



# Food and Drink Trails – a review with case studies

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## **Food and Drink Trails in Scotland – a case study review**

### **Introduction**

Food and drink is being put at the heart of destination marketing campaigns across the world. Great images and the promise of wonderful experiences through food and drink can entice visitors to a destination as much as the landscape or culture of the place itself. Destinations need to stand out and many are drawing on their food and drink culture as their unique selling point.

The importance and potential of food tourism in Scotland has recently been recognised in the publication of “Food Tourism Scotland” the first national action plan for becoming an international leader in food tourism. Food tourism is described as the enjoyment of food and drink-based experiences where a person learns about, appreciates or consumes food and drink that reflects the history, heritage and culture of a place. Incorporating an interesting story about the people and places who grow and prepare the food, and the traditions behind local dishes enriches the visitor experience. Visitors are estimated to spend almost £1 billion every year on food and drink when they holiday in Scotland and the ambition associated with the action plan is to double spend by 2030 (“Ambition 2030”).

Food and drink trails take advantage of increasing consumer interest in the origins of food and provide a way to offer an attractive tourism experience from existing resources that are usually already in place. For producers and suppliers, collaborations can offer an opportunity to gain support from organisers and other businesses in the network, as well as potential to reach a wider customer base. Bringing producers and food sites under one initiative and recognisable identity helps create a positive image of the region and can in turn increase a sense of local pride. Food and drink trails can increase opportunities for access to locally produced food and drink and reduce supply chains which in turn can benefit the local economy. Trails can also make significant contributions to rural communities by attracting additional visitor nights and expenditure.

Research shows that successful trails require clear and sustained leadership, a common purpose, financial support, and administrative management. Trails and routes offer a powerful marketing strategy if well-funded and supported, providing small and independent producers and suppliers with an opportunity to work together to share resources, marketing spend, advice and knowledge. Trail members are likely to be more visible than might be possible on their own through the publication of maps, guides, signs, leaflets, and websites. Getting numerous, varied and sometimes disparate businesses to work together can be challenging but the rewards can be great. Collaboration between the food and drink and tourism sectors is also essential.

ACT Hubs was asked by AITC, on behalf of its members, to review existing food trails as case studies and to find out how current trails were set up and sustained. Information was gathered from four food trails in Scotland. Each food trail follows a slightly different model. The results are presented



below and include information on how the trails began, who runs them, how the trails are sustained, criteria for joining, membership/listing fees, and marketing.

## Case studies - Food and Drink Trails in Scotland

### Eat Drink Hebrides Trail

The Eat Drink Hebrides Trail was launched in 2016. The trail is managed by Outer Hebrides Tourism, a destination marketing organisation and provider of support to tourism businesses. OH Tourism is account managed by HIE and this provided the opportunity to employ a graduate placement through ScotGrad to develop the food and drink trail. Funding was also received from Scottish Natural Heritage, the Community Food Fund and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. Funding was required to produce leaflets, a website, branding, and signage.

The trail was developed throughout 2015 by working with local businesses and producers to research the idea and gather support, before establishing a brand for the trail.

Outer Hebrides Tourism developed participation criteria that eating places, shops, and producers had to meet before qualifying for membership to the food trail. The criteria include showing a passion for local food and drink, membership of OH Tourism and promotion of the trail and other Eat Drink Hebrides participants. There are additional criteria specific to the type of participant e.g. eating place, shop, or producer (Appendix 1).

To join the Eat Drink Hebrides Trail participants must pay an annual membership to OH Tourism and have a silver or gold listing on the destination marketing site. There is also a £50 trail participation fee. Depending on the size of the business and the level of website listing, total annual cost will be £150 - £230. Registered charities are eligible for a discount. Benefits include inclusion on the Eat Drink Hebrides Trail website, use of official trail brand identity including signage, and inclusion in Visit Scotland marketing activity.

The leaflet was produced as an A3 trifold with summary information on the front and back covers. A map on the inside shows the locations of the 35 participants with a short description, contact details, and a six-figure grid reference for each one. The printed leaflet is available throughout the Outer Hebrides as well as at gateway Visit Scotland offices. OH Tourism is working with Calmac to distribute leaflets on the ferries. The website is a page on the Visit Outer Hebrides website but has an independent web address that redirects to this page. The leaflet is available as a pdf download on the website. Experience to date suggests that the printed leaflet is more important for promotion of the trail than the website. The trail has a social media presence, but it is not independent of the Visit Outer Hebrides marketing.

Now that the trail is established, day to day administration of the trail is minimal. However, updating the leaflet and annual membership renewals is time consuming. The Tourism Development Officer for OH Tourism is responsible for managing the trail, but is not a dedicated officer to this role. OH Tourism would like to develop the trail and make more of it for tourism purposes.



Historically, there was a food and drink trail in the Outer Hebrides called the “Outer Hebrides Speciality Food Trail”. This European funded (LEADER+) project won the Highlands and Islands food tourism award in 2005 and was widely promoted in tourism literature. The initiative brought together 23 speciality food producers to encourage rejuvenation of artisanal activity and local food promotion on the island. However, the project was not sustainable and eventually failed. This is suspected to be due to several factors including:

- Difficulty in securing membership funds
- Rising costs – if producers didn’t pay, or left the trail the remaining cost had to be shared amongst remaining members
- Management by a local producer – administration was a lot of work and own business always took priority
- No links with businesses or shops selling produce
- Difficulty in locating some sites published on the maps
- Difficulty in locating produce for sale

The trail now benefits from being managed by an independent organisation who hold the risk of sustaining the trail, rather than that risk being left with the trail members.

### Scottish Borders Food and Drink Trail

The Scottish Borders Food and Drink Trails were set up by Scottish Borders Food and Drink, a network for local food businesses whose membership is open to any food producer or provider whose principal area of activity is located in the Scottish Borders. Benefits of membership include business advice, discounts to professional services and marketing and promotion. Membership costs £50 per annum. Scottish Borders Food and Drink is run by a voluntary committee with one ad hoc paid officer to update the website, do social media etc. This officer was initially employed via funding from the Community Food Fund to carry out various projects including setting up a food and drink directory, food trails and supporting local Farmers Markets.

The food and drink directory was compiled, designed, printed and distributed (20,000 copies) within this funding, followed by six food trails – 4 regional trails, a cycle route and a rail route (to coincide with the opening of the Borders Railway). Businesses were selected for the trails according to their proximity to the route and were not charged extra for their inclusion. Between 20 and 23 businesses are listed in each trail, including eating places, local producers, and places to buy local produce.

The Directory and trails were first produced in 2016. The trails were printed on A4 trifold leaflets and are available to download from the website. The trails have not been updated since first published. The trails are not signposted and there is no specific trail branding (the Scottish Borders Food and Drink network logo is used). There is no ongoing admin or cost in sustaining the trails on the website. There is no budget for re-prints of the original leaflet. The Directory is an annual publication and is now fully dependent on advertising income to cover the cost of production. The Directory is distributed free of charge and is also available as a download from the website. Marketing and



promotion is included in the general social media and website content for Scottish Borders Food and Drink. Scottish Borders Food and Drink is supported by various tourism organisations including Visit Scotland, and the Scottish Borders Tourism Partnership.

## Cairngorms National Park Food Trails

The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) commissioned the Cairngorms Business Partnership to produce a food trail guide in 2013. The Cairngorms Business Partnership is a not for profit private sector led organisation which promotes the area as a visitor and event destination. The partnership also develops and supports local businesses by providing an online presence, training, direct business benefits and links with public agencies.

The food trails project was fully funded by the CNPA. Businesses did not have to pay to be part of one of the four food trails, but they did have to self-assess against the criteria such as producing food/drink locally or selling local produce, showing passion, knowledgeable staff, and demonstrating authenticity, integrity and provenance. Businesses that had a high enough score were included in the guide. Businesses listed on the trails included eating places, producers and places to buy produce.

The trails are described in a multi-page leaflet, with a map. The leaflet was first printed in 2014 and produced 25,000 copies which were distributed throughout the Park and surrounding areas. A re-print in 2015 produced another 15,000 copies. The leaflet has not been printed since 2015 because the funding ran out. The food trails page is still on the Visit Cairngorms website and the leaflet is available to download. There was no trail signage or branding and promotion was restricted to the printed leaflets and the information on the website. There is no ongoing administration or cost for the trails on the website.

The guide was extremely popular with visitors. The biggest challenge was getting businesses to sign up and complete the assessment forms, despite no fee to join.

## Mull and Iona Food Trail

The Mull and Iona food trail was set up by three individuals with a shared interest in encouraging more island produce to be sourced and used locally. The group wanted the food trail to build links between producers and suppliers and those cooking and selling food such as restaurants and cafes. They also wanted to provide more information for residents and visitors about how to access and buy more island produce.

The food trail group received start-up funding from their local tourism group, the Community Food Fund and two local charities to help fund a website and a printed food trail map. The map was first printed in 2015 and has an annual print run of 7000 copies.



The ethos of the food trail is to “promote locally sourced food, produced with respect for animal welfare and the environment, which tastes great and contributes to a sense of place.” The food trail is not a membership organisation but has listings of producers, suppliers, shops and eating places. There is a simple policy for who can join the Mull and Iona Food Trail: Producers should be able to show that they work in accordance with current animal, food and drink product legislation. Suppliers (shops, cafes, hotels, and restaurants) should be able to list the specific Mull, Iona and neighbouring island produce they have on their menus and what produce they currently stock. Producers and suppliers who meet the criteria (including a selling/using a minimum number of local products) can pay £50 to be listed on the website and printed map, or £35 for listing on the website only.

The food trail, including website and social media, is run by volunteers. The printed leaflet has an illustrated map and list of locations of food trail subscribers including eating places, shops, farm shops and producers’ markets. The cost of the printed leaflet is covered by the approx. 40 subscribers who pay for their listings. The subscribers are encouraged to host events each year, called “Moveable Feasts”. These are something a bit different such as a BBQ, bread making fiesta or a dinner at a Castle, for example. The food trail group have organised two events themselves to raise money for local charities. Each event provides a story to share on social media which results in free marketing for the food trail.

The food trail does not have any continuation funding but the group has various development ideas for building on the food trail, updating the website, developing an app and advertising beyond the islands. Funding would be required to take these ideas forward.

## Food from Argyll

Argyll Food Producers, trading as Food from Argyll, is a co-operative organisation that aims to raise the profile of Argyll and the Isles as an area of good food production and a good food destination. Food from Argyll showcases the best in food and artisan produce from throughout Argyll and aims to create greater market opportunities for its members to assist their financial growth and business development.

Full membership is open to food businesses who produce food within Argyll and Bute using Argyll ingredients where possible. Associate membership is for food providers who use Argyll produce from at least five local suppliers. Benefits for members of the co-operative include: use of a recognised logo and branding, listing on the Food from Argyll website, use of a series of promotional films, PR and marketing, exposure through social media, exposure at events, training, and a support network of like-minded companies.

Food from Argyll does not currently support any food trails but would like to develop food trails in the future. Several food and drink journeys are described on the Food from Argyll and [Explore Argyll](#) websites. These journeys outline different routes, and recommend places to sample local produce including seafood, whisky, and beer. The journeys are not branded or specifically promoted in any way.





## Evaluation

Even though each food trail is slightly different in the way it is run, sustained, and managed there are common themes amongst them all.

- The food trails are all supported by tourism organisations. This ranges from start-up funding to administration and management.
- All food trails received start-up funding to develop their ideas and produce marketing materials including a website/online presence and leaflets. Several trails benefitted from the Community Food Fund (now closed) which was financed by the Scottish Government and created to celebrate local food and drink. Current funding options include the [Connect Local Regional Food Fund \(RFF\)](#) which is for supporting growth in Scotland's food and drink sector, in line with the priorities of "[Ambition 2030](#)" to make farming, fishing, food and drink Scotland's most valuable industry. The fund is open until March 2020, with the next application deadline on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2018.
- Membership or subscriptions are needed to cover the costs of administration and marketing updates.
- Criteria can be used to set minimum standards for members or subscribers.
- Once set up, the food trails can be sustained with minimal administration time, depending on how often information is updated and how annual subscriptions are managed. However, this is unlikely to facilitate growth of the project.
- Food trails do not need to be branded or have specific signage to be successful – but listings need to be easy for visitors to locate and visit.
- All trails include a mix of producers, shops and eating places who meet criteria for joining the food trail. The combination of outlets for promoting local food gives visitors a variety of options to access local produce and learn about the food stories.

## References

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- Eat Drink Hebrides Trail: <https://www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk/food-and-drink/eat-drink-hebrides-trail>
- Scottish Borders Food and Drink: <https://www.bordersfoodnetwork.co.uk/>
- Cairngorms Food Trails: <https://visitcairngorms.com/foodtrails>
- Mull and Iona Food Trail: <https://mullandionafood.co.uk/>
- Food from Argyll: <http://www.foodfromargyll.com/>
- Explore Argyll: <https://www.wildaboutargyll.co.uk/>
- The Connect Local Regional Food Fund: <https://connectlocal.scot/funding/regional-food-fund/>
- Ambition 2030: <https://connectlocal.scot/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ambition-2030.pdf>



## Appendix 1 – Eat Drink Hebrides Participation Criteria

Eat Drink Hebrides will show visitors where they can see the produce being made, where they can taste it and also where they can buy it for themselves.

### **All participants:**

- Must be passionate about local food and drink in the Outer Hebrides
- Must be OHT members
- Must promote other Eat Drink Hebrides participants and the Trail in general

### **Cafes, Restaurants, Bars and Pubs**

- Must be operating from April to October and hold regular opening hours.
- Have a policy for using and promoting local Hebridean products – demonstrated by one or more of the following -
  - Menus must feature at least 3 named dishes with products sourced in the Outer Hebrides.
  - Be Taste Our Best accredited, providing at least 3 dishes on the menu feature Hebridean products.

### **Food and Drink Producers**

- Must be operating from April to October and producing in the Outer Hebrides.
- Be supplying to businesses in the Outer Hebrides e.g. community-owned shops, restaurants.
- Food and Drink Producers are required to produce their '**story**' ranging from the origins of the product, the people, the process and the relationship with the land. This will be through text, images and other forms like video will be a great bonus. OHT can provide guidelines for this.

### **Food and Drink Producers with onsite visitor premises**

- Visitors must be able to visit on-site and purchase from you with regular opening hours. This can range from a retail outlet onsite for visitors or an open door policy within agreed opening hours e.g. unmanned shop with honesty box.

### **Food and Drink Producers with no onsite visitor premises**

- Must provide details of at least 2 businesses in the Outer Hebrides where visitors can buy your product.
- Information on website and leaflet will guide visitors to available retail outlets instead.

### **Retail outlets**

- Must be operating from April to October and hold regular opening hours.
- Must have a policy for promoting and selling local food which demonstrates strong community awareness and/or a place for fostering the sale local food and drink. This can be demonstrated by the following –





- Have a dedicated section of the store which promotes local produce e.g. Hebridean food display or other way of highlighting local provenance.
- Have at least 5 different products and/or suppliers local to the Outer Hebrides