

BLUE SAIL ▶

VISITORS PLACES DESTINATIONS

CANTERBURY SHARED STORY

NOVEMBER 2013

1 THE IDEA OF A SHARED STORY

We believe that the most successful places have a simple Shared Story to tell. It's a commonly agreed way of describing the place, that everyone uses when they're planning how to invest in improvements or new experiences, and when they're talking to people who don't know the place.

It's a short and simple story that makes it clear what is special and different about the place. But it mustn't overpromise. It must go with the grain of the place, and be authentic and true. It focuses on the distinctive qualities that capture the essence of the place: **it isn't a list** of everything that's on offer.

If everyone uses the same broad ideas to *develop* the place, and then uses some of the same concepts and phrases to *talk about* the place externally, the image of Canterbury, and the actual experiences in the place, will be much stronger. And that will mean more impact, and more visitors. It will also raise positive awareness among other external people you are trying to reach (not just tourists, but students, investors etc).

We're not suggesting that the offer or marketing by all the various organisations, agencies and businesses in the area should be the same – far from it. Marketing communications – the tone of voice and vocabulary – will be different for different markets.

But the Story should provide strong themes, ideas and inspiration that can be reflected in marketing and development. We hope stakeholders will use components from it to bring out what is special and different about the city of Canterbury, and to develop their offer. This will build a stronger, clearer picture in the marketplace – a 'shorthand' for the place. And it will inspire people to look for the next level of information.

The Story should set the agenda for developing and managing the destination: so we have created the Story before proposing where your priorities will lie. We developed the Canterbury Story by:

- ▶ Looking at what is currently being said and written about the place – by locals, media, and visitors
- ▶ Working with stakeholders in a creative workshop to explore what they believe is the essence & difference of the place
- ▶ Applying our knowledge about what differentiates places
- ▶ Testing and discussing a first draft with the DMP Project Group
- ▶ Taking on board Project Group and Action Planning Group feedback and producing a final version.

2 THE CANTERBURY STORY

This is the Shared Story for Canterbury. For annotations (explaining choices of words, phrases and emphases), see the Appendix.

“Canterbury’s past is as rich as it comes” says the latest Lonely Planet guide to Britain. This world-famous cathedral city was one of medieval Europe’s great places of pilgrimage and knowledge. Today – with its international visitors and two Universities – it still has a distinctly cosmopolitan feel. Less than an hour from London, it’s in that corner of England that’s almost touching France.

People come here from across the globe for world-class heritage, for culture and festivals, to visit and to study, to shop, eat and hang out. The extraordinary Cathedral dominates the medieval streets within the city walls. Among the listed buildings, a boldly modern theatre – named after the city’s famous son Christopher Marlowe – has been built on the river bank, and an art museum has been restored and doubled in size. To the south is St Augustine’s Abbey, part of the World Heritage Site, and England’s first seat of learning.

There’s something warm and mellow about this intimate European city. Crowds throng around the entrance to the Cathedral and in the busy high street. Thousands of students add to the vibe. It’s lively and fun. But it’s also remarkably easy – in a moment – to step off the beaten track into some quiet oasis where you’ll hear nothing but birdsong, and the splash of oars on the narrow, gently flowing River Stour.

You may be in a city, but you get a strong sense of being in the Garden of England too. There are riverside gardens and even a cider-making orchard within the city itself. Then there’s all the local produce in cafes, pubs and restaurants: Romney Marsh lamb, Kent cherries, ale from local hops, award-winning fizz from Kentish vineyards. To the north of the city is one of England’s largest ancient woodlands, the Blean. And, less than a 7-mile cycle away at Canterbury’s coast, there’s the seaside town of Whitstable, for England’s finest oysters.

3 CONCEPTS FROM THE STORY

The following strong concepts emerge from the Story. These have steered the Destination Management Plan.

- ▶ **A European City** – An important differentiator compared to other English cathedral cities, drawing on both Canterbury’s heritage (as one of Europe’s great places of pilgrimage in Medieval times), and its location (almost touching France). It gives Canterbury significant contemporary status too – i.e. it operates not just on a UK stage, but on a European stage too.
- ▶ **World-class heritage and culture** – World-class heritage is without question (viz the World Heritage Site designation). It is important to mention culture when we mention heritage – its cultural offer is there, and important for visitors and students, but not always recognised by people who have never visited.
- ▶ **Buzz and tranquillity** – A key defining feature is the dramatic contrast between the busy buzz of tourists and shoppers in the very centre of Canterbury, and the tranquillity of the small lanes, riverside walks and hidden gardens.
- ▶ **Garden of England** – Another important differentiator compared to the competition: this is a nationally and internationally recognised brand which alludes to Canterbury’s greenness, a chance to mention the great local produce, and also the opportunity to explore further afield.

Examples of how destinations use their Stories:

- ▶ Using the concepts/themes in the Shared Story to steer investment in the offer e.g. to decide which Festivals & Events to develop or support
- ▶ Workshops with people in different sectors, to familiarise them with the Story and to help them think creatively about how they might use it to develop and differentiate their own offer, service or business
- ▶ Producing an online Toolkit for partners to use, comprising Story-inspired product development ideas plus downloadable marketing copy (tailored for use in different markets) and images based on the Shared Story

APPENDIX: STORY ANNOTATIONS

Para 1 – Starts with a very strong simple quote, using warm powerful monosyllabic words “*past*” and “*as rich as it comes*”. This puts Canterbury’s heritage upfront, but achieves contemporary resonance, referring to “the *latest* guide”, to a strong contemporary brand “Lonely Planet” and to Canterbury’s national status in the “guide to *Britain*”. Early on, we introduce the idea of “world” status and “European” status. And there are early mentions of “pilgrimage” and “knowledge”, visitors and the Universities. It translates the European past into what visitors will feel today – somewhere that is “distinctly cosmopolitan”. We also locate Canterbury – essential for many people – with a very visual image of it being in a “corner that’s almost touching France”.

Para 2 – In this paragraph we reinforce the city’s international and visitor credentials, reassuring people that they’re right to want to visit/study there. There is the image of this extraordinary building that dominates the small streets and buildings around it. We mention the cultural offer alongside, and in among the heritage too. And we’ve given an idea that there is more heritage to see besides the Cathedral, by mentioning the “World Heritage” status of St Augustine’s Abbey. This also gives us the opportunity to refer to the city’s long history of learning.

Para 3 – “Warm” “mellow” and “intimate” are all positive ways of referring to the small compact nature of the city – and obliquely to the idea of an “autumn” city, with rich gorgeous colours that came from the creative workshop. We don’t shy away from the reality of the crowds – this helps to imply a buzzy, lively place, which is an attractive idea and counters misperceptions of this being a static historic place “preserved in aspic”. “Thousands of students” reinforces this as a University city. The oases of peace and tranquillity– being able to get “off the beaten track ... in a moment” is a key feature of Canterbury – and a very attractive aspect too, especially to people who want to seek out authentic experiences. The mention of the narrow and gentle river is important too: quite different from other city rivers e.g. York.

Para 4 – The Garden of England is an iconic brand – recognised nationally and in some mature international markets – and easily understood by others. It is a very attractive image & helps to reinforce the greenness of the city, and ‘English-ness’ of the surrounding countryside, including the “ancient woodlands” – an evocative image. It also allows us to introduce ideas of good local food (very important for cultural visitors). And it suggests the wider region beyond the city for exploring/touring. Cycling is introduced to suggest the opportunity for outdoors activities. Using the linking idea of local produce, and as an example of how close the coast is, we have mentioned trendy Whitstable and the oysters: this is a place that has achieved national recognition for leisure visits (especially among young Londoners), and provides another reason for staying overnight in Canterbury and exploring around and about. Other nearby places can feature in the next level of content (more detailed themed info, market-specific content, itineraries etc).

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