

WELCOME

Vision

To provide a consistently warm welcome to England before, during and after the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Objectives

1. To enhance the Welcome and sense of place at key touch points across the visitor journey.
2. To ensure staff have the key skills and knowledge to offer a warm and convivial Welcome.

What do we mean by Welcome?

The visitor experience can be greatly enhanced or damaged by the quality of Welcome at places and by people at key touch points in England.

For the purposes of this Action Plan, 'key touch points' are the interactions visitors have along their journey; predominantly face to face, but also where visitors engage with tourism products.

Various research indicates that key touch points include airports, rail stations and rail travel, accommodation and attractions, shops, restaurants and bars and visitor information services.

Personal Welcome interactions occur at all stages of the visitor journey, from asking residents for directions in the street to purchasing food, accommodation and tickets. Welcoming images and messages create a stronger sense of place, reminding the visitor of England's distinctive qualities and enhancing experiences.

The quality of the English Welcome is measured by potential visitors perceptions based on PR and recommendations, first impressions at key touch points, the feeling of warmth expressed by English people and places and ultimately customer service satisfaction leading to a desire to recommend and return.

Why take action on Welcome?

By highlighting and rewarding excellent practice, England's Welcome could become a unique selling point. "The customer has always been important and now is not the time to be mediocre. Service has been seen as soft; now it's absolutely clear that it links to engagement, productivity and bottom-line profit" (Jo Causon, CEO of the Institute of Customer Service, 2010).

The Government's Tourism Policy (March 2011) highlights inconsistencies in behaviours and skills of tourism staff and managers in vital interactions with domestic and international visitors, recommending improvements to ensure maximum economic growth.

Opportunities and Challenges

- Excellent Welcome practice is evident across England; this Action Plan enables its sharing both within and across tourism related sectors.
- Most visitors felt generally welcome when visiting the UK (source: CAA, 2009).
- Significant work has taken place to engage partners across the visitor journey in the Welcome agenda. This has resulted in valuable cross-sector partnership working, for example, with key transport providers.
- Poor customer service has been reported across the visitor journey, with Welcome inconsistencies evident at airports, which offer no real sense of place, rail travel information and journey assistance.
- Despite major investment in customer service training programmes, 65% of business respondents still highlight a skills gap in this area (source: People 1st, 2010).
- Britons have been described as cold, distant, reserved and polite by visitors (source: Firefish Ltd, 2010) demonstrating the impact of first impressions.
- Britain dropped to 13th out of 50 countries for perceptions of having welcoming people in the 2010 Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index; Canada, Australia and Italy hold the top 3 positions.
- Welcome is an important motivator for visitors across all markets but it is a weakness for Britain as a destination (source: TNS/VisitBritain 2007).

The Action Plan

A group of public and private partners developed the draft Welcome Action Plan for consultation. A number of these actions have now been completed, with the results used to inform this revised Plan.

The comments received as part of the consultation process have led to a re-prioritisation of actions and emphasised that Welcome is essential to all parts of the visitor journey and across all sectors of the visitor economy. Welcome is therefore a theme that cuts across the Strategic Framework and the actions identified in this Plan will be integrated into the other Action Plans to reflect this.

With the exception of airports, this Action Plan focuses on the Welcome domestic visitors receive while travelling in England.

VisitBritain coordinates an Overseas Group of public diplomacy bodies and private sector groups, which focuses on the UK Border Agency Visa application service and a Ports of Entry Group concentrates on the UKBA Border Control service. This work stream will link to these groups.

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games provide a catalyst for change, and the Welcome objectives will focus on actions that can be realised in time for the Games.

Partners across the visitor journey will act as Welcome Champions promoting an excellent Welcome leading up the London 2012 Games and ensure Welcome actions are embedded within the Phase 2 Action Plans.

Objective 1: To enhance the sense of place at key touch points across the visitor journey

ACTION	LEAD PARTNERS (where appropriate)	PARTNER SIGN UP	OUTCOME OR SUCCESS MEASURE
i. ‘Welcome proof’ Phase 2 Strategic Framework Action Plans (Transport, Skills, Quality) - Work with partners and organisations to ‘Welcome proof’ activity.	VisitEngland	Welcome Champions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> England’s Welcome will be improved at key touch points before, during and after the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.
ii. Imagery - Develop and provide customised ‘Welcome to England’ imagery for use at airports. - Investigate the potential to develop and provide imagery for use at key rail stations, TICs etc. - Share best practice case studies and PR e.g. Manchester Airport.	VisitEngland	Welcome Champions Manchester Airport Group Network Rail Visit Kent English Airports Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) Network Rail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vast white spaces at visitor facilities are utilised. Visitors feel Welcome. A recognisable English brand and images greet visitors.
ii. Investigate the potential for a ‘Big England Weekend’ where residents receive free access to local attractions. - Possibly as part of English Tourism Week 2012.	VisitEngland Visit Kent	English Tourism Week Steering Group Welcome Champions DMOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents are engaged in the England visitor journey. VFR numbers rise. Advocacy. 100,000 free tickets given away by 2013. Excellent PR.

Objective 2: To ensure staff have the key skills and knowledge to offer a warm and convivial Welcome

ACTION	LEAD PARTNERS (where appropriate)	PARTNER SIGN UP	OUTCOME OR SUCCESS MEASURE
i. Airport Welcome Audits and Improvement Plans - Airport Operators Association to monitor the implementation of airport improvement plans. - Share best practice case studies across the Airports and where relevant with other sectors.	Airport Operators Association VisitEngland Go Skills Visit Kent	Welcome to Britain Ports of Entry Group Aviation Industry Expert Group Welcome Champions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audits and Improvement Plans created at 15 Priority Airports.

ACTION	LEAD PARTNERS (where appropriate)	PARTNER SIGN UP	OUTCOME OR SUCCESS MEASURE
ii. Rail Station engagement - Work with rail partners to improve Welcome at priority rail stations, working with destinations and national partners. - Reward improvement with Welcome imagery and PR. - Linked to objective 1.i	VisitEngland Visit Kent	Go Skills Network Rail Association of Train Operating Companies Rail Industry Expert Board Welcome Champions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome is improved at priority rail stations. • Rail industry partners engaged in tourism at a national and local level.
iii. Endorse and promote customer service training throughout. - Encourage providers to work together to meet the needs of the industry in providing accessible / relevant programmes across the visitor journey in line with new Government directives.	VisitEngland Welcome Champions	Go Skills and People 1st and training providers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations, businesses and individuals can access information and assistance. • 200,000 people trained in customer service by 2012 (People 1st target).
iv. Promote the use of local volunteer schemes to enhance the visitor experience across English destinations e.g. Global Greeter and EMT Taxi Driver Programme. - Share experiences and excellent practice.	VisitEngland / Visit Kent DMOs	Welcome Champions Global Greeter destinations. DMOs Local Government Association Volunteering England.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent practice is shared across England. • The untapped resource of English residents is utilised.
v. PR to promote excellent individuals highlighted through customer service competitions (e.g. best service, best smile). - Improve existing competitions.	VisitEngland	DMOs Welcome Champions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses improve customer service. • Excellence is rewarded.