area as a top quality walking destination would be the most beneficial method in helping them attract more walkers to their establishment.

Our project was designed to greatly simplify the planning process for international visitors to book a walking holiday. We created a series of suggested itineraries combining a mix of great walks with other activities and attractions, accommodation and places to eat, along with travel information about how to join them up. Our target audience included people who enjoy walking, but don’t want to walk all day, every day, but instead want to maximise the views they get for the amount of effort involved and enjoy the great food, accommodation and other attractions in the area.
About the Market

Research showed that the most sought after information on the South West Tourism Growth Fund website was on the countryside of the South West, with the majority of traffic coming from Germany and the Netherlands. In addition to this, research carried out by Visit Cornwall showed on foot was the most popular way to enjoy the countryside with 83% of visitors to Cornwall undertaking a short walk during their stay.

Germany is defined as having devoted discoverers and action seeking explorers whilst the Netherlands has energetic, mature and sporty culture seekers. The South West Coast Path is one of 15 National Trails in England and is the country’s longest and most well-known trail. Long distance trails are well understood in Germany and the Netherlands, and a strong walking and hiking culture already exists. For these reasons, we decided to focus our activity in these two well established markets.
Working in Partnership

The South West Coast Path Association has over 40 years of experience providing information about the Coast Path and responding to hikers enquiries. However, a top priority for us was to reach out to the numerous organisations who could help support and strengthen this project, and more importantly benefit from our combined efforts.

We delivered this project with the help of; South West Tourism Alliance, Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site, Visit Devon, Visit Dorset, English Riviera Bid Company, Visit Plymouth, Visit Exmoor, Exmoor National Park and Visit Cornwall.

We would like to say a big thank you to all our partners, volunteers and members for their ongoing support with this project.
Itineraries
We created a range of six itineraries jam-packed with information to make it really easy for people to book a holiday. We included some of the best day walks with details of other things to do such as mountain biking, stand-up paddle boarding and coasteering. Alongside these are recommendations for travel routes, great restaurants, pubs cafes and places to get a good night’s rest. We printed five day itineraries in handy pocket-size guides for distribution and made the full range available online so that people could ‘mix and match’ based on their preferences. A matching postcard for each itinerary was also created and marked the launch of our ‘Win a walking holiday’ competition. In total, we received over 2,000 competition entries which is just one example the fantastic engagement we achieved with this project.
Once each itinerary had been finalised, we set about getting them translated into Dutch and German along with leaflets, the Complete Guide to the South West Coast Path and sections of the website. The itineraries are available on our website in a fully customisable format, allowing people to build their very own 1-7 day itinerary along with useful links to information such as ‘What to take’ and ‘How to become an overseas member’. They are also bookable through UK Tour Operators Encounter Walking Holidays, Footscape and Contours Walking Holidays.
Digital Resources

To accompany the itineraries, we also developed a range of digital resources including videos, immersive 360° virtual reality (VR) films and an app. These proved particularly valuable when attending travel and trade shows as the interactive elements attracted a great deal of footfall to our stand. At the end of June we’d achieved over 1,800 views for the 36° films.

We also created six 90-second films to promote each itinerary and one complete overview film to display at travel and trade shows as well as promote online and on social media. In fact, our overview film is the most popular we have ever posted with a reach in excess of 100,000 over 38,000 views and over 500 likes! Each itinerary has its own supporting video to introduce the section of Path and whet the appetite for anyone planning their trip. The videos are a compilation of aerial shots, footage from the Path itself and clips of interesting activities to do along the way, all brought it to life with music and illustrations. To make sure they work with all our audiences, we added subtitles and created translated versions in Dutch and German too.

Why not take a look for yourself by clicking on the images below:

- The South West Coast Path - Overview
- The Wilderness Coast
- The Wild West Coast
- The Coast of Legends
- The Nautical Trail
- The Seafood Coast
- The Timeless Coast
The Coast Path becomes a ‘Virtual Reality’
A really exciting element of the project for us, was developing VR films. Using this innovative technology, we were able to instantly transport people from a trade show in the Netherlands to standing on a beach in Cornwall! The 360° films, available on our YouTube channel, cleverly show a complete view from a location on the Coast Path making it feel like you are actually there. Using a self-assembled VR headset, people can use their own mobile phone to power the headset immersing themselves in this virtual reality.

Discover England’s South West Coast Path App
There is an ever growing popularity to access information in a digital format and we were keen to offer something that would appeal to this audience. The project enabled us to create a walking app with the great walks included in the itineraries. We are applying for further funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to make it truly interactive, we hope to add video guides, photos of how views from the Coast Path would have looked in the past and topography of the seabed and location of shipwrecks. Fully integrated with online mapping systems, routes can be downloaded when connected to the Wi-Fi and accessed later on when offline. You can download the app now from the App store and Google Play.
Trade and Travel Shows

We attended some of the top travel and tradeshows in Europe for walking tourism including Vakantie-Beurs and Fiets en Wandelbeurs in Utrecht, the Netherlands and ITB Berlin in Germany. We made the most of having access to an incredible library of images and created an eye-catching display to attract visitors to the stand. This, teamed with our digital resources and a tempting selection of goodies from the South West (including the infamous cream tea!) meant we left with a whole network of contacts and a great deal of insight. At Vakantie-Beurs Travel Show alone we had 3,750 consumer conversations and distributed 1,250 pre-filled bags and 2,000 pieces of product marketing material. Within five days of attending ITB Berlin, Travelling Britain (a tour operator in Germany) had all itineraries on their website in buyable formats and another major tour operator invited us to accompany them (free of charge) on their stand at Germany’s largest travel trade Show next year (350,000 consumers).
Strijd om de scone met clotted cream

Press and Fam Trips

Fundamental to the wider PR campaign was a series of press and familiarisation trips whereby influential journalists, bloggers and tour operators were invited to attend a hosted walking trip. We organised more than 20 of these key influencers trips in March alone to visit England and explore the South West Coast Path. We had journalists from renowned publications like the educational GEO magazine, Europe’s largest camping magazine ANWB and the most widely-read women’s magazine in Germany ‘Brigitte’. This led to a hive of activity online and on social media, complemented by a targeted advertising campaign.

When organising trips, we worked with established UK tour operators that specialise in walking holidays to ensure we delivered the best trip possible. In doing so, we were also able to make important introductions between them and the international tour operators. German and Dutch operators were keen to have the opportunity to meet with an in-country equivalent and discuss opportunities for working together. As a result of this, the itineraries have already been packaged and made available to buy in both our target markets. We would like to specially thank Footscape and Encounter Walking Holidays for their continued support with this project.

“Being introduced to a UK tour operator was essential! Within a few weeks after my visit to the Jurassic Coast I had the itinerary on my website. Never before had an arrangement been ready for booking so quickly.”

Eduard Camping, Travellers Wandelvakanties
Tourist Information Centres and Ferry Routes
All our printed materials, which include the itineraries, leaflets, guides and postcards, are available to over 100 Tourist Information Centres (TIC) regionally and 1,500 TIC’s nationally via a media top-up service. In the first month we received more than 200 orders that totalled over 6,000 itineraries. In addition to this, we’re distributing the pocket-size guides on the P&O Ferries that run between Dover and Calais. All itineraries improved functionality we offer the option to customise these to combine the walks in whatever order they require and to re-order or delete days.
Events and Engagements

We maximised all communication channels and made sure we were leading the conversation at key events regionally, nationally and internationally. Everyone associated with the charity, including members, volunteers, partners and business members were updated regularly via e-news, face-to-face meetings and the quarterly newsletter. We took advantage of a number of speaker opportunities including the Seafood Coast Conference, West Country Tourism Conference and the Coastal and Rural Tourism Conference. We also attended high profile international events held at the Embassies in Amsterdam and Berlin as well as the Public Policy Forum held at Westminster.
Our Achievements

We’ve achieved coverage with a total media value in excess of €2 million, we’ve seen a 92% increase on the website from German visitors and 190% increase from Dutch visitors compared to the same period last year. We saw over 5,000 of the online walking itineraries downloaded in the first three months and as of the end of June this figure has risen to over 10,000 downloads in total. In addition to this, our new South West Coast Path App featuring the itineraries has been downloaded over 3,500 times with almost 6,000 individual tours having been downloaded.

Since visiting, some of the tour operators we hosted have already started offering walking packages and have confirmed significant value of business secured through bookings in a very short time. Many of the other tour operators are planning to include the itineraries in their programmes next year. This hugely successful project was made possible thanks to the Discover England Fund and the help and support of a number of partners; South West Tourism Alliance, Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site, Visit Devon, Visit Dorset, English Riviera Bid Company, Visit Plymouth, Visit Exmoor, Exmoor National Park and Visit Cornwall.

We would like to say a big thank you to all our partners, volunteers and members for their ongoing support with this project and to Visit England who are responsible for distributing the funding and developing England’s tourism.
Next Steps

We now know our international visitors want translated materials (if English is not their first language) and tailored information that does not require them to already have geographical knowledge or walking experience in order to plan a visit. By simplifying the booking process and developing tailored information, we have already made big steps toward answering the needs of this audience. However, there is more work to be done.

Using all that we have learnt, we are now bidding for a national level project that will offer 3-14 day optional itineraries for 7 Great Walks of England – Pennine Way, South West Coast Path, North Down Way, Hadrian’s Wall, Norfolk Coast Path, Cleveland Way and Cotswold Way. The 7 trails have been carefully selected for the world-class walking they offer as well as their accessibility via airports, ferries and rail. The walk is only half of the experience; it’s also an opportunity to meet the locals, experience a warm welcome, a warm cosy fire, a locally brewed pint, home cooked local food, and a comfortable nights’ sleep. We will continue to target both Germany and the Netherlands but will expand our reach to new markets including France and the US. The project will be funded by the Discover England Fund, with Marketing Peak District & Derbyshire as the lead and in partnership with Natural England, National Trails, Destination Marketing Organisations, National, Regional and Local business sector partners and Visit England and Visit Britain.

This project opened our eyes to the vast and varied audiences
What have we learnt?

This project gave us the opportunity to reach new markets but also opened our eyes to the vast and varied audiences we have, and more importantly, what they want from us.

**Overseas markets** – want more quality information and support to enable them to explore the Coast Path and surrounding areas. Our work must also reach beyond geographical location and target audiences by profile and needs.

**Young people and those leading young people** – want resources aligned to the National Curriculum that engage children in a love for exploring the Path.

**Pre-nesters (under 35’s with no children)** – want better resources and more information on adventure and coastal tourism. This market has a huge growth opportunity, as highlighted by the National Coastal Tourism Academy.

**Trail runners** – want more resources and better promotion of challenge events like the ‘Fastest Known Time Challenge’ to satisfy the growing appetite for Trail running.

**Empty nesters (over 55’s)** – want support and advice that will enable them to achieve aspirations of walking more or taking on active challenges.

**Businesses** – need support in harnessing their potential in winning new business from walking tourism to lessen the impact of seasonality, something they have identified as being the biggest barrier to improving productivity.
The project also highlighted a broader set of improvements that could benefit all audiences and safeguard the future of the Coast Path.

Greater accessibility – With an ageing population, the demand for easy and accessible routes is continuing to grow. Improvements are also needed to encourage year-round walking as people are often put off by paths if they are muddy and slippery. We’ve worked with Countryside Mobility SW, the National Trust and others to identify, promote and where feasible improve accessible routes on and linking to the Coast Path but there remains much more to be done.

Better navigation – Improvements in 4G, Wi-Fi speed and coverage gives us the opportunity to offer new and improved resources such as walk apps and mobile-friendly web pages. We could vastly improve route mapping and navigation by taking advantage of this increase in connectivity. On a more practical basis, feedback on the new visitor welcome boards has been very positive and demonstrates how good information in car-parks gives visitors the confidence to explore and make the most of their visit.

Improved infrastructure – The Path is vulnerable to extreme weather, but we can make it more resilient by upgrading drainage infrastructure to greatly reduce the risk of damage from heavy downpours. New Coastal Access legislation will soon make it easier and quicker in most locations to negotiate new routes when the Path is lost due to coastal erosion, but funding will still be needed to construct any new paths needed.

Increased routes – We received 1.3 million views in 2016 to the circular walks promoted on our website. This is a clear indication that people are keen to explore beyond just the Coast Path but there is an expectation (not always realised) that all paths will be well waymarked and in good condition.

To help meet the needs of our growing audiences and protect the Path for generations to come, we need your help. If you would like to support the charity as an individual member or as a business member please visit the website to find out how you can join us.