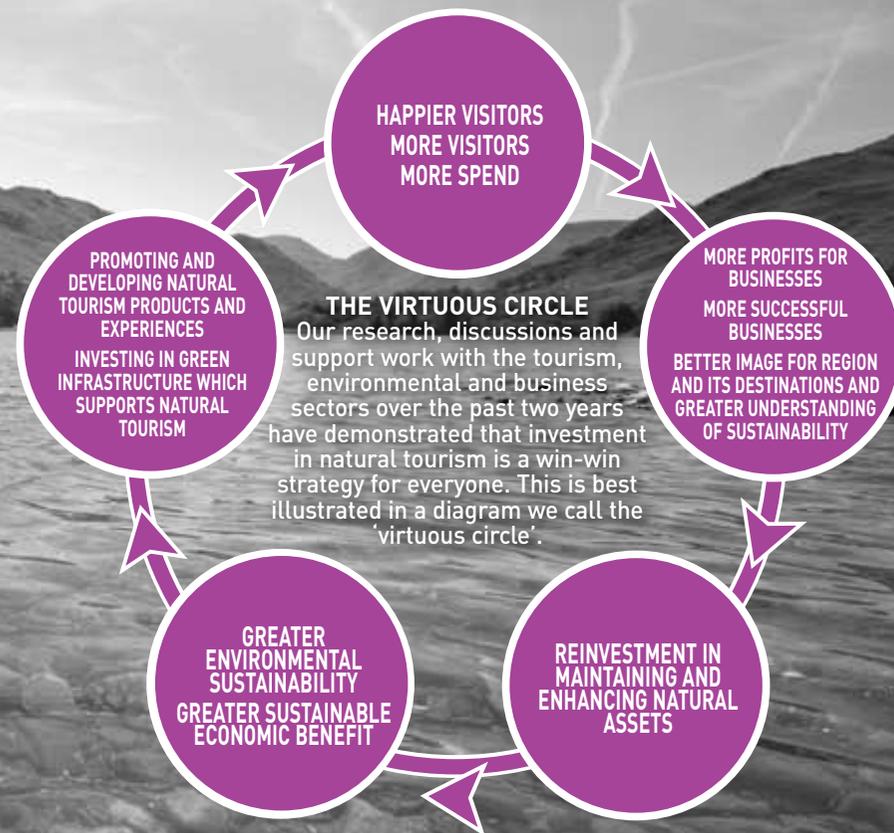




Growing Natural Tourism



Canoeing on Ullswater in the Lake District – just one of a host of natural tourism opportunities



Foreword

The glories of the Lake District didn't only inspire Wordsworth and Beatrix Potter! The lakes and fells remain one of the UK's most popular attractions. But England's Northwest boasts a huge variety of other natural delights, from the Trough of Bowland in Lancashire, said to be one of the Queen's favourite retreats, to the rolling countryside of Cheshire. The coast line stretching from the wild Scottish borders to the mountains of North Wales hosts a vast array of natural and man-made attractions from nature reserves

to beaches, championship golf courses to famous sculptures. We want as many people as possible to share and enjoy these unique assets while helping to safeguard and enhance them for the future.

This guide* has been distilled from Natural Economy Northwest's research, discussions and support work with the tourism, environmental and business sectors over the past two years. It demonstrates the important contribution sustainable natural tourism can make to the economy of England's Northwest.

It illustrates how by pooling effort and investment, tourist boards, local authorities, and other tourism and environmental organisations, can ensure the natural environment is used and enjoyed by the increasing numbers of visitors attracted to this region for outdoor activities or simply to get away from it all. Working together, not only to tell potential visitors what is here, we can ensure we have the facilities and infrastructure to enable visitors to enjoy these often fragile areas, and the management and vision to look

after this precious resource.

Natural tourism, done well, should result in better stewardship of the natural environment, conserving and enhancing the experience for future generations. England's Northwest can naturally be England's greenest destination.

Felicity Goodey CBE, DL
Chairman, Tourism England's Northwest and Cheshire, Gardens of Distinction

*This guide is based on a paper produced by Blue Sail for Natural Economy Northwest.



Natural tourism can offer plenty of adventure

What is natural tourism?

Realising the potential of natural tourism will involve people from a range of sectors and backgrounds – from tourism, environment, nature conservation and economic development, if not more. To ensure clear communication, a few definitions are in order.

Natural Tourism is tourism that is based on, and motivated by, experiencing the natural environment.

Much natural tourism is relatively passive, such as visitors enjoying scenery as part of a relaxing break that could also include spending time with family and friends, eating out, shopping or generally 'pottering'.

Then there are the activities which take place in the natural environment. These include:

- 'Soft' activities, such as walking and cycling;
- Adventure activities, such as rock climbing and water sports;
- Wildlife watching;
- Leisure learning, that is, combining a holiday with learning new skills in areas such as photography and painting;
- Conservation breaks
- Events and festivals with a natural environment theme.

Green Infrastructure is a new term coined to describe the totality of the green and blue environment and the social, economic and environmental benefits it provides. The definition adopted in the Northwest is:

Green infrastructure is the region's life support system – the network of natural environmental

CASE STUDY

Fix the Fells

The Lake District is one of the most beautiful places in the world, attracting millions of visitors every year. However, its popularity comes at a price – the heavy tourist traffic means many of the area's footpaths are suffering potentially devastating erosion.

The erosion is caused as grass, soil and peat are trampled by walkers and then worn away by rain, wind and ice. The result is wide, scarred paths that are visible for miles. As well as being ugly, they are also difficult to walk on and damage the heritage, archaeological and natural history qualities of the area.

Fix the Fells is a huge project to repair footpaths throughout the area. The National Park Authority, Friends of the Lake District, the National Trust, Natural England, Tourism and Conservation Partnership, the Ramblers Association and the Field Studies Council all worked together to secure Heritage Lottery Funding to address the problem.

To date 102 paths have been fixed with a further 74 identified for work. A team of volunteers provide an invaluable workforce, combining traditional practices with modern equipment such as helicopters, which can transport materials to remote locations.

The Fix the Fells teams hope that in this way they will be able to preserve the Cumbrian landscape and its fragile ecosystem for future generations.

www.fixthefells.co.uk



Volunteers repair a Lake District footpath as part of the Fix the Fells project.



Well maintained natural assets have economic as well as social value

components and green and blue spaces that lies within and between the Northwest's cities, towns and villages and which provides multiple social, economic and environmental benefits.

Natural tourism is based on natural assets like lakes, mountains, forests and rivers. Together these make up the green infrastructure. The better their condition, the greater are the economic benefits that they underpin.

However, other forms of infrastructure are also required to provide access to natural assets to enable tourism to take place. Examples include footpaths, bridleways, signposting, wildlife hides, picnic areas and countryside information, as well as car parking, cafes and toilets.

Sustainability is about enjoying and living in harmony with our natural environment now – and making sure we manage, maintain and enhance it so people can go on benefiting from it in future.

Many of our green spaces are vulnerable to over-use, which is why managing access and provision of visitor facilities must be considered alongside product development and marketing.

Sustainable tourism is founded on the UK Government's five principles of sustainable development:

- Living within environmental limits
- Achieving a sustainable economy
- Using sound science responsibly
- Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society
- Promoting good governance, i.e. ensuring the visitor economy promotes effective and participative government

CASE STUDY

Forest of Bowland

The 300 square miles of land in rural Lancashire and north Yorkshire known as the Forest of Bowland was designated an area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) in 1964.

A sustainable tourism strategy for the area was launched in 2005 by the Forest of Bowland AONB Partnership, which involves the six district and two county councils, landowners, farmers, voluntary organisations, wildlife groups, recreation groups and government agencies.

An initial consultation found that the area was not very well known outside Lancashire, and developing a strong local identity became crucial. Reducing environmental impact is an important part of this, since the stunning landscape is what makes Bowland special.

This means it is important to promote activities that are environmentally friendly, including walking, cycling, and horse riding.

Every opportunity is also taken to encourage people to buy local produce. As a result of the project many producers have started using Bowland in their name. It is estimated that every £10 spent on local food is worth £25 to the local area. Buying local also reduces food miles and therefore congestion and pollution.

www.naturaleconomynorthwest.co.uk

[Go to > Resources > Case Studies > Tourism]



The Forest of Bowland offers a huge range of environmentally friendly pursuits for visitors



High quality environments can enhance local land and property values

The economic benefits

Natural tourism brings economic benefits that go well beyond simply attracting more visitors. Whether it is supporting green infrastructure or developing new products and experiences, investment in natural tourism can lead to a wide range of rewards, as we show below.

Economic growth and investment

Research for the Northwest Regional Development Agency identified the market potential of using the natural environment to develop natural tourism businesses. This could be a unique selling point for the Northwest, attracting more visitors and giving them more opportunities to spend. The result would be more profitable businesses, more local jobs, and commercial income for charities and voluntary organisations that own sites.

Expansion of the tourism sector

The money currently spent by tourists in the Northwest – both day visitors and people staying longer – already amounts to some £11.4bn per year. In addition, these visitors support 190,000 jobs, almost 36,000 of which are in rural areas. Consumer research at regional and national level suggests these figures could grow substantially if the area realises the potential of its natural assets, developing new and appealing products, from wildlife watching to activity holidays to ‘escape from it all’ breaks.

Land and property values

Successful businesses will be worth more as profitable going concerns. Businesses will pay a premium for locating in quality environments if they can see the potential for

CASE STUDY

Aspen House

Food is the axis on which Aspen House spins – so say Sally Dean and Rob Elliott, proprietors of this award-winning, environmentally friendly bed and breakfast in Herefordshire.

By food, they mean pure, unadulterated and nutritious fare. The pair are committed to the ‘slow food’ movement and buy only top-quality, seasonal ingredients direct from local traders to minimise food miles. They provide gourmet breakfasts for all their visitors and can also offer dinner for up to eight people.

Energy saving and waste management are high on their list of priorities. For instance, they use low energy light bulbs, low-flush cisterns and organic soap. They are also greening the bedrooms as they become due for redecoration, using organic cotton bedlinen and eco-friendly paints.

All organic waste is composted for the wildlife-friendly garden, and as much of the other waste as possible is recycled.

www.aspenhouse.net



Comfortable accommodation, a wildlife-friendly garden and fresh local food are all part of the package at Aspen House

CASE STUDY

Langdale Leisure

Care for the environment lies at the heart of Langdale Leisure’s business model, and the company finds its commitment to sustainable operating is a key selling point.

Langdale Leisure is a holiday complex in the heart of the Lake District. It includes a 57-bedroom hotel, 100 timeshare and self-catering lodges, cottages and apartments, a health spa, and award-winning restaurants and bars.

The complex, which won Cumbria Tourism’s ‘sustainable hotel of the year’ award in 2009 and the CBEN Biodiversity Award in 2007, occupies a 35-acre site in natural woodland with streams and tarns. All its operating policies aim to minimise environmental impact in terms of energy consumption, waste management, ecology and water usage.

A major project is the installation of a biomass heating system to reduce dependence on fossil fuels. This will be capable of heating the hotel’s entire leisure area, including swimming and spa pools, and should also bring savings of up to £40,000 a year.

Such approaches are a major attraction for visitors, who are increasingly interested in sustainability. Another draw is the huge range of wildlife that thrives in the organically managed grounds.

www.langdale.co.uk



success. Improving the resource efficiency of properties will not only reduce running costs but also increase their value.

Labour productivity

The tourism sector is frequently perceived as having low levels of productivity and limited investment in training. This is partly due to low profit margins. Increasing profitability will enable businesses

to invest more in their staff and improve productivity.

Natural tourism businesses also tend to offer a good environment in which to work, reducing sickness and absence and increasing job satisfaction.

Local produce

Many consumers are increasingly interested in the provenance of food. They want to reduce food

CASE STUDY

Natural Retreats

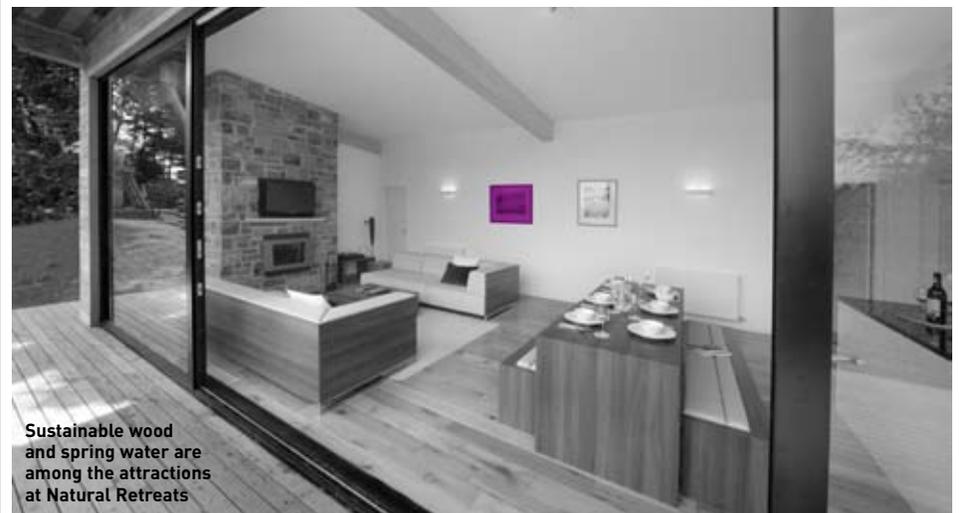
Natural Retreats was launched in 2006 with the vision of building holiday accommodation that is both luxurious and environmentally friendly. The aim is to create high-quality complexes in, or close to, all 14 national parks in the UK by 2011.

The first Natural Retreat to be ready is in the Yorkshire Dales. It consists of 20 residences on a secluded site in Swaledale, just a short walk from Richmond.

All the properties have been built from sustainable wood and include natural sedum roofing. There are environmentally friendly waste and recycling systems, and water comes from the local natural spring.

Other Natural Retreats due to open in 2009 are in Snowdonia, the Lake District and the North York Moors.

www.naturalretreats.com



Sustainable wood and spring water are among the attractions at Natural Retreats

CASE STUDY

Keldy Cabins

The Keldy cabin holiday centre sits in beautiful woodland on the edge of the North York Moors National Park. Run by Forest Holidays, which is a partnership between the Forestry Commission and The Camping and Caravanning Club, Keldy offers holidays in cabins built from sustainably produced timber that blend with the natural forest environment.

In addition, the newest cabins are designed to meet the BREEAM 'Excellent' standard, which means they have appropriate insulation and glazing and incorporate a variety of features such as rainwater harvesting and low energy appliances and light bulbs.

Although many people arrive by car, once on site most will dig out their walking boots or take to their bikes to get around. Bike hire is also available on site. Forest Rangers offer wildlife-friendly activities such as badger watching and customised forest tours for families.

Forest Holidays is a member of the Green Tourism Business Scheme, which involves monitoring such things as recycling, energy usage, biodiversity and the type of produce stocked in the shops.

www.forestholidays.co.uk/cabins/our_locations/keldy.aspx



A greener holiday: Keldy cabins, operated by Forest Holidays, have made sustainability a priority.

miles and are concerned about food being over-processed.

This provides a market opportunity for restaurants, cafés and local shops to use and sell local products. Many quality restaurants already pride themselves on the use of local seasonal produce and build their reputation on it.

Using more local products will help farmers and other food producers, as well as mitigating climate change by reducing food miles.

Health and wellbeing

Increased interest in good health and wellbeing is a significant social trend. More people are looking for breaks which offer opportunities to be pampered, or to get fit outdoors – or both. This provides scope for new business ventures.

Recreation and leisure

Day visitors are important. The Northwest attracts 240 million day trippers each year. Natural tourism development will provide further reasons for Northwest residents to stay in the region – and attract visitors from outside. And of course leisure and recreation facilities based on the natural environment can be used by residents and visitors alike, irrespective of their target market.

Quality of place

Great quality of place helps the image of the region: it makes it easier to draw in visitors, as well

CASE STUDY

Manchester peregrines

For the fourth year running, visitors to Manchester's Exchange Square can watch live footage beamed from a nest of peregrine falcons onto a giant outdoor screen. The falcons are raising four young, high on a city roof top.

Staff and volunteers from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) are on hand three days a week to give information to visitors, and recorded DVD footage of the nest can be seen in the RSPB van. Two high-powered telescopes offer further viewing opportunities.

The project is a joint venture between the RSPB, Manchester City Council and the BBC. It builds on the success of previous years, when members of the public were able to watch the eggs hatch, the parents feeding and the young taking their first flight.

Last year around 13,000 people visited Peregrine Watch, which also offered opportunities for publicising other events and attractions.

www.rspb.org.uk/datewithnature/sites/manchester

www.bbc.co.uk/manchester/content/articles/2009/04/16/peregrine_diary_2009_feature.shtml



Manchester city centre has become a haven for peregrine falcons

CASE STUDY

Bassenthwaite ospreys

When a pair of ospreys settled in a purpose-built nest on the edge of Bassenthwaite Lake near Keswick in 2001, they sparked a spectacular tourism success.

The first ospreys to breed in the Lake District for 150 years, they have returned every year since, fledging a total of 13 chicks between 2001 and 2007.

The Lake District Osprey Project aims to provide a welcoming habitat for breeding ospreys, enabling them to recolonise the Lake District while giving people a chance to find out more about wildlife.

Overall, the project has reaped huge rewards, not just in environmental terms but also for the local economy. It has put the Bassenthwaite area on the

map, with improved facilities for tourists and better public transport – an ‘osprey bus’ now travels from Keswick to several places of interest around the lake.

Around 100,000 people visit the ospreys each season, with a spend of £420,000 directly attributable to the osprey effect. Visitors are not charged to see the birds but money is raised from car parking and from sales at Whinlatter Visitor Centre, recently revamped to the tune of £500,000.

www.naturaleconomynorthwest.co.uk

[Go to > Resources > Case Studies > Tourism]



One of the Lake District osprey fledglings

as attracting inward investment, students and new talent.

Visitor research shows that attractive places with beautiful landscapes are one of the main reasons for choosing a particular destination. And visitors expect areas that promote their natural landscape to have a public realm to match.

Improvements to a place through

maintaining and enhancing quality green infrastructure and developing natural tourism will benefit residents as much as visitors. Everybody wins.

Natural tourism also provides benefits to communities as a whole. Transport links, shops and pubs are just some of the facilities that are likely to improve as tourism expands. In addition, jobs are created

and outward migration reduced, all of which helps to sustain small, and sometimes fragile, rural communities.

Land and biodiversity

High-quality landscape and varied flora and fauna are important elements of natural tourism. Clearly natural tourism should support conservation of the landscape and the species that depend on it. Alongside this, access to the environment is likely to improve, as this is crucially important to effective visitor management, helping to ensure tourists don't have a negative impact on the attractions they come to see.

Flood alleviation

Both green infrastructure measures and the development of natural tourism can safeguard wetland and water habitats as well as woodlands, and so contribute to flood prevention and alleviation. This can substantially reduce the costs of flood damage.

Climate change adaptation and mitigation

Natural tourism can mitigate climate change. Many UK residents are looking to take ‘green holidays at home’ to reduce their carbon footprint from overseas travel.

Visitors will expect good environmental practice from natural tourism businesses. Such businesses will be very aware of their environmental impact and concerned to practise resource efficiency.

CASE STUDY

Ludlow

Ludlow in Shropshire was the first town in the UK to be admitted to the ‘Cittaslow’ or ‘Slow City’ movement.

Cittaslow originated in Italy and seeks to find practical ways to improve wellbeing and quality of life in towns and cities. It celebrates places where people make time to enjoy a lifestyle that includes unspoiled landscape, fresh local food and traditional craft skills.

Other criteria for Cittaslow accreditation include quality urban fabric, well maintained green spaces and historic buildings, effective traffic management, and hospitality. Such qualities have obvious attractions for visitors.

Ludlow is about as far from being a ‘clone’ town as it is possible to be, supporting five traditional butchers and four bakers. Very few retailers are part of national chains.

Recently, Cockermouth in Cumbria became the seventh town in the UK and the first in the Northwest to be awarded Cittaslow status.

www.ludlow.org.uk
www.cittaslow.org.uk



Ludlow: capital of slow food

Investment in infrastructure

Investment in infrastructure is crucial for natural tourism.

Better green infrastructure ensures quality and sustainability of natural assets, while enhanced

'grey' infrastructure – such as bus routes and railways – will provide the access and facilities necessary for greater visitor understanding, appreciation, participation and enjoyment.

CASE STUDY

Shacklabank free range walking

Alison O'Neill (right)
with BBC Radio 4's
Clare Balding



Free range walking is the brainchild of farmer Alison O'Neill, who offers tailor-made holidays at the farm she runs with her husband John near Sedbergh, Cumbria. Each holiday offers a combination of guided walks – led by Alison – and the opportunity to sample life on the working farm, Shacklabank.

Guests shape their own holidays depending on their interests and levels of fitness. Throughout their stay they eat fresh food and are invited to work on the farm – collecting eggs, gardening or even lambing.

From the beginning, Alison decided to buy everything she needed as locally as possible. Lamb, chicken, eggs and vegetables are from Shacklabank.

Fresh fish is sourced locally and milk and dairy products come from Cumbrian farms. In total the enterprise supports around 40 local businesses.

Money made from the holidays is ploughed back into the business and local economy. Alison and John have planted trees and hedgerows and created woodlands to encourage the return of bluebells, and have already noticed a huge increase in the number of birds like woodpeckers, cuckoos and buzzards.

www.naturaleconomynorthwest.co.uk

[Go to > Resources > Case Studies > Tourism]

A growing visitor economy

Natural tourism sits well with the Visitor Economy Strategy for North West England for the following reasons:

- It improves the image of the region.
- It provides opportunities for new business development and increased profitability.
- It expands the range of products

and experiences on offer to visitors.

- It provides opportunities for developing skills.
- It supports sustainable development by ensuring natural resources are properly managed and that there is access for all. Investment in green infrastructure benefits other businesses, and residents too.

Benefits across the board

Natural tourism sits across the policy, aspirations and responsibilities of the natural environment and tourism sectors, as well as the public, voluntary and business sectors. Among its cross-sectoral benefits are:

- Sustainable management and enhancement of natural assets;
- Opportunities for people from all sections of society to enjoy these assets;
- An increase in people's understanding and appreciation of nature, and in their physical contact with the outdoors;
- A wider range of products within the overall tourism offer that creates new experiences for people to enjoy;
- Increased promotion of, and advice to, natural tourism businesses, leading to greater profitability of individual

businesses and the communities in which they operate;

- Promotion of the Northwest as a special place for people to work, live, visit and invest;
- Improved physical and spiritual health arising from the enhanced natural environment, bringing benefits for individuals and cost savings for the NHS.



Walking in the Lake District,
with Derwentwater and
Skiddaw in the background



Demonstration projects

Natural Economy North West (and others) are funding a number of projects to demonstrate the very best in natural tourism. Funding was approved in summer 2008 and information about progress and lessons learned will be disseminated towards the end of 2009.

The projects are:

- The Wild Zone – wildlife watching in Cumbria
- Play Days in the Woods – fun activities for families in Cumbria
- Naturally Farming – holidays on a farm in Cheshire
- Appreciating the natural

- environment – staying in the Forest of Bowland
- Burscough Bridge to Martin Mere Wetland Centre Trail in Lancashire – an alternative to the car
- Dirtiest Weekend Ever – combining Green Tourism Business Scheme accommodation with a culture or pamper experience and conservation work
- Chef & Farmer – visits to producers and cooking the produce in Merseyside

Find out more from
www.natureconomynorthwest.co.uk

FIND OUT MORE

Natural Economy North West provides research reports, information and case studies on natural tourism and green infrastructure

www.natureconomynorthwest.co.uk

Statistics and research can be found at

www.nwriu.co.uk

The Northwest's green infrastructure website has details of projects, resources and contacts as well as a useful glossary at

www.greeninfrastructurenw.co.uk

Get inspired to preserve our natural assets from overuse by finding out more about the Lake District Fells at

www.fixthefells.co.uk

The Sustainable Tourism Gateway provides a wealth of international resources, such as reports, checklists, charters, codes, tools and links, on sustainable and eco-tourism and destination management.

<http://tourism.gdrc.org/>

For information on Europarc's role and activities in conserving and enhancing Europe's natural heritage visit

www.europarc.org

Find out about the green tourism business scheme at

www.green-business.co.uk

Details of the David Bellamy Conservation Awards are at

www.davidbellamyconservation.org.uk

Discover how they promote natural tourism elsewhere at

www.wild-scotland.org.uk and www.coastproject.co.uk

For information on natural assets and their management see the websites of the Defra agencies

www.naturalengland.org.uk

www.forestry.gov.uk

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

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