



Committee	Assets & Services
Month	November 2023
Report Title	Saffron Walden Food Tours
Report Author	Rachel Hewlett
Attachments	NA

Agenda item: 6b

Saffron Walden Food Tours– April- Sept 2023

Summary

Saffron Walden Food Tours (SWFT) were launched by Saffron Walden Tourist Information Centre in April 2023. This initiative was developed to celebrate the many independent, award-winning food businesses we have in the town and to provide a **bookable experience** for visitors and locals alike. This capitalises on the town's long association with the Saffron industry but also the food industry expertise within our team.

SWFT offer a new perspective on our celebrated medieval market town, attracting both local, domestic and international visitors and providing an experiential reason for visitors to book a return visit and importantly spend money in the town.

Target Market/Typical Customer Profile

Leisure travellers within a 50-mile radius who can incorporate SWFT into a day visit.

International visitors staying for a few days and who are looking for a more personal guided experience and a unique interactive opportunity to discover the town.

Saffron Walden Visitor Economy statistics April- Oct 2023

Note: we have *excluded local visitor numbers* as the primary focus is to attract and increase spend amongst British and international visitors to the town.

The date period reflects the primary months of promotion of the food tours/scope of the opportunity.

Total British and international visitors are up by 30% for this period (4,408) compared with 2022 (3,385)

2023 **International visitors** were significantly up in May (285%) and June (38%), probably driven by the Coronation, warm weather and strength of US\$.

2023 **British visitors** were up most significantly in June (83%) and August (54%), probably driven by warm weather in June, and Audley End concerts in August.



Key Milestones

March 2023 Pilot tour (16/3/23)

Website launch (21/3/23),

1st press article (29/3/23)

April 2023 1st paid bookings (6/4/23)

Paper flyers distributed (14/4/23)

July 2023 Business Breakfast presentation

Size of Business: 1 staff member running the tours and we have hosted:

46 paying guests

17 strategic partners (local hotels, press, staff, Bad Wildungen visitors)

2 Essex Big Weekend prize winners from Maldon

In addition to ticket sale income, estimated spend amongst the 14 participating food businesses by food tour guests is excess of **£1,000** and has included dinner bookings, afternoon tea and product purchases.

SWFT guests have also booked subsequent tickets for The Old Sun Inn tour, Saffron Walden Museum exhibitions, Saffron Hall concerts and purchased additional Food Tour tickets for gifts.

Visitors have come from London, Hertfordshire, Cambridge, Germany, Belgium, USA.

We have also entered the tours for East of England Tourism Awards

Award-winning Saffron Walden businesses include:-

Chaters

Victory Gin-London Spirits Competition, Bronze, 2018
Victory Bitter-IWSC Silver
Cold Distilled Gin-IWSC

Mini Miss

Food & Farming Finalist 2022

Hill St

Academy of Chocolate, 2017

Saffron Fish

Farm Shop & Deli Awards commended 2021

Dead Time

Retailer of the year- Uttlesford Business Awards 2022

Adnams

Broadside sausage with Burtons- Silver award
Dry Hopped Lager- Gold ,World Beer Awards winner
Queens award for Enterprise- Sustainable Development (3x winner)

Tiptree

Patisserie- Great Taste Awards 2022

Press and photographic coverage



PRESS ARTICLES

SAFFRON WALDEN FOOD TOURS
Expert guided food tasting and cultural tours of historic Saffron Walden

SAFFRON WALDEN FOOD TOURS
Expert guided food tasting and cultural tours of historic Saffron Walden

General Information
When: Thursdays 11am up to the end of July (please arrive 10.30am)
Cost: £55 per person, groups (4-10 people) £45 per person. Over-18s only.
Included: All food tasting (enough for lunch) and guided tour.
Duration: 2-2.5 hours, approx.
1 mile walking.
Capacity: MIN 2 people, MAX 10 people.
Wear: Comfortable shoes and clothes suitable for some outdoor settings.
Accessibility: If you have mobility requirements, please contact us.

PURCHASE TICKETS
visitsaffronwalden.gov.uk
01799 524002
Tourist Information Centre
1 Market Place, Saffron Walden, CB10 1HR
Tours must be booked 24 hours in advance.
Please advise of any allergies when booking.

Conratulations to our Sovereign King Charles III

Walden Local 11th May 2023 (Paid)

The Three Hills
HOME ABOUT US OFFERS EAT STAY CHRISTMAS PRIVATE EVENTS GALLERY EXPLORE #1222 BRIDGE

Winner: Best Rural/Country Pub in the UK 2022 (Great British Pub Awards)
Winner: Best of England Pub and Bar of the Year 2022 (National Pub and Bar Awards)
Winner: Best Traditional Pub in Suffolk and Cambridgeshire 2022 (Mudie Special Awards)
Finalist: Best Rural/Country Pub in the UK 2023 (Great British Pub Awards)

The warmest welcome in Cambridgeshire

Walking Food Tour of Saffron Walden
Updated May 10

There is such a wealth of things to do if you are staying with us at The Three Hills, and last Thursday we paired a group of keen foodies to experience the delights that Saffron Walden has to offer under the expert care of local food guide Rachel Veal.

First stop: the Goat and Grass on Cross Street, a very popular brunch cafe serving the most delicious power salads, avocado, poached egg and smoked salmon breakfasts and a whole host of other emerging dishes. Full of local buzz and friendly staff, you will want to linger longer than we had time but best not to head to the other side of Church Street, a wonderful bakery specialising in sour dough breads and selected

Three Hills -May 2023

ESSEX BIG WEEKEND

Essex Big Weekend 2023

Why
We are going to see incredible live music, comedy, and more.

When
Saturday 26th and Sunday 27th August 2023

What
Free tickets will be available for everyone. Accommodation and parking at the event.

How
The tickets will open on 26th August 2023

visit essex

Essex Big W/E
7,700 Essex resident participated
626 (8%) bid to win SW Food Tour

Finding Gold
At £10 per gram, the exact growing location of the world's most expensive spice is one of Saffron Walden's best kept foodie secrets. Velvet writer Riadh Falvo takes a culinary tour of the town

For our tour, local food enthusiast and guide Rachel Hewitt of Saffron Walden Tourist Information Centre chose nine stops, tours change weekly depending on availability of the chefs, owners, and seasonal food and drink offerings.

Rachel has two main criteria when organising the tours, starting first and foremost with quality, and the special service offered by the venues front of house team.

"Uniqueness - many of our venues are independent but it's more than that, it's about the customer experience that they offer and their uniqueness from one another. You can have coffee at Little Patisserie or Goat & Grass but they offer a very different dining experience and have different specialities in terms of products," she explains.

"Then there's a company story/credentials - the venues link to the local area, either through owners or production, and their passion for their products. This covers both those making products in town like Mini Miss Bread or the more regionally based businesses like Toppies and Achams, but also people

Velvet Magazine -Sept 2023
Readership 36,000
Distribution Cambridge/West Suffolk
Advertising Equivalent spend £500

Financial Implications

SWFT PROFIT & LOSS

Income	£
Ticket Sales (EXCL VAT)	1864.00
Total Income	1864.00
Expenses	
Branding, Printing & Advertising	1083.00
Food Samples	86.13
Staff	791.70
Total Expenses	1960.83
	 -228.83

Ticket sales generated through visits to TIC, online bookings, customers, and business referrals.

Whilst the new offering is yet to break even, it will do so in the 2024/25 season. It is not unusual for a fledgling idea/project to run cost neutral/at a loss in the early days. There is significant interest from the general public, groups and the business community in continuing with the food tours in the next season when the marketing investment in 2023 will come to fruition.

46 paying customers have participated in the tours and half of these have been group bookings of 4 or more which enjoy a discounted group price of £45 per person.

Complimentary tours have been offered to all the local businesses that advertise with the Tourist Information Centre to encourage promotion of the tours within their venues. Guests have included:-

- Down Hall, Hatfield Broad Oak
- Three Hills, Bartlow
- Velvet Magazine, Cambridge
- Bish magazine (Dec Christmas edition), Bishop Stortford
- The Chestnut Group, (Eight Bells, The Cricketers plus 12 other pubs)
- The Red Cow /The Black Bull, Chrishall/Hinxton

Key Considerations / Feedback

Client Feedback

"I never knew the town had so much food to offer. All of the businesses were great and of particular interest for me they were small independent businesses with huge amounts of passion"
(March 2023)

"I now look at the town in a completely different way. I have been back to several of the food stops and bought things and told them how much we enjoyed it too."
(April 2023)

*"You did an excellent job, and after learning of your extensive experience and history in food and hospitality, it makes sense!
Everything was so well put together and the food visits you choose for our group were a perfect harmony of sweet and savoury!"*
(June 23)

"Fantastic tour carefully planned & researched. Enthusiastic welcoming, informative tour rep, well done Rachel "

For Venues

Each venue/host is scored out of 5 for the following interest, quality and quantity of food sampled/interaction with the owner if available.

This feedback is shared every 3 months with each venue and the Town Clerk.

Lovely atmosphere (Goat & Grass)
So cool to have a place like this in such a small town! (Hill St)
Lovely talk, inspiring (Adnams)

Lovely shop with mainly British fish (Saffron Fish)
Ten minute distillery tour (Chaters)
Another unexpected but very welcome stop (Sage & Saffron)

Really enjoyed the bread & story behind the shop (Mini Miss)
Alex is amazing. Food is top tier (Bella Bella)
Very informative (Dead Time)

Delicious smoothie, great fun (smoothie bike)

Officer Recommendation

- (1) Develop promotional packages with local venues, hotels and accommodation to attract food tourists to our area, combining Saffron Walden Food Tours with their visits.

This will attract both food tourists looking to discover new food heroes and regional specialities as well as other visitors planning leisure vacations or staying in the area for events such as weddings. This will include working closely with the Saffron Walden Town Council events team who are the first point of contact for weddings, markets and events that happen in our own town centre venues, as well as working with other key venues in town such as Saffron Hall, who often share similar profile target customers.

- (2) Develop further formats of the food tour to include seasonal specials focussing on both seasonal products in store, events and any unique history of the town, Christmas, Valentines Day, Easter etc.

We will also look at new formats including shorter tours to try and capture coach visitors who often don't have time for a 2.5 hour food tour whilst also spending the time visiting our many other town attractions. This shorter format may also exclude a personal guide to enable us to maintain margins but also attract visitors with smaller budgets/less time. This could also improve our accessibility for visitors with additional needs who prefer to self-guide and/ or avoid groups. This could be in an audio format, too, depending on costs.

- (3) Developing partnerships with the property developers in the surrounding areas to promote food tours as part of a welcome package for new residents of their properties.