



The  
Baltic Sea  
Region



Photo Credit: Michael Benz / Unsplash

# OFF-SEASON: A GATEWAY TO NEW BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Your guide to off-season business opportunities

**Interreg**  
Baltic Sea Region



Co-funded by  
the European Union



RESILIENT ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES

**Light in the Dark**

# Off-Season Tourism Product Development Process

Read the handbook cover to cover, or head straight to the parts that will help you today. Use the links below to jump to the key sections.

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## [INITIAL SITUATION ANALYSIS](#)



### Analyze Your Starting Point

Take a careful look at [where you are now and what you can build on](#). Use your [Overall USPs](#) (Baltic Sea identity) and [Local USPs](#) to spot real opportunities.

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## [KNOW YOUR CUSTOMERS](#)



### Identify Potential Off-Season Travelers

Understand what guests value, need, and what inspires them to travel. [Identify key target groups and their profiles](#) and decide [how to reach and serve them effectively](#).

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## [DESIGNING EXPERIENCES AROUND CORE THEMES](#)



### Transform Strengths into Meaningful Experiences

Shape your competitive edge here. Align your offer with the three core themes - [Local Lifestyle](#), [Nourished by Nature](#), and [Active Adventures](#) - and tie each [theme to your USPs](#) and main target groups.

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## [PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND TESTING](#)



### Transform Concepts into Concrete Offerings

Define [the customer journey](#) and [service blueprint](#) to describe both the product and how it is produced. Use [co-creation and partner networks](#) in development and testing.

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## [PRICING AND DISTRIBUTION](#)



### Strategic Pricing and Channel Selection

List the information you need to [price the product](#). Price differently for [individual travelers and for groups](#). Choose a mix of [direct](#) and [indirect](#) sales channels.

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## [MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION](#)



### Tell Your Story and Reach the Right Audience

Highlight what [makes the off-season unique](#). Use a consistent [storytelling](#) approach, choose the right [communication channels](#), and make use of [partnerships](#) in marketing and communication.

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## [CASE STUDIES FEATURED IN THIS HANDBOOK](#)

Throughout the chapters, you'll find real examples from the Baltic Sea region:

- [Kayaking Trip from Strömfors to Kymijoki River \(Finland\)](#)
- [Where the Coast Calls - Rediscover Adventure at Camping Melnsils \(Latvia\)](#)
- [Where the Forest Meets the Sea - Retrovisiit on Hiiumaa \(Estonia\)](#)
- [From Grain to Loaf - Arčiau Gamtos bread-making workshop \(Lithuania\)](#)
- [Moonlight Safari Paddling - Kajak Och Uteliv Ab in Stockholm Archipelago \(Sweden\)](#)

Each case demonstrates practical application of the development process.

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## [TOOLS TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS](#)

Use [the Off-Season Product Development Form](#) and [the short online checklist](#) to make sure your product idea covers all key elements and to receive quick feedback on its strengths and areas to refine..



# Introduction

This handbook is designed for tourism entrepreneurs and developers in the Baltic Sea region who want to make the most of the off-season and turn quieter months into an opportunity. Tourism here often peaks during a short summer period, but the rest of the year offers untapped potential for those ready to think differently.

The aim is to equip you with practical tools and concrete guidance for developing tourism products that thrive outside the high season. Whether you run a small accommodation, offer guided activities, or manage a destination, you'll find strategies that help you attract guests who value calm, authenticity, and a closer connection to nature.

This handbook builds on three fall–winter–spring product experience packages developed in the Light in the Dark project for Baltic Sea tourism. Designed for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and Destination Management Organisations. The concepts provide inspiration and practical tools to turn the off-season into an opportunity. Enhance resilience and unlocking new potential for businesses in archipelago and coastal areas.

## THE THREE EXPERIENCES

BALTIC SEA REGION / LIGHT IN THE DARK

### LOCAL LIFESTYLE



Come close to reality with authentic experiences with local people, food, culture and traditions.

It's a journey into the everyday lives of local people that focuses on personal and meaningful interactions. It's about hearing personal stories that bring the place to life.

A journey where you taste original dishes and learn the stories behind the flavours and ingredients that make them unique.

This is for you who want to go beyond the typical tourist spots and instead dive deep into the heart of a destination to discover its essence through its people and their culture.

### NOURISHED BY NATURE



A Journey to stillness and recreation.

A travel experience focusing on relaxation and recreation through close encounters with nature and a deeper connection to the environment. It's a journey back to the essence of life, where nature nurtures the body, mind, and soul. It's an invitation to slow down, breathe deeply, and appreciate the beauty of the world around us.

Step into your new comfort zone and immerse yourself in nature. Gain new perspectives and insights, personal growth and self-discovery.

### ACTIVE ADVENTURES



Embrace an active vacation with soft outdoor adventures. It's about making adventure travel accessible to everyone, regardless of age, fitness level, or previous experience. Offering lighter versions of kayaking, hiking, exploring, and nature encounters.

It's an opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors without feeling limited by physical demands or the need for specialized skills and equipment.

Whether you're paddling through calm waters or wandering along a picturesque trail, Active Adventures promises experiences that are as memorable as they are attainable.

Why is this handbook important? Because the off-season is not just a gap in the calendar. It's a time when you can:

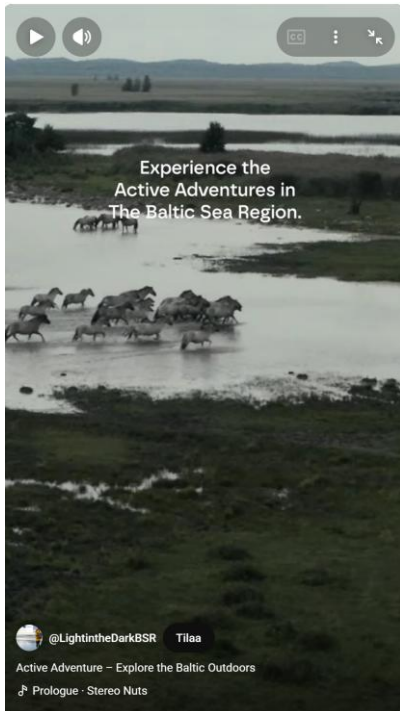
- Stand out from competitors by offering unique experiences not possible during the high season.
- Reach new customer segments who travel at different times and seek different experiences.
- Build a more stable business with income spread across the year instead of concentrated into a few months.
- Support your community through year-round economic activity and employment.

The guide follows a clear process, starting with identifying your strengths and target groups, and moving step-by-step through concept development, pricing, marketing, and long-term improvement. Each chapter includes checklists, tips, and case examples to help you apply ideas directly to your business.

You can read the handbook from start to finish or jump directly to the sections most relevant to you. Either way, it is meant to inspire action and make off-season product development both achievable and rewarding.

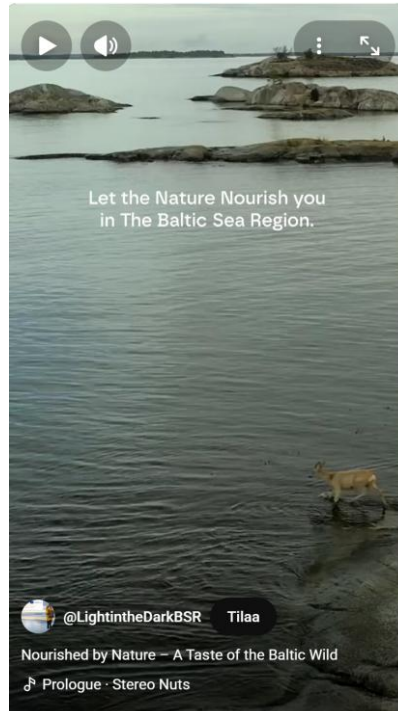
Handbook is part of Light in the dark Project. The project helps small and medium-sized enterprises in the tourism sector create an off-season nature-based offer to attract tourists to rural and coastal areas of the Baltic Sea region all year long.

Explore the three core themes in our short intro videos—Local Lifestyle, Nourished by Nature, and Active Adventures.



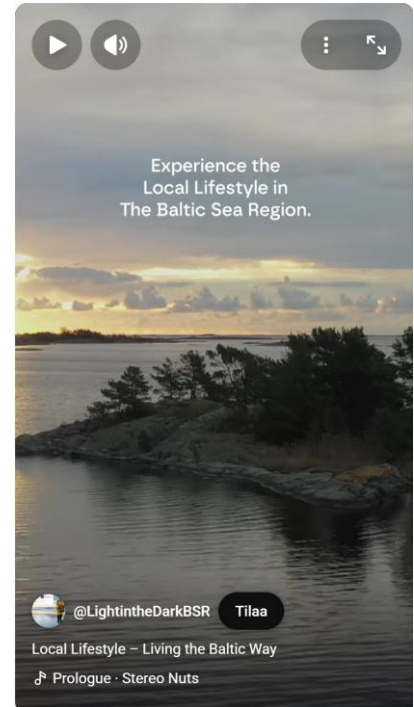
### [Active Adventure – Explore the Baltic Outdoors](#)

Adventure awaits in the Baltic wilderness! This energetic clip showcases the thrill of outdoor activities—from kayaking and hiking to snow-covered trails and starlit safaris. Whether on land or water, the region invites you to move, explore, and reconnect with nature.



### [Nourished by Nature – A Taste of the Baltic Wild Prologue](#)

Step into the serenity of the Baltic Sea Region, where nature nourishes both body and soul. This short film captures the essence of local flavors, foraged ingredients, and the peaceful rhythm of life in harmony with the land. Discover how nature's bounty becomes a source of wellness and wonder.



### [Local Lifestyle – Living the Baltic Way](#)

Experience the warmth and authenticity of everyday life in the Baltic Sea Region. From cozy cafés to crafts and community, this video celebrates the people, traditions, and slow-living values that make the region unique. A glimpse into the heart of local culture, where simplicity meets sustainability.



## Initial Situation Analysis

In this phase, you carefully examine where you are starting from and what opportunities you can build on:

- *Identify the unique selling points (USPs) of the destination:* for instance, tranquility, nature, fresh air, and authentic local culture.
- *Understand the contrasts between high and off-seasons,* such as climate, visitor volume, and atmosphere.
- *Analyze the competition,* identifying what similar destinations offer during the off-season and how they communicate their strengths.
- *Take stock of local assets;* natural, cultural and social assets that can form the foundation of new tourism products.



Photo Credit: Solveiga Kalva

It is important to distinguish between extending the existing season and creating dedicated winter products. Season extension focuses on shoulder months like early spring or late autumn. It is offering experiences that don't depend on specific weather conditions. Winter products, by contrast, often rely on snow or ice. They may require special infrastructure or equipment. Both approaches can help fill the calendar, but each requires different resources and marketing strategies.

For SMEs, extending the existing season can be only incremental—adjust hours, pacing, and price. Winter is more intentional. It is needed to rebuild the experience around seasonal strengths: design for comfort and clarity, ops for conditions and staffing, and marketing for the benefits only winter months deliver.

Unique Selling Points (USPs) are the specific features that make your product or destination stand out. They highlight why a visitor should choose your offer instead of another. In the Baltic Sea region, USPs exist both at a regional level (such as pure nature) and at a

local/entrepreneurial level (such as a family-run guesthouse or a distinctive activity). The key is to connect these USPs with the needs of your target customers.

“Unique Selling Points (USPs) highlight why a visitor should choose your offer instead of another.”

Overall Unique Selling Points: The Baltic Sea Identity

At a broader regional level, the Baltic Sea area offers several compelling USPs that distinguish it from both traditional summer destinations and mass-market tourism hotspots:

- **Coolcation Appeal** – A refreshing alternative to the hot, crowded Mediterranean, with cooler summers and tranquil landscapes.
- **Space and Silence** – Low population density and uncrowded environments create ideal conditions for relaxation and mental recovery.
- **Nature as a Way of Life** – Access to pure nature, fresh air, and seasonal changes are central to everyday life and visitor experiences alike.
- **Sustainable Tourism Values** – Focus on eco-friendly practices and local authenticity appeals to modern, responsible travelers.

These qualities form the foundation of a unified identity across the region. They are enabling collaborative branding around shared experiences such as seasonal nature phenomena, calmness, and quality of life.

As part of the wider Baltic Sea region, you’re not alone. This shared identity is a springboard: it inspires you to create something uniquely yours while drawing confidence, ideas, and partners from a larger peer group.

Local Unique Selling Points: From Shared Values to Distinct Experiences

While the broader region shares many strengths, each locality also brings its own distinct personality. These local USPs are often rooted in the area’s cultural traditions, geographic features, community, or creative offerings. They are essential for enriching the overall brand and making individual destinations memorable.

**Tip:** When identifying your USP, ask recent customers why they chose you. Their answers often reveal stronger USPs than what you first think yourself.

For example, in archipelago communities:

- **Island Lifestyle & Archipelago Spirit** – A slower pace of life, deeply connected with the sea, traditions, and independence.
- **Fresh Local Food** – Sourcing directly from small producers or the surrounding nature adds value and authenticity.
- **Soft Nature Adventures** – Activities such as kayaking, hiking, or birdwatching in serene natural settings’
- **Digital Retreats** – Sparsely populated areas offer unique opportunities for remote work and digital detox.
- **Sauna Culture** – The traditional sauna becomes not just an activity, but an emotional highlight, particularly in the colder months. For example, a warm sauna on a crisp

Table 1: From Regional to Local	
Level	Unique Selling Points
Regional (Overall USP)	Cool climate, peace and space, clean air, nature-based lifestyle, safety
Shared Themes	Seasonal beauty, sustainable values, slow travel, low-density destinations
Local (Examples)	Archipelago culture, fresh food, forest cabins, sauna experiences, “off-grid” lifestyle

autumn evening offers a “hygge-like” experience. Comfort, simplicity, and connection to self and nature.

By articulating both regional and local USPs clearly, destinations in the Baltic Sea region can offer layered and compelling tourism experiences that appeal to modern travelers year-round.

## **CASE Kayaking Trip from Strömfors to the Kymijoki River**

### **Product Overview**

The product “In the midst of nature - a kayaking trip from Strömfors ironworks to the Kymijoki River” is an active adventure that combines soft outdoor activity with relaxation, cultural storytelling, and immersion in local nature. The trip is guided by a professional who balances safety, interpretation, and silence, allowing guests to enjoy both mindful moments and active engagement.

### **Why it is a Good Off-Season Product**

**Seasonal Strengths:** The trip is particularly suitable for spring and autumn. In spring, guests experience awakening birdlife and fresh greenery along the riverbanks. In autumn, the route offers vibrant colors and tranquil conditions without the summer crowds. Even in cool weather the experience is enjoyable, as proper clothing and equipment ensured comfort.



Photo Credit: Janne Metso

**Emotional Impact:** The trip is calming, mindful, and restorative. The combination of being close to water, hearing local stories, and paddling at a slow pace provided strong stress-relief and well-being benefits-qualities highly valued by off-season travelers.

**Accessibility:** The route is designed as a soft adventure suitable for a wide range of guests, including those with little prior kayaking experience. Clear safety instructions and the presence of an empathetic guide reduced hesitation and made the activity approachable.

**Local Value:** The starting point at Strömfors ironworks links the product to local culture and heritage. Snacks and coffee breaks can be organized with local providers, creating small but meaningful community benefits.

**Sustainability:** As a low-impact, nature-based activity, kayaking requires minimal infrastructure and supports the preservation of local riverside environments. The pilot highlighted opportunities to communicate these values more clearly in marketing.



## Know your customers

Knowing exactly who you are trying to attract is just as important as knowing what you want to offer. Without a clear picture of your potential off-season customers, even the most creative product can fail to reach the right audience. By identifying the traveler segments most likely to appreciate the quieter months, you can tailor your experiences, pricing, and marketing to match their needs and motivations, turning interest into bookings. In the off-season, where demand can be more limited, targeting the right people is one of the most effective ways to maximise your resources and stand out from competing destinations.

“Without a clear picture of your potential off-season customers, even the most creative product can fail to reach the right audience.”



Photo Credit: Teele Rehe

Successfully extending the tourism season or attracting visitors during the off-season requires a deep understanding of the most promising customer segments. Based on visitor analysis from the Baltic Sea region, three key clusters stand out as potential targets for off-season tourism: Leisure Seekers, Cultural Travelers, and Nature Enthusiasts. These groups not only show interest in off-peak travel but also have specific needs and motivations that can shape product development and marketing strategies.

### Key Target Groups and Their Profiles:

#### 1. Leisure Seekers (24%)

Who are they:

- Middle-aged (25–44), urban residents, often traveling with a spouse or partner.

Needs and motivations:

- Seek rest, relaxation, and low-intensity recreational activities.
- Prioritize cozy accommodations and nature-surrounded lodgings.
- Prefer destinations that are easy to reach.
- Value price and comfort, often spending less than €100/day.

Off-season potential:

- Already inclined to travel off-season (61%).
- Likely to be attracted by wellness offers (sauna, spa, meditation), scenic nature walks, and photography opportunities.

## 2. Cultural Travelers (28%)

Who they are:

- Older travelers (45–64), slightly more female, often without children.

Needs and motivations:

- Strong interest in local culture, traditions, and gastronomy.
- Enjoy activities like berry picking, stargazing, sauna bathing, and local performances.
- Appreciate accessible destinations and authentic, social experiences.

Off-season potential:

- High preference for off-season travel (67.9%).
- Likely to respond to cultural festivals, seasonal food events, and authentic local encounters.

## 3. Nature Enthusiasts (48%)

Who they are:

- Younger adults (18–44), slightly higher income, often traveling with friends or partners.

Needs and motivations:

- Balance adventure and relaxation.
- Seek immersive nature experiences, including hiking, cycling, fishing, canoeing, sauna, and wildlife observation.
- Enjoy learning about nature, sustainability, and local traditions.

Off-season potential:

- About half of this group already engage in off-season travel.
- Motivated by cost savings, remote work opportunities, and a desire to experience nature's seasonal changes.

Now that we understand who our off-season travelers are, let's explore how to effectively reach and serve them.

- **Develop seasonal and authentic experiences:** Focus on what is special about the off-season, such as autumn colors, winter calm, or the awakening of nature in spring. Authenticity should be central, emphasizing local traditions, foods, and ways of life.
- **Create themed packages:** Bundled experiences can increase appeal and simplify purchasing. Examples include wellness retreats, photography weekends, culinary tours, cultural workshops, or winter nature adventures.
- **Enhance accessibility and comfort:** Offer eco-friendly, comfortable accommodation, and make sure good transportation connections even outside peak season.
- **Offer flexible pricing:** Use off-season discounts, package deals, and special offers to attract cost-sensitive travelers without sacrificing quality.
- **Communicate through the right channels:** Personal recommendations, travel websites, social media (especially Facebook and Instagram), and influencer collaborations are highly effective for reaching these segments.

## CASE Where the Coast Calls – Rediscover Adventure

### Product Overview

Where the Coast Calls – Rediscover Adventure is an off-season hiking and wellness experience developed by Camping Melnsils in Latvia's Slitere National Park. Designed for small groups, the three-day product combines gentle seaside hiking, local gastronomy, and a traditional Latvian sauna by the Baltic Sea. The experience invites to rediscover the calm, elemental beauty of Latvia's northern coastline, local traditions and the rhythms of nature.



Photo Credit: Solveiga Kaļva

### Connecting Product Design with Customer Understanding

This product exemplifies how a clear understanding of off-season traveler segments can shape an appealing and authentic offer. The main target groups - Nature Enthusiasts and Leisure Seekers - are drawn to its blend of activity and restoration. For Nature Enthusiasts, the product offers im-

mersion in diverse coastal landscapes and physical engagement through hiking. For Leisure Seekers, the emphasis on relaxation, local cuisine, and sauna rituals delivers emotional balance and comfort.

By combining physical activity with mindful relaxation, Where the Coast Calls addresses the motivations identified in the Know your customers chapter: a desire for peace, authenticity, and slow connection with nature rather than high-intensity adventure. Although positioned as an “active adventure”, the product can be described as a reflective, even meditative journey.

### Why It Works

**Seasonal Strengths:** The raw, wind-swept beauty of Latvia's coast are perceived as most powerful in the off-season, offering solitude and contrast to the summer crowds.

**Emotional Impact:** Sauna, sea air, and the quiet landscapes provided strong well-being and restorative effects, values central to off-season travel.

**Authenticity:** Local food, genuine hospitality, and unpolished natural settings enhanced credibility and appeal.

**Accessibility:** The activity level is moderate, open to a wide age range, and requires little prior experience.



## Designing Experiences Around Core Themes

This is one of the most important stages in the entire handbook and the place where your competitive advantage can take shape. Here, you transform your destination's unique strengths into experiences that stand out and feel truly meaningful to your target customers.

“Transform your destination's unique strengths into experiences that stand out and feel truly meaningful to your target customers.”

By aligning your offer with the core experiential themes of the Baltic Sea region, you increase your chances of attracting visitors and building a stronger off-season appeal:

The core themes of this handbook are Local Lifestyle, Nourished by Nature, and Active Adventures.



### LOCAL LIFESTYLE

**Come close to the reality with authentic experiences with local people, food, culture, and traditions.**

It's a journey into the everyday lives of local people that focuses on personal and meaningful interactions. It's about hearing personal stories that bring the place to life.

A journey where you taste original dishes and learn the stories behind the flavours and ingredients that make them unique.

This is for you who want to go beyond the typical tourist spots and instead dive deep into the heart of a destination to discover its essence through its people and their culture.

Photo Credit: Daba Laba

### **NOURISHED BY NATURE**

**A travel experience focusing on stillness and recreation through close encounters with nature.**

A Journey to stillness and recreation. A travel experience focusing on relaxation and recreation through close encounters with nature and a deeper connection to the environment. It's a journey back to the essence of life, where nature nurtures the body, mind, and soul. It's an invitation to slow down, breathe deeply, and appreciate the beauty of the world around us. Step into your new comfort zone and immerse yourself in nature. Gain new perspectives and insights, personal growth, and self-discovery.



Photo Credit: Chris Alfthan

### **ACTIVE ADVENTURES**

**Embrace the excitement of outdoor activity that is approachable and enjoyable for everyone. Come close to reality with authentic experiences with local people, food, culture, and traditions.**



Photo Credit: Jainis Zekanis

Embrace an active vacation with soft outdoor adventures. It's about making adventure travel accessible to everyone, regardless of age, fitness level, or previous experience. Offering lighter versions of kayaking, hiking, exploring, and nature encounters. It's an opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors without feeling limited by physical demands or the need for specialized skills and equipment.

Whether you're paddling through calm waters or wandering along a picturesque trail, Active Adventures promises experiences that are as memorable as they are attainable.

The themes provide a practical framework for turning the region's unique selling points into compelling products for the main customer groups identified earlier. They help ensure that product ideas are not developed in isolation but are aligned with off-season traveler motivations.

Local Lifestyle highlights everyday culture, food, and traditions. This theme connects strongly with Cultural Travelers, who are motivated by authenticity and learning. At the same time, it can also attract Leisure Seekers looking for variety and memorable moments in their holiday.

Nourished by Nature emphasizes the region’s pure landscapes, silence, and seasonal contrasts. These elements directly respond to the motivations of Nature Enthusiasts, who seek peace and immersion in natural environments. Leisure Seekers may also value these experiences when they are framed as opportunities for relaxation and well-being.

Active Adventures focus on accessible outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling, or wildlife watching. While this theme primarily appeals to Nature Enthusiasts who enjoy being active in nature, it also offers possibilities for Leisure Seekers who wish to add variety and light adventure to their stay.

By using these themes as guiding storylines, entrepreneurs can:

- Anchor their products in clear customer motivations, ensuring relevance in the off-season.
- Differentiate offerings while keeping a shared regional identity.
- Communicate consistently, making it easier for visitors to recognize what the Baltic Sea region stands for.

In short, the core themes are the “bridge” between the region’s unique assets and the expectations of its most relevant customer groups.

Beyond offering specific products, destinations should create a clear narrative about the value of off-season travel. This means shifting the marketing message from “off-season bargains” to unique, meaningful, and enriching experiences based on core themes that can only be found when the crowds are gone. Whether it’s the stillness of a foggy coastline, the intimacy of a local craft workshop, or the thrill of a snow-covered landscape, off-season tourism has its own authentic charm. These are the stories travelers are eager to hear.

Regardless of the main theme, integrating cultural elements strengthens authenticity and differentiation. Even nature-based or adventure products gain depth when they include local traditions, stories, or everyday practices.

Table 2. Core Themes, related USPs and main target groups

Core Theme	Related USPs (examples)	Main Target Groups
Local Lifestyle	Local food and gastronomy, cultural traditions, everyday life in villages and coastal towns	Cultural Travelers, Leisure Seekers
Nourished by Nature	Pure nature, silence, clean air, seasonal contrasts	Nature Enthusiasts, Leisure Seekers
Active Adventures	Accessible outdoor activities (hiking, cycling, kayaking, wildlife watching)	Nature Enthusiasts, Leisure Seekers

**Tip:** Test your core themes in marketing messages. Use different wording for the same product (e.g. “authentic lifestyle” vs. “local traditions”) and see which one attracts more attention.



## CASE Where the Forest Meets the Sea – Retrovisiit

### Product Overview

Where the Forest Meets the Sea is a serene, year-round nature experience offered by Retrovisiit on the island of Hiiumaa, Estonia. The product invites guests to discover the island's ancient forests, quiet beaches, and traditional coastal lifestyle through a short guided hike, local food preparation, and a relaxing sauna evening. The small-scale accommodation and personal hosting style create an atmosphere of warmth, authenticity, and calm, perfectly suited to the slower rhythm of off-season travel.

### Connecting to Core Themes

This product illustrates how the three core themes of the handbook - Nourished by Nature, Local Lifestyle, and Active Adventures - can harmoniously blend into one meaningful experience.

**Nourished by Nature:** The hike along Hiiumaa's untouched coastline allows guests to experience the island's natural beauty through all senses: the sounds of waves and wind, the scent of pine forests, and the sight of fossils and corals scattered along the shore. The short, low intensity walk focuses on mindful observation rather than physical challenge, making it accessible to a wide audience while fostering emotional restoration and a deep sense of calm.

**Local Lifestyle:** Evenings at Retrovisiit highlight the simplicity and warmth of Estonian coastal living. Guests share stories with the hosts, prepare or enjoy locally inspired meals, such as grilled Baltic herring, and learn about the island's traditions. The hospitality and personal storytelling were repeatedly described as the emotional heart of the experience, transforming a simple stay into a cultural encounter.

**Active Adventures:** While physical activity is light, the guided hike still provides a sense of gentle exploration and discovery. Guests valued the chance to actively engage with nature by identifying fossils, learning about local flora, and moving through different landscapes. This soft adventure approach shows how "activity" in off-season tourism can be redefined as curiosity and connection, not intensity.

Photo Credit: Teele Rehe



## Product Development and Testing

Transform concepts into concrete, high-quality offerings:

- Define customer journey and service blueprint to describe the product and production process
- Run a small pilot with target groups.
- Gather their feedback on what worked well and where improvements could be made.
- Refine products based on insights, ensuring they deliver both emotional impact and practical satisfaction.

This process helps make sure that your offer feels authentic, well thought out, and worth recommending to others.

**Tip:** Start small. Pilot your idea with one partner and a limited group of customers before scaling it up.

Quality and sustainability are key to making off-season tourism successful. Guests are more likely to return and recommend to you if every step of their experience feels smooth, authentic, and trustworthy. Two tools can help you systematically design and refine your service: the customer journey and the service blueprint.

### Customer Journey and service blueprint

The customer journey maps out all the steps a guest takes from the first moment they hear about your product until after their visit. This includes:

- Awareness – How do they find out about your offer?
- Consideration and booking – Is it easy to get information and make a reservation?
- Arrival – How smooth is the check-in, transport, or meeting point experience?
- Participation – Does the activity meet or exceed expectations?
- Post-visit – Do they leave with positive memories and share them with others?

By walking through this journey yourself or asking guests for feedback you can identify pain points and opportunities for improvement

A service blueprint goes deeper. It visualizes both what the customer experiences and the behind-the-scenes processes that make it possible. It often includes:

- Frontstage actions (what the customer sees: guide interactions, facilities, activities).
- Backstage actions (preparations, logistics, staff training).
- Support processes (IT systems, suppliers, sustainability measures).

“Service blueprint visualizes both what the customer experiences and the behind-the-scenes processes that make it possible.”

Using a blueprint helps ensure consistency and quality. For example, if you promote eco-friendly values, the blueprint can show whether your suppliers, transportation, and waste management truly support that promise. How to use these tools in practice:

- Start small: sketch your current customer journey on paper, focusing on one product.
- Identify the weakest touchpoints and brainstorm improvements.
- Once you have a clear journey, create a simple blueprint that maps the internal processes needed to deliver that journey sustainably.
- Revisit the blueprint regularly to adapt to new trends, feedback, or environmental requirements.

Table 3. Customer Journey: Guided Fishing &amp; Relaxation Experience

Stage	Customer Action	Touchpoints	Experience Goal
Awareness	Sees ad or social media post about unique fishing & wellness experience	Social media, websites, brochures	Curiosity, inspiration
Consideration	Checks website, reads reviews, compares options, checks available dates	Website, OTA listings, TripAdvisor	Trust, transparency, reassurance
Booking	Books directly on the website, receive confirmation and practical info	Booking engine, confirmation email, pre-trip information	Ease, confidence, anticipation
Arrival	Arrives at location, welcomed warmly, receives safety and clothing briefing	Reception, staff, welcome materials	Hospitality, security, comfort
Participation	Guided fishing trip, lunch outdoors, sauna & hot tub, dinner, overnight stay	Guide, facilities, dining, accommodation	Adventure, relaxation, shared stories, immersion
Post-visit	Share photos and fishing stories, posts reviews, recommends to friends	Social media, review sites, follow-up email	Lasting memories, advocacy, loyalty

Table 4. Service Blueprint: Guided Fishing &amp; Relaxation Experience

Layer	Frontstage (Customer Sees)	Backstage (Internal Actions)	Support Processes
Marketing	Social media posts, websites, brochures	Content creation, ad campaigns, partnerships	Social media tools, CMS, design services
Booking	Online booking system, confirmation email, pre-trip info	Reservation handling, payment processing, communication	Booking engine, CRM, payment provider
Arrival	Welcome greeting, safety briefing, clothing & gear handover	Staff scheduling, preparation of equipment and thermal suits	Local transport if arranged, fishing gear suppliers
Experience delivery	Guided fishing trip, outdoor lunch, sauna & hot tub, three-course dinner, overnight stay	Guide preparation, boat checks, meal planning, accommodation readiness	Local food suppliers, safety equipment, cleaning services
Feedback collection	Review request, follow-up email, photo sharing encouragement	Survey setup, monitoring reviews, CRM updates	Survey tools, analytics, email marketing system



## Co-creation and Networks in Product Development

Use the Baltic Sea region as your reference group: co-design pilots with regional peers, borrow what works, and contribute your own twist. The point is not sameness. It's momentum and credibility from building together, then differentiating locally.

Developing new off-season products rarely happens in isolation. Strong concepts often require the combination of skills, resources, and ideas from several partners. Working in networks helps entrepreneurs to create richer experiences, share risks, and reach wider audiences.

- **Local partners:** Accommodation providers, restaurants, activity companies, and cultural institutions can together build integrated packages that are more attractive than individual offers.
- **Destination organizations:** Regional and national tourism organizations provide visibility, marketing support, and sometimes training that individual businesses could not achieve alone.
- **Cross-sector collaboration:** Cooperation with schools, artisans, wellness experts, or environmental organizations can bring fresh perspectives and help create unique experiences.



Photo Credit: Chris Alfthan

Building a local tourism ecosystem is particularly important in the off-season. Businesses can support each other through cross-marketing, joint packages, and coordinated promotion. For example, an accommodation provider may promote nearby activities or restaurants, extending visitors' stay and generating shared benefits for the whole community.

Co-creation with partners also plays an important role in testing. By piloting a product together with other businesses, it is easier to evaluate the customer journey as a whole and to adjust the details that affect quality. In addition, working in networks often leads to shared learning and innovation what works for one company may inspire new solutions for others.

“Developing new off-season products rarely happens in isolation.”

For entrepreneurs, the key message is simple: partnerships strengthen off-season products. A single business may be limited in its capacity, but a well-designed network can make the destination more competitive. It makes sure that visitors find compelling reasons to travel outside the main season.

**Tip:** After each season, collect at least one type of feedback systematically. Feedback can be online reviews, survey answers, or informal comments. Small insights accumulate into big improvements.

Long-term development is also about relationships. Maintain active connections with local businesses, tourism organizations, and networks that share your off-season vision. Joint campaigns, shared training, and collaborative events can open new markets and strengthen your brand.

After refining your product with feedback, focus on pricing and distribution.

During the Light in the Dark project we piloted off-season products across the Baltic Sea region. Testers consistently described the experiences as real, calm, honest, warm, simple, and authentic, often highlighting strong storytelling, hosting, safety, and a balanced rhythm between activity and rest. The clearest improvements were about pre-trip information (weather, clothing, practicalities), online visibility (clearer pages with photos and short video), timing and logistics (smoother flow, fewer gaps), and adding a short closure moment so the experience feels complete.

## **CASE From Grain to Loaf– Arčiau Gamtos**

### **Product Overview**

From Grain to Loaf is a hands-on cultural workshop organized by Arčiau Gamtos at the Fisherman's Ethnographic Homestead in Nida, Lithuania. During this three-hour experience, guests learn about traditional rye bread making, listen to stories of Curonian coastal life, and share herbal tea while the bread bakes. The activity invites visitors to slow down, connect with local heritage, and discover the meanings behind everyday traditions.

### **How the Product Could Be Tested**

#### **1. Concept Validation – Defining Uniqueness**

A small-scale test group could be asked: a) What makes this experience special compared to similar ones? b) Which part feels most memorable (baking, storytelling, or cultural immersion)? c) What additional sensory or emotional moments could make it stand out? These insights would help strengthen the value proposition and clarify the storytelling focus.

#### **2. Process Testing – Balancing Activity Flow**

The current three-hour duration may feel long if guests have little to do while the bread bakes. Pilot tests could experiment with time management by adding short interactive moments such as herb-decorating, tasting local honey, or learning traditional songs. Observing participant engagement during these pilots would indicate where the experience naturally slows down and how to keep interest alive without losing its calm atmosphere.

#### **3. Experience Prototyping – Involving Multiple Audiences**

Testing should include diverse groups (families, couples, and cultural traveler) to assess accessibility and emotional impact. Parallel test sessions with different profiles can reveal how to tailor the narrative and pace for each segment without losing authenticity.



#### 4. Testing Enhancements – Storytelling and Setting

The product's emotional strength lies in its connection between food, place, and people. Testing could explore enhancements such as a) Introducing the host's personal story to deepen authenticity. b) Visual storytelling through historical photos or bread tools. c) Including sensory anchors e.g., guests grinding a handful of grain or writing short reflections on their “bread moment.”



Photo Credit: Janne Metso



## Pricing and Distribution

Pricing is more than setting a number. It is a strategic choice. Pricing communicates the value of your product, defines your target customers, and influences profitability. An appropriate price reflects production costs, perceived value, and market segment differences.

Start pricing by calculating your actual costs, including materials, time, staff, transportation, and marketing. Then add a margin that reflects both your effort and the perceived value for the customer. It's often helpful to create package deals that combine accommodation, activities, and meals. This simplifies purchasing for the customer and can increase your earnings.

Checklist for pricing your tourism product:

- Know your costs: Include direct costs (materials, guides, accommodation, food), indirect costs (marketing, administration), and your time.
- Define your pricing model: Will you price per person, per group, per night, or as a package?
- Benchmark competitors: Look at what others offer in your region and in similar destinations. What do they charge and what is included?
- Highlight value, not just price: Emphasize what's included, for instance personal service, local insight, quality, convenience.
- Adjust for seasonality: Offer discounts or value ads for early bookings or off-peak times, but make sure your base price remains fair.
- Consider bundles: Packages that combine activities, accommodation, and meals are easier for customers and can increase your income.
- Leave room for profit: Don't forget to include a margin that reflects your effort, creativity, and risk.

**Tip:** Try price testing. Offer the same product at slightly different prices on different channels and monitor the response to find the optimal level.

### Pricing for individual travelers vs. groups

These two markets require different approaches.

- Groups can benefit from economies of scale: shared transportation, bulk accommodation rates, and volume discounts. This often allows for a lower per-person price while still maintaining profitability.
- Individual travelers and couples share fixed costs among fewer people, which means the per-person price is usually higher. For this market, you can justify the price by offering more personalised service, flexible scheduling, and exclusive access. Consider creating specific offers for solo travelers or couples, such as premium experiences or small-group departures.



Photo Credit: Janne Metso

When working with B2B clients such as tour operators and Destination Management Companies (DMCs), pricing follows different principles than with individual travelers or groups consisting of private individuals. These partners usually expect commission-based agreements or net rates that allow them to build packages. Clear communication on margins, booking terms, and seasonal pricing are crucial to maintaining profitable yet competitive partnerships.

While groups bring volume and stability, individual travelers often bring higher per-person revenue and valuable word-of-mouth marketing. A strong pricing strategy can accommodate.

“Leave room for profit.”

Finally, remember pricing is not a one-off decision. Test different levels, collect feedback, and refine your approach over time. The most effective prices not only cover your costs but also signal the quality and uniqueness of your product. In addition, it builds trust and encourages bookings year after year.

## Distribution Channels

Creating a great off-season product is only half the job. The other half is making sure customers can find and book it. Distribution channels are the pathways that connect your product to potential guests. The right mix of channels can significantly increase your visibility, sales, and long-term profitability.

### Direct channels

- Your own website is the most important direct channel. It should be visually appealing, mobile-friendly, and regularly updated.
- Direct bookings save you commission fees and allow you to build a closer relationship with your customers.
- Use secure and easy-to-navigate booking systems. Complex processes quickly drive customers away.

### Indirect channels

- Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) such as Booking.com or Expedia provide global visibility. However, their commission fees (often 15–25%) must be included in your pricing strategy.
- Tour operators and travel agencies can help attract international visitors who prefer package deals.
- Regional DMOs (Destination Management Organizations) often promote local companies through joint marketing and booking portals.

**Tip:** Track where your bookings are coming from. If an OTA generates most of your sales, work on improving your direct booking options to reduce dependency and

## Balancing the mix

- Relying only on OTAs reduces your margins but relying only on your own website limits visibility. A balanced mix of direct and indirect channels usually works best.
- Keep in mind that today's travelers use multiple touchpoints before booking. They might discover you on Instagram, read re-views on TripAdvisor, and finally book through your website or an OTA. Make sure your message is consistent across all channels.

### **CASE Moonlight Safari Paddling - Kajak Och Uteliv Ab**

#### **Product Overview**

Moonlight Safari Paddling is a 24-hour guided sea kayaking experience in the Stockholm Archipelago, guests paddle from the village of Gräddö toward the island of Lidö, enjoying sunset views, an outdoor-cooked dinner, and overnight accommodation by the sea. The following morning features breakfast, a self-guided nature walk, lunch cooked over an open fire, and a seal and eagle safari before returning to the mainland.

#### **How This Product Could Be Distributed**

##### **1. Direct Channels**

- Company website: Main platform for storytelling and bookings, with vivid visuals and transparent pricing.
- Social media and storytelling: Use Instagram, YouTube, and blog-style articles to evoke emotions — moonlight reflections, silence on the water, local food moments.
- SEO and language adaptation: Visibility for “moonlight kayaking Sweden” or “archipelago overnight adventure” searches in English, German, and Finnish.

##### **2. Indirect Channels**

- Regional DMO platforms: Feature on Visit Stockholm and Stockholm Archipelago portals to reach Nordic and international nature travelers.
- Niche adventure tour operators: Collaborate with European agencies specializing in soft adventure or experiential travel (e.g., Scandinavian Outdoor, Responsible Travel).
- Corporate and incentive travel market: The experience's compact format and emotional depth suit leadership or wellbeing retreats.

##### **3. Distribution Strategy by Season**

- Peak months (August–September): Focus on international bookings via online platforms and DMOs.
- Early/late shoulder season: Target local and regional audiences through newsletters, experience gift cards, and partnerships with wellness and outdoor communities.



## Marketing and Communication

Even the best off-season product will remain invisible if the right people never hear about it. Marketing and communication are not just about promotion. They are about making sure your story reaches the right audience, sparks their interest, and convinces them to book. In the off-season, when competition for attention can be high and overall demand lower, inspiring communication becomes one of your most powerful tools for success.

“Connect your messaging to the core experiential themes.”

Marketing your off-season product means showing potential guests why it's worth traveling outside the peak season. Position with a clear promise tied to the season (“quiet space, clean air, warm comfort”) and name who it's for (couples, small groups, remote-friendly travelers). Match your message to the core themes (Local Lifestyle / Nourished by Nature / Active Adventures), show proof with a few photos or a short clip, and always include practicals (when, what's included, gear, meeting point) plus call to action (CTA) — for example Book now, Request dates, or Check availability.”.

Highlight the elements that make this time unique:

- Peace and authenticity: The chance to enjoy a slower pace, meaningful encounters, and a genuine connection to the local way of life.
- Personal connection: Smaller crowds mean more one-on-one time with guides, hosts, and locals.
- Sustainability: Traveling outside the peak season can help reduce pressure on nature, infrastructure, and communities.

Connect your all messaging to the Baltic Sea Region Concept. Keep your marketing consistent and memorable with the themes.

**Storytelling** is key. Instead of simply listing what's included, paint vivid scenes: the glow of a sauna on a cold November night, the scent of freshly baked bread in a village café, the thrill of spotting wildlife in the quiet of early spring. These images help potential guests imagine themselves in the moment. Once they do, they're more likely to book.

**Tip:** Promote off-season offers already during high season. Guests who enjoy your destination in summer may be the perfect audience for autumn or winter experiences.

Choose your communication channels based on where your target customers spend their time:

- Social media: Use visually engaging content on platforms like Instagram and Facebook, where potential guests can easily share and save your posts.
- Influencer collaborations: Work with trusted voices who align with your brand values and have a genuine connection to your target audience.
- Travel websites and booking platforms: Make sure your listings are up to date, visually appealing, and reflect your off-season strengths.
- Word of mouth: Encourage past customers to share their experiences through reviews, testimonials, and personal recommendations.

Remember: effective marketing is not a one-off effort. Monitor what works, adapt your message, and keep telling your story in fresh ways. Over time, consistent and well-targeted communication builds trust, increases bookings, and strengthens your reputation as an off-season destination worth discovering.

## Partnerships in Marketing and Communication

- Joint visibility: Working with regional tourism organizations, DMO networks, and national visit organizations increase reach and credibility.
- Shared campaigns: Pooling resources with other local businesses enables stronger marketing efforts, especially for international markets.
- Cross-promotion: Partners can recommend each other's services, creating added value for customers and extending the visitor's stay.

**Tip:** Show don't tell. Use photos and short videos instead of long descriptions to capture attention in social media.

Key takeaway: Effective marketing is rarely done alone. Partnerships amplify visibility, build trust, and help off-season products reach the right audiences more efficiently.



Photo Credit: Solveiga Kalva

## Conclusion

The off-season is not a time to wait for business to return. It is a season in its own right. The off-season is full of possibilities for those who know how to use them. By rethinking what your destination offers outside the high season, you can attract new guests, strengthen your brand, and create a more stable year-round income. This handbook has given you the tools, ideas, and inspiration to take that step.

Off-season tourism is not about doing more with less. It is about doing something different. It invites slower pace, deeper connections, and authentic local experiences, all of which are increasingly valued by modern travelers. For small tourism businesses, these months are not a gap but a potential. A chance to stand out from competitors, appeal to new markets, and extend the economic benefits of tourism to the whole year.

With the right product ideas, pricing strategies, and storytelling, the quieter months can become a profitable and fulfilling part of your business. Whether you are just starting to explore this path or already testing new concepts, the key is to keep building, adapting, and sharing your story.

You are not alone. Many others in the Baltic Sea region are working toward the same goal. By collaborating, sharing experiences, and learning from each other, we can shape a tourism economy that is more sustainable, resilient, and rewarding for both visitors and the communities that host them.

### What will sell tomorrow?

Tomorrow's off-season winners in the Baltic won't be single "hero products" so much as experiences that turn shoulder-month realities into advantages. Think in terms of weather-positive design: build programs that become more atmospheric when skies darken or winds rise, with warm transitions (hot drinks, firelight, textiles) and photogenic vantage points that make storms, mist, and low light part of the appeal rather than a risk to be mitigated.

Lean into recovery culture instead of generic wellness. Guests are seeking measurable rest and nervous-system downshifts. Pair heat/cold rituals, sleep hygiene, gentle movement, and digital boundaries with simple diagnostics (sleep scores, breathwork timers) and quiet, tactile spaces. The tone should be cozy and evidence-literate rather than luxury-spa glossy.

Use the long night as a feature. Darkness invites guided attention: soundscapes, storytelling, night saunas, astrophotography intros, and occasional aurora alerts. Build lighting plans and safety choreography so dusk-to-dawn programming feels calm, cinematic, and accessible, not improvised.

Treat nature as co-operative, not consumable. Biodiversity seasons as bird migration, mushroom flushes, and seaweed growth can structure micro-itineraries that are gentle on habitats and beginner friendly.

Design for the hybrid traveler. Off-peak periods are perfect for rhythm stacking: deep-work hours by day, restorative rituals in the evening. Quiet coworker nooks, dependable bandwidth, and humane scheduling signal that guests don't have to choose between outcomes and wellbeing.

Curate culture in small doses. In colder months, attention spans are shorter, and transitions matter more. Tight, well-paced encounters - atelier visits, choir rehearsals, light installations - paired with warm hospitality and reliable transport windows outperform sprawling festivals. Favor partnerships with schools, archives, and craft guilds to refresh content annually.



Engineer frictionless low-carbon movement. Bundled rail-and-ferry legs, luggage transfers, and last-mile bikes make slower travel feel premium. Off-peak dynamic pricing can reward flexible dates, while digital “route passports” turn waypoints into shareable collectibles and a reason to come back in a different month.

Plan for conditional seasons. Ice, snow, and wind are increasingly variable. Programs should have automatic Plan B/C pivots pre-communicated. If the bay doesn’t freeze, the narrative shifts to coastal skills, spa rituals, or kitchen residencies.

## Practical Tools for Product Development

Alongside this handbook, you can use two practical tools designed to help you structure your work, test ideas, and improve quality throughout the development process.

### [Off-Season Product Development Form](#)

This form helps you plan and document your product step by step. Define the core theme and target groups to mapping the customer journey, partnerships, pricing, and marketing. It’s a hands-on tool for workshops and ongoing development, ensuring that your concept stays clear, consistent, and ready for testing.

### [Online Checklist](#)

The short online checklist helps you confirm that your product idea includes all essential off-season elements such as customer focus, storytelling, seasonal fit, and collaboration. You’ll also receive immediate feedback to support further development before piloting your product.

🔗 [Download the Off-Season Product Development Form \(PDF\)](#)

🔗 [Complete the online checklist](#)

Both tools were developed as part of the Light in the Dark project to help small and medium-sized tourism enterprises in the Baltic Sea region design and deliver authentic, high-quality off-season experiences.

All project materials are available on the website <https://lightinthedarkbsr.eu/>. There you’ll find a variety of inspiring and practical resources designed to support you throughout the Off-Season Tourism Product Development Process.

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**Light in the Dark**