

Rural Touring in a Nutshell, a brief overview for companies and performers

Useful tips for those new to rural touring

1. Touring Scheme Menus:

- A key aspect of rural touring is the relationship between the touring schemes and their local voluntary promoters.
- Each scheme curates a menu offering a range of companies, performers and art forms. This menu is offered out to their local promoters who then select the shows that they wish to promote, based on their knowledge of their local audiences.
- These menus are produced once or twice a year – around February for autumn or annual programmes, and around June for the spring programme for the following year. Schemes will need pre-publicity copy and images.
- In terms of fee structures, the local promoters agree to pay a minimum fee for each show to the scheme. The scheme then tops this up to make up the difference in what is paid to the company, reducing the financial risk to the local promoters.
- While schemes know their promoters well, they won't know for sure who will be interested in each specific show and therefore can't offer guaranteed dates.
- The menu includes technical requirements for each show as well as the company/performer's touring availability, both of which are factors that promoters take into account when selecting from the menu.
- The process for bookings is generally as follows: promoters are given a certain amount of time to make their choices and return them to the scheme. The scheme then collates this information and liaises with the company/performer on touring dates. Once the booking is firmed up, companies and performers usually liaise directly with the promoter.

- Promoters, not schemes, sell tickets for shows through their own box office arrangements and largely by word of mouth.
- Schemes and promoters prefer Friday and Saturday nights but are used to trying to sell a 4-night

2. Audiences:

- In the main, audiences attending rural touring venues are local community members. They might therefore be attending for social reasons, whether or not they have an interest in live performance (which doesn't mean they won't engage with and enjoy the show!).
- Remember that the venue is often at the heart of the local community and touring shows offer the chance for people to get together and share a good night out.
- Audience members will often hang around at the end of the show and want to talk with the performers. This goes for the interval too – it's nice if the company is around for the interval and not holed up in a dressing room, somewhere else.
- Due to the nature of most small-mid scale community venues, you'll be physically very close to your audience. This proximity is often a highlight for touring artists and companies.
- Rural touring audiences are often mixed. Research has shown that approximately 60% are regular arts attenders while the remaining 40% attend cultural events less than 3 times a year.
- Audience capacity ranges from very small (50 people) to larger halls (200 people), with the average capacity around 100. Average audience attendance is around 70, although this varies according to venue and artform (with music shows tending to draw slightly larger audiences).

3. Staging the show – practical considerations:

- The average performing space tends to be around 3m x 5m. Shows exceeding this playing space do tour but would not be booked by the smallest venues.

- Think about sight lines – you’re unlikely to have raked seating so try not to have too much happening at floor level.
- In terms of configuring the performance space, shows can be performed in the round or on 3 sides. Staging the piece side-on rather than end-on means that you can accommodate better viewing by having more people on the front few rows.
- Preferred playing time is 2 x 40-minute halves with an interval – villages like to have an interval for tea, biscuits, bar, raffle etc and the related social interaction. Shows of around an hour’s duration with no interval may therefore lose some interested promoters (although this varies from scheme to scheme).
- The power supply is likely to be a 13 amp circuit so make sure you use nothing that will overload this. You also need to think about the location of the power supply.
- As community venues are often used for other activities during the day, your get-in time will generally be 2-3 hours. Doors tend to open 30 – 60 minutes before the show to sell drinks, raffle tickets etc – bear this in mind when calculating your get-in time.
- Venues can be cold on arrival as heating is an expensive issue for community venues so it’s often switched on in time for the audience arriving.
- Some venues will have limited blackout possibilities.
- There won’t be any technical support staff at the venue so you’ll be doing your own get-in and get-out.
- Think carefully about your set – it’s all going to have to fit in your vehicle!

4. Touring to rural venues – practical considerations:

- You’ll be touring all your own sound, light and technical equipment.
- You’ll also be touring any flooring, carpeting or staging, if you need it.

- Access from your van to the performing space in terms of distance and/or steps might not be simple.
- Most rural touring venues have limited changing room facilities so think about things like irons, mirrors etc
- A lot of villages no longer have a village shop so you won't necessarily have easy access to provisions (sewing kits, hammer and nails, throat sweets etc!)
- Your get-out will usually be on the same night as the show – it would be unusual to get out the next day, though not impossible
- Think about the number of people on the road and factor accommodation into your budget. Quite a few rural touring venues will offer local hospitality and accommodation – they'll need your accommodation requirements in advance (including willingness or not to share rooms) so they can make hosting arrangements. Shows are usually one-night stands and often tour back to back 3 or 4 nights per week.
- Make sure you have directions printed out before setting off – you may not get a great mobile or sat nav signal in rural areas.
- Remember that the vast majority of promoters are volunteers and give their time for free. They may not therefore be as knowledgeable about your work and your requirements as arts venue staff. In return for your cooperation/flexibility you'll be given a very warm welcome and hospitality.
- You're the guests of the local village community. At the end of the night it's therefore far more appropriate to say 'thanks for having us' instead of 'thank you for coming to see the show'. Don't forget to thank the promoters and anyone else who's been involved in making the event happen and helping you feel at home.

5 Marketing considerations:

- You'll be on a menu with other companies and performers so make sure your copy and images stand out and clearly relate to the show content.

- Are there add-ons that you could offer? E.g workshops, pre- or post-show Q&As etc. The opportunity for engagement with the audience can be a key factor for local promoters when selecting shows.
- Print publicity should take the form of A4 posters and A5 flyers and try not to use shiny paper – most promoters will do their own over-printing and shiny paper won't work with a lot of domestic printers.
- Back-up marketing materials such as a draft press release template, high quality images to send to local press and information for radio interviews can all prove really useful.
- Marketing materials should be with the schemes 6-8 weeks before the tour dates.
- A certain proportion of the audience are likely to be first-time attenders. Don't dumb down too much as they're a discerning audience but don't scare them off either!
- A totally abstract piece will be difficult to sell (firstly to voluntary promoters and then for them to sell on to audiences) so try and have a theme or story and produce marketing copy and images that make the show accessible and easy to grasp.

Further Information

We hope that the above has provided a useful introduction to rural touring and some of the practical considerations to bear in mind.

For a more in-depth overview and practical tips and advice, you can become a member of NRTF. NRTF [membership](#) starts at £25 per year and offers access to advice, information resources and opportunities for networking with the UK-wide rural touring network, made up of touring schemes, voluntary promoters, companies and performers, venues, festivals and producers.