

Swale Visitor Economy Framework Action Plan

For this action plan to be a success it is essential that there is shared ownership across different stakeholder groups and council departments. It is therefore vital to establish a clear working structure right from the start; identifying resources, delivery responsibility and agreeing key milestones.

The following action plan has been developed based on a range of **primary and secondary research** as well as **consultations with cross-council departments and wider stakeholders** from across the borough. The plan builds on the first stage of work already carried out to deliver on the Visitor Economy Framework, taking into consideration the unique identity of individual areas but also the shared assets and challenges of the borough and wider destination. This work is also designed to support wider placemaking objectives and we recommend that you use the extensive research to update the existing resources and inform future strategies.

Placemaking

Creating a strong framework which will support growth of the Visitor Economy in Swale has benefits beyond providing experiences for tourists, improving the attractiveness of the place not just to visitors but also residents, investors and incoming skilled workers. The Visitor Economy Framework should sit at the heart of a wider placemaking strategy, incorporating stakeholders from wider sectors, supporting inward investment and skills development.

Investment in visitor infrastructure provides resources that help to build strong communities, improving civic pride and supporting social inclusion. Furthermore, the Visitor Economy Framework can support the transformation of public spaces, enhancing community assets and providing a new focus for problem areas. Developing the visitor offer has also been proven to be a catalyst for the transformation of the high street and creating vibrant places by helping to capitalise on the growing trend for experiences and improving the dining and evening economy offer. Delivering the actions within this document, which supports the work already carried out by the Visit Swale team, will have a wider impact on how people perceive Swale.

The internal workshop helped us to ensure that the action plan reflects current local authority priorities such as the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency with a focus on sustainable tourism and aligns with interrelated strategies such as the Heritage and Cycling & walking Strategies.

A significant amount of both primary and secondary research has been carried out to ensure that the framework responds to the needs of visitors and changing visitor trends. While consultation with departments across Swale Borough Council means that the actions will support wider council strategies and objectives.

The action plan has been structured into six workstreams which address the destination challenges defined by the research, while also aligning with wider council priorities.

1. Branding & identity
2. Business support and partnerships
3. Product quality and development
4. Transport & public realm
5. Community engagement
6. Tactical marketing

The workstreams have emerged from the following six overarching destination challenges that were identified as part of the research and further tested in the workshops. For more details about each challenge, please consult Appendix 1.

1. Shift visitors' perceptions of the area and increase awareness of the product offering.
2. Give visitors a reason to stay longer and spend more.
3. Respond to visitor engagement with online and social content.
4. Give visitors a reason to visit outside of the summer season.
5. Develop the visitor experience by creating packages and experiences.
6. Persuade visitors to travel beyond London.

Visitor Economy Framework

The table below provides an overview of the workstreams and the headline actions. This must be read in conjunction with the specific deliverables which have been informed by research and are detailed across the following pages.

Overarching Destination Challenges					
Placemaking					
Workstream 1	Workstream 2	Workstream 3	Workstream 4	Workstream 5	Workstream 6
Branding & identity	Business support & partnerships	Product quality & development	Transport & public Realm	Community engagement	Tactical marketing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Review and embed destination identity for towns ➤ Improve destination video and photography ➤ Develop destination brand and increase awareness ➤ Improve engagement on social media channels ➤ Develop destination content bank ➤ Refresh on-brand visitor materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Respond to changing visitor needs ➤ Develop business training programme ➤ Increase cross-promotion between businesses ➤ Increase cross-sector collaboration ➤ Increase regional collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Grow experiential product ➤ Develop water activities ➤ Improve quality of accommodation ➤ Develop out of season events ➤ Showcase local food, drink & produce better ➤ Develop walking and cycling offer ➤ Develop sustainable tourism offer ➤ Improve coastline, sea front and estuary offer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Improve cycling infrastructure ➤ Improve disability access ➤ Improve visitor facilities and signage ➤ Improve landscaping and green spaces ➤ Develop integrated transport and smart ticketing solutions ➤ Improve coach parking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Uncover and tell real stories ➤ Curate special offers for residents ➤ Integrated communication strategy for residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Define and segment comms channels by key target markets ➤ Develop campaigns with regional partners ➤ Develop out of season campaigns ➤ Local campaign ➤ Develop overnight-stays campaign ➤ Partner with relevant influencers
Measuring Results					
Resource					

Measurement and reporting

These actions have been developed to be specific, measurable and achievable with realistic timelines. The suggested timescales we have used are:

- Short term – up to 1 year
- Medium term – 2-3 year
- Long term – up 5 years

Establishing clear metrics by which to measure growth in the visitor economy is vital. Swale Borough Council currently commissions the Cambridge Model Economic Impact Study every two years. Continuing to commission the Economic Impact Study, will provide a comparable set of data on changes in visitor economy.

In addition, this District level data can be aligned to other performance indicators such as digital reach, engagement and subscribers, additional spend from marketing campaign evaluation. Other indicators of success could include growth in engaged partners for Visit Swale and initiatives outlines below including online platforms selling experiences and Gourmet Garden Trails, event footfall counters, day visitor dwell time based on car park ticketing and increased use of coach parking facilities. Destination visitor research should be carried out a minimum of every five years, particularly if regeneration and destination development work has taken place as this will provide a measurement of changing perceptions.

Resource and funding

The following Action Plan is based on a partnership delivery structure. As many of the actions align with wider council priorities and initiatives, any resource or funding required from within the council may be allocated according to the priority function.

Responsibilities for actions also sits with the private sector, with some actions delivered by businesses within the Swale district as well as partner organisations across the county. This is why it's essential that businesses and organisations involved in the development and listed as delivery partners are actively engaged and take shared ownership of the plan. By exploring partnership working opportunities for delivery of large-scale projects, there can be the added benefits of economies of scale, shared expertise and leveraging additional funding streams.

Individual businesses have had some success in accessing funding through schemes such as LEADER and LOCASE. Work should be done to identify new funding streams and promoting them to the right businesses to maximise the benefit for the area.

Workstream 1: Branding & Identity

Deliverable	Destination Challenges	Delivery Timescale	Delivery partners	Location
1. Review and embed destination identity for towns 1.1. Refresh destination stories based on new visitor insights 1.2. Disseminate visitor research town dashboards 1.3. Create pen portraits of product audit for each destination 1.4. Create pen portraits of key audience of each destination 1.5. Identify destination brand ambassador(s) for each town 1.6. Dedicated presence for each town on Visit Swale website with clear user journey and avoiding duplication	1,3	Short term	Swale Borough Council - Visit Swale, Town Councils, Visit Kent	Faversham, Isle of Sheppey, Sittingbourne
2. Improve destination video & photography 2.1. Refresh and build-upon existing image library and conduct gap analysis 2.2. Following gap analysis, commission new destination imagery and video content by audience and theme to build on existing image library	1,3	Short / Medium term	Swale Borough Council - Visit Swale, Businesses, Colleges, Photography Clubs	Swale
3. Develop destination branding and increase awareness 3.1. Assess if a full destination branding exercise is required to support visitor economy as well as wider placemaking 3.2. Create destination brand guidelines document 3.3. Develop a destination PR strategy	1,3	Short /Medium term	Swale Borough Council - Visit Swale, Communications, Economic Development	Swale
4. Improve engagement on social media channels 4.1. Create social media guidelines, including key messages, hashtags and tone of voice for each channel 4.2. Map audience and best team within Swale Borough Council to deliver each channel	1,3	Short term	Swale Borough Council - Visit Swale, Communications	Swale

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.3. Launch Visit Swale Instagram account for visitor focused messages 4.4. Launch Swale Borough Council LinkedIn business account for business engagement messages 4.5. Once in place, add Instagram feed to Visit Swale website 4.6. Create 3 or 4 locations for Instagram suitable photography within public realm 4.7. Work with local social media influencers, photographers and bloggers 4.8. Set up a working group with key partner businesses and organisations to support key social media content themes including shared hashtags e.g. gardens, food, history etc. 4.9. Incorporate user generated content onto channels 4.10. Create agreed plan for sharing content on Visit Swale channels from town-led organisation channels e.g. Visit Faversham 4.11. Create opportunities for user engagement such as voting/polls 				
<p>5. Develop destination content bank</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1. Continue to develop Visit Swale content authors group 5.2. Create quarterly content plan with seasonal, local and national themes 5.3. Set up streamlined process for businesses to submit content 5.4. Set up content bank with generic sample copy 	1,3	Ongoing	Swale Borough Council - Visit Swale, Communications, Businesses	Swale
<p>6. Refresh on-brand visitor materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6.1. Maintain regular updates to the Swale Visitor Map 6.2. Explore opportunities for commercial funding of the Swale Visitor Map 6.3. Map current distribution channels for the Swale Visitor Map 	1	Short term	Swale Borough Council – Visit Swale	

Workstream 2: Business support & partnerships

Deliverable	Destination Challenges	Delivery Timescale	Delivery partners	Location
1. Respond to changing visitor needs 1.1. Review of business opening times and recommendations based on visitor behaviour and footfall 1.2. Businesses to build partnerships with accommodation providers, with a focus on holiday park owners to encourage wider dispersal of visitors and increase spend 1.3. Improve visitor welcome from businesses with specific destination welcome training.	2,4	Medium term	Businesses, Visit Swale	Swale
2. Develop business training programme 2.1. Digital Experience Platform Training i.e. Airbnb Experiences / TripAdvisor 2.2. Welcome Walkers Training 2.3. Content Curation for Social Media training 2.4. SEO & Google Maps Training 2.5. Accessibility training 2.6. Destination welcome training 2.7. Online Profile and Reviews training 2.8. Self-catering quality development training	4,6	Short term	Visit Swale	Swale
3. Increase cross-promotion between businesses 3.1. Businesses to utilise Visit Swale fam trips 3.2. Annual networking and leaflet swap event 3.3. Update and raise awareness of the business toolkit to include imagery, copy, Swale Visitor Map pdf and links that businesses can use to promote other local businesses and events on their own channels 3.4. Raise awareness of business toolkit and wider Swale Borough Council B2B support tools 3.5. Encourage attractions to include links to nearby accommodation on their websites.	1,2,5	Short / Medium term	Businesses, Visit Swale, Historic Swale, Produced in Kent, Explore Kent, Wheels of Time	Swale

<p>3.6. Encourage accommodation providers to list nearby attractions on their websites.</p> <p>3.7. Increase engagement with and between tourism businesses through communications on LinkedIn</p>				
<p>4. Increase cross-sector collaboration</p> <p>4.1. Build relationships with local producers and create local supplier list for businesses</p> <p>4.2. Develop links with local artist networks such as artists' open houses and connect with other businesses/projects</p> <p>4.3. Encourage businesses to get involved with the 'Great for Art' Homes pilot as part of England's Creative Coast</p> <p>4.4. Encourage businesses to get involved with England's Coastal Path project</p> <p>4.5. Work with retail and market traders to engage with events, incorporate more local products and experiences</p> <p>4.6. Create best practice case studies of cross-sector partnerships for each sector</p>	<p>2,5</p>	<p>Medium term</p>	<p>Businesses, Produced in Kent, East Kent Artists' Open Houses, Market Traders, Visit Kent, Natural England – England's Coastal Path, Artists, Residents</p>	<p>Swale</p>
<p>5. Increase regional collaboration</p> <p>5.1. Set up a collaboration network with neighbouring destinations</p> <p>5.2. Develop regional and thematic itineraries with partners</p> <p>5.3. Participate in partnership working groups to benefit from the Dickens 150 anniversary and highlight Dickens connections across Swale</p> <p>5.4. Ensure that Visit Swale messaging aligns with the "Visitor First" regional approach</p> <p>5.5. Build stronger relationships with transport providers to ensure Swale destinations are profiled on their channels</p> <p>5.6. Support a county-wide bid in for tourism zone status to address barriers to growth</p>	<p>1,2,5,6</p>	<p>Medium term</p>	<p>Visit Swale, Visit Kent, Medway Council, Gravesham Borough Council, Visit Canterbury, Quality Bus Partnership, Joint Transportation Board, Kent Highways</p>	<p>Swale</p>

Workstream 3: Product quality & development

Deliverable	Destination Challenges	Delivery Timescale	Delivery partners	Location
1. Grow experiential product 1.1. Businesses and organisations to identify opportunities for delivering visitor experiences, including fossil hunting, scorpion hunting, sea glass craft, archaeological dig experiences, beach and forest schools 1.2. Develop suitable booking processes for experiences 1.3. Case studies with businesses already delivering experiences through digital experiences platforms	1,2,5,6	Medium term	Businesses, Visit Swale, Visit Kent, Historic Swale, Residents	Swale
2. Develop water activities 2.1. Work with Yacht Club, Sailing Club, Barge Museum and Rowing Club to develop visitor offer 2.2. Identify a provider to hire SUPs, Sea Kayaks, Wind surfing and Kite boarding 2.3. Raise awareness of wild and outdoor swimming offer including blue flag beaches and Faversham lido with outdoor swimming groups and triathlons 2.4. Work with boat tour providers to further develop tours to Maunsell Sea Forts from Queenborough, seal watching as well as photography and art tours 2.5. Explore the possibility of reopening ferry link from mainland to the Isle of Harty 2.6. Install mooring posts at Milton Creek	4,5,6	Long term	Swale Borough Council, Businesses, Visit Swale	Swale
3. Improve quality of accommodation 3.1. Work with landowners / tenants to support diversification into high quality visitor accommodation 3.2. Encourage more high-quality glamping and sustainable accommodation products 3.3. Actively encourage development of a high quality / boutique hotel through the local plan and identifying suitable sites	2,5	Long term	Swale Borough Council - Planning, Visit Swale, Locate in Kent, Visit Kent	Swale

<p>3.4. Work with Visit Kent and Locate in Kent to target suitable hotel developers working within the local plan</p> <p>3.5. Deliver training to support all accommodation providers to improve the standard of quality with a focus on self-catering businesses</p>				
<p>4. Develop out of season events</p> <p>4.1. Create Swale event calendar as a planning resource for businesses</p> <p>4.2. Identify gaps in the calendar for new out of season events</p> <p>4.3. Identify themes and audiences for new events based on destination identity</p> <p>4.4. Ensure that event seed funding to support organisations looking to set up a new event or expand an existing one is part of any future community grant scheme</p>	1,4,6	Medium / Long term	Businesses, Visit Swale, Swale Borough Council	Swale
<p>5. Showcase local food, drink and produce better</p> <p>5.1. Hospitality businesses to develop local produce menus</p> <p>5.2. Create field to fork narrative for each local producer with food miles information</p> <p>5.3. Develop more food and drink experiences</p> <p>5.4. Increase number of businesses involved in Gourmet Garden Trails and Kent Food Trails</p>	1,2,6	Short / Medium term	Businesses, Produced in Kent, Visit Kent, Visit Swale	Swale
<p>6. Develop walking & cycling offer</p> <p>6.1. Promote the three walking and cycling ‘Wildlife and Heritage Trails’ linking Coast to Downs in Swale, developed through the Interreg Experience project</p> <p>6.2. Develop product around England’s Coastal Path</p> <p>6.3. Develop baggage transfer connections</p> <p>6.4. Businesses to review the suitability of their offer/product for the walking and cycling market</p> <p>6.5. Increase number of water bottle refill locations on refill.org</p> <p>6.6. Secure a bike hire provider to deliver bike hire app</p>	2,5,6	Medium term	Businesses, Kent Downs AONB, Sustrans, Explore Kent, CyclingUK, Local Rambler Associations, Natural England – England’s Coastal Path, Visit Swale	Swale

<p>6.7. Commission cycling and walking maps for Sittingbourne</p> <p>6.8. Promote walking and cycling routes through national networks accessed by local rambler associations</p>				
<p>7. Develop sustainable tourism offer</p> <p>7.1. Curate content around eco-accommodation, low impact experiences and locally sourced produce</p> <p>7.2. Create a sustainable tourism toolkit to support businesses to be more environmentally friendly and showcase their credentials better</p> <p>7.3. Work with environmental and conservation organisations to develop new volunteering experiences</p> <p>7.4. Encourage more electric vehicle charging points at tourism businesses and identify potential funding sources.</p>	4,5,6	Medium term	Visit Swale, Businesses, Visit Kent, Kent Downs AONB, Kent Wildlife Trust, Kent County Council	Swale
<p>8. Improve coastline, sea front and estuary offer</p> <p>8.1. Work with local artists and community to continue development of the art offering on the sea wall</p> <p>8.2. Encourage quality hospitality providers and concessions in sea front areas through planning policy</p> <p>8.3. Review planning and licencing policies to ensure support for the development of quality hospitality providers with economic benefit for the local area</p> <p>8.4. Install beach huts with online booking</p>	1,2,5,6	Medium / Long term	Swale Borough Council - Planning, Economic Development, Businesses, Town and Parish Councils, Natural England – England’s Coastal Path, Visit Swale	Swale

Workstream 4: Transport & Public Realm

Deliverable	Destination Challenges	Delivery Timescale	Delivery partners	Location
<p>1. Improve cycling infrastructure</p> <p>1.1. Provide feedback to Sustrans on technical Town Audits (Sheerness and Faversham) and agree priorities for delivery</p> <p>1.2. Await outcome of bid for funding to create Sittingbourne walking and cycling map with Explore Kent</p> <p>1.3. More facilities at accommodation such as cycle storage, drying rooms and water refills</p> <p>1.4. Through Interreg Experience, develop three enhanced “green routes” for walking and cycling ‘Wildlife and Heritage Trails’ linking Coast to Downs in Swale</p>	1,4,5,6	Medium / Long term	Swale Borough Council, Kent Downs AONB, Explore Kent, Kent Count Council, Town and Parish Councils, Visit Swale	Swale
<p>2. Improve disabled access</p> <p>2.1. Develop accessible seafront walk</p> <p>2.2. Have key venues, including historical attractions, audited by Access-able</p> <p>2.3. Deliver audits of public seating and map gaps in provision</p> <p>2.4. Deliver audits of accessible toilets and changing spaces and map gaps in provision</p> <p>2.5. Improve public transport accessibility</p>	2,4	Long term	Swale Borough Council, Town Councils, Visit Swale, Historic Swale, Businesses, Tenants, Southeastern, Arriva, Stagecoach	Swale
<p>3. Improve visitor facilities and signage</p> <p>3.1. Deliver audit of public toilet facilities (location, opening times, standard of facilities, accessibility, user costs etc) in key attraction/event areas including the seafront</p> <p>3.2. Establish a Community Toilet Scheme and promote the Use Our Loos app to support additional provision</p> <p>3.3. Deliver audit of retail in each town and map gaps in provision of outlets of visitor interest.</p> <p>3.4. Wayfinding audit of signage and identify any gaps</p>	1,2	Medium term	Swale Borough Council, Town and Parish Councils, Visit Swale, Kent Highways, Businesses	Swale

<p>4. Improve landscaping & green spaces</p> <p>4.1. Increase tree planting in public areas</p> <p>4.2. Create 3 or 4 locations for Instagram suitable photography within public realm</p> <p>4.3. Conduct audit of picnic and seating areas in visitor locations including town centres and identify gaps in provision or quality</p> <p>4.4. Encourage businesses/retailers to install/improve their own floral/garden displays where appropriate. Focus on key event themes e.g. Hop Festival, Hanami etc</p> <p>4.5. Include “How to guides” on green space development on the Visit Swale business toolkit</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Medium term</p>	<p>Swale Borough Council, Town and Parish Councils, Businesses, Swale in Bloom, Visit Swale</p>	<p>Swale</p>
<p>5. Integrated transport & smart ticketing solutions</p> <p>5.1. Map visitor transport routes including provider, length of time and cost.</p> <p>5.2. Continue to raise awareness of the Kent Connected app to visitors</p> <p>5.3. Promote plus bus ticket options where last mile is a challenge</p> <p>5.4. Work with Arriva on review of Isle of Sheppey</p> <p>5.5. Work with Arriva and Southeastern on joint ticketing</p> <p>5.6. Explore opportunity for reopening the ferry link from Harty to Faversham</p> <p>5.7. Continue work with boat provider to deliver water ferry/taxi service from Queenborough to Medway and Southend</p> <p>5.8. Scope infrastructure requirements for continuing long-term ferry link with Southend</p> <p>5.9. Set up network of businesses to develop packages and experiences around the Queenborough ferry service</p>	<p>2,6</p>	<p>Medium / Long term</p>	<p>Arriva, Stagecoach, Southeastern, Swale Borough Council, Kent Connected, Kent Highways, Queenborough Harbour Trust, Businesses, Visit Swale</p>	<p>Swale</p>

<p>6. Improve coach parking</p> <p>6.1. Option review of potential coach parking sites across public car parks including capacity, facilities, cost and opening times</p> <p>6.2. Review opportunity for businesses that could provide coach parking space and facilities</p> <p>6.3. Once secured, ensure all suitable coach parks are updated on Visit Kent trade hub</p>	<p>2,4</p>	<p>Medium term</p>	<p>Swale Borough Council, Town Councils, Visit Swale, Visit Kent, Kent Highways, Businesses</p>	<p>Swale</p>
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Workstream 5: Community engagement

Deliverable	Destination Challenges	Delivery Timescale	Delivery partners	Location
1. Uncover and tell real stories 1.1. Develop “People Like Me” campaign featuring content from local residents 1.2. Encourage residents to share their favourite places/hidden gems via social media and groups	1,2,3,6	Medium term	Visit Swale, Local residents, Communications	Swale
2. Curate special offers for residents 2.1. Encourage business and local resident engagement with Kent Big Weekend and Heritage Open days 2.2. Develop town apps for businesses to offer residents incentives and offers	1,3,4	Short / medium term	Businesses, Visit Swale, Town Council, Visit Faversham, Faversham Traders Association	Swale
3. Integrated communication strategy for residents 3.1. Review all resident and business communication channels managed by the council 3.2. Map opportunities for sharing relevant tourism messages on wider Swale Borough Council communication channels	1,3,4	Short term	Swale Borough Council - Visit Swale, Communications	Swale

Workstream 6: Tactical marketing

Deliverable	Destination Challenges	Delivery Timescale	Delivery partners	Location
1. Define and segment comms channels by key target markets 1.1. Map all Swale Borough Council comms channels and partner channels by audience 1.2. Use the product audit to align against target audience 1.3. Create an audience and style guide for each channel 1.4. Ensure alignment with PR strategy	3	Short term	Visit Swale, Swale Borough Council, Visit Kent, Communications team	Swale
2. Develop campaigns with regional partners 2.1. Maritime links 2.2. Heritage links 2.3. Food & drink links 2.4. Film locations 2.5. Suitable businesses to participate in Discover England Fund campaign, Gourmet Garden Trails 2.6. Suitable businesses to participate in Discover England Fund campaign, England's Creative Coast	1,2,3,4,5,6	Short / Medium term	Businesses, Visit Swale, Visit Kent, other councils	Swale
3. Develop out of season campaigns 3.1. Build on "dog friendly" website feature content and develop campaign 3.2. Build on "Back to nature - nearest faraway place" website feature content and develop campaign 3.3. Build on "Hidden gems" website feature content and develop campaign 3.4. Build on "Food & Drink" website feature content and develop campaign	1,2,3,4,6	Medium term	Visit Swale, Visit Kent, Visit Faversham, Businesses	Swale
4. Local campaign 4.1. Deliver local campaign on suitable residents' channels using "people like me" content and recommendations e.g. residents' groups, newsletters	1,2,3,4	Medium term	Visit Swale, Swale Borough Council Comms, Visit Kent	Swale

4.2. Encourage residents to participate in Kent Big Weekend and Heritage Open Days				
5. Develop overnight-stays campaign 5.1. Develop digital marketing campaign including competition in partnership with attractions and accommodation providers. 5.2. Feature good quality and “quirky” accommodation on social media channels 5.3. Include accommodation suggestions in all inspirational content featured on Visit Swale website 5.4. Incorporate into wider PR strategy	2,4,6	Medium term	Visit Swale, businesses, Visit Kent	Swale
6. Partner with relevant influencers 6.1. Identify suitable influencers based on audience 6.2. Confirm partnerships to support out of season campaign themes 6.3. Continue to utilise TravMedia network 6.4. Incorporate into wider PR strategy	1,3,4,6	Medium term	Visit Swale, Visit Faversham, Visit Kent, Communications	Swale

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