

# IRELAND'S ANCIENT EAST

INDUSTRY UPDATE  
FEBRUARY 2023



# INTRODUCTION

Ireland's Ancient East was launched in 2015 as a mechanism to unify the region as an internationally marketable tourism proposition. By 2019, tourism in Ireland's Ancient East was worth €1.7bn to the regional economy, supporting approximately 55,000 jobs.

Over the past three years, our primary focus has been supporting tourism businesses in navigating an unprecedented trading environment.

We have, however, continued to progress our longer term development efforts and in late 2022, in consultation with all stakeholders, we published the draft *Ireland's Ancient East Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023 – 2027* as a roadmap for tourism development in the region. This sets out the overarching strategy for the region and will be delivered through a suite of Destination and Experience Development plans for each destination.

Our ambition for this strategy is to drive recovery and growth of the visitor economy in Ireland's Ancient East and to create sustainable, high-quality jobs in the sector to strengthen local communities while protecting our natural environment.

This strategy sets out a number of objectives to help us achieve our goals:

- Motivating the domestic and international consumer to visit Ireland's Ancient East
- Providing the visitor with more reasons to stay, increasing the economic impact of tourism
- Ensuring the region is easy to access, navigate and consume for the visitor
- Enabling and assisting the industry to grow its capacity and capability to ensure it can thrive in the period of the strategy and create sustainable jobs in local communities
- Building committed stakeholder and industry partnerships to guide sustainable destination development across the region

While the trading environment and wider economy continue to present challenges for our industry, we know that demand for holidays in Ireland is high, which is reason to be optimistic for 2023. We will continue to work closely with tourism businesses to build their capability and capitalise on this demand.

We look forward to our continued collaboration with all stakeholders in 2023 to increase the economic return from tourism to the Ireland's Ancient East economy.

**Brian O'Flynn,**  
**Head of Ireland's Ancient East**



# TOURISM SURVIVAL

## INVESTMENT 2020-2022 - COVID SUPPORTS

€12M



**Tourism Business Continuity Scheme Grants** paid to 266 Ireland's Ancient East businesses in 2021

€8.3M



**Outdoor Dining Grants** awarded to over 1400 businesses and 12 Local Authorities in Ireland's Ancient East.

€4.3M



Paid to 1450 businesses across Ireland's Ancient East under **Adaptation Fund**

€9.5M

**Tourism Business Continuity Scheme Grants** Paid to 196 Ireland's Ancient East businesses in 2022



€870K



Paid to 164 B&B's under **Restart Grant** funding

## COVID-19 TOURISM SURVIVAL

Fáilte Ireland worked collaboratively with key industry stakeholders to provide a recovery plan to guide the reactivation of destinations following their closure to visitors due to COVID-19.

Over 400 businesses across the region were supported through various training programmes, including 70 new businesses that engaged with Fáilte Ireland for the first time. Collaboration across the region with all stakeholders was key to ensuring that destinations remained attractive and open for business to the visitor. Many innovative projects were activated in a short period of time through this collaboration, some of these are highlighted below:

**Cork City:** Fáilte Ireland invested €1.3 million in developing new outdoor dining facilities in 5 streets in Cork City centre. Working in partnership with Cork City Council and the hospitality sector, these dining facilities have helped build Cork's reputation as a food destination that offers a year-round outdoor dining experience.

**Waterford:** Approximately €1 million has been invested in Waterford City and Dungarvan in a number of projects e.g new outdoor dining facilities have been provided in central locations in Waterford City and Dungarvan in collaboration with Waterford City and County Council. A new digital trail and interpretation are being installed in Waterford City to improve public realm and wayfinding in the city centre.

**Kilkenny:** A number of initiatives were set up to boost visitor numbers including 'Wolfwalkers' which projected illuminations from the Cartoon Saloon film onto the expanse of the external river walls of Kilkenny Castle, and the 'Kilkenny Cat Walk', a trail of 21 Kilkenny Cat sculptures from some of Kilkenny's most talented artists. Additional marketing funds were also secured to promote Kilkenny as a domestic destination in the Winter season.

**Wicklow:** The Wicklow taskforce developed a new suite of experiences maximising the potential of Wicklow as an outdoor and family destination. It also supported activation of the Wicklow Passport as well as supporting industry in developing itineraries to support front line staff to sell the destination.

**Meath/Louth:** 4 specific initiatives were activated. A Marketing/PR Ambassador programme involving 14 businesses was rolled out; 5 industry cluster hub action plans developed; A uniform interpretative solution to align industry cluster hubs/attractions and orientate visitors is being developed; A review of how the Destination is portrayed on digital platforms is being carried out to ensure consistency of visitor focused messaging and orientation.

# DESTINATION EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PLANS

A Destination Experience Development Plan is a 5 year sustainable tourism development plan for a destination. It brings the public and private sector together to prioritise development projects and maximise their chance of success with the ultimate goal of motivating visitors to stay longer and spend more in the destination.



For more information about Destination Experience Development Plans please visit our website <https://www.failteireland.ie/Regional-experience-brands/Ireland-s-Ancient-East/Ireland-s-Ancient-East-experience-development.aspx>

DEDP	DATE
Meath and Louth - Ancient	Launched in 2021
Kildare and Tipperary – Thoroughbred Country	Launched in 2021
Monaghan	Launched in 2022
Cork City, Harbour and East Cork	Launching 2023
South Tipperary	Launching 2023
Waterford	Launching 2023
Wexford	Launching 2023
Kilkenny	Launching 2023
Wicklow	Commencing in 2023
Laois	Commencing in 2023
Carlow	Commencing in 2023

## THOROUGHBRED COUNTRY DESTINATION EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN (KILDARE AND TIPPERARY)

- This destination development plan has seen the development of 19 new experiences in 2021 and 2022 including a 'Behind the Scenes' tour of the Curragh Racecourse in Co. Kildare.
- The plan includes the development of a Thoroughbred Country website which is an international sales platform, supported by on-the-ground sales in Ireland and in the international market.

## MEATH AND LOUTH - ANCIENT DESTINATION EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Work to date on 4 Catalyst projects includes:

- The re-imagined Boyne Valley Drive. An action plan complete and key projects in 2022 include
  - Delivery of a digital orientation plan and review of websites.
  - 5 Industry cluster hubs developed and a cluster infrastructure and interpretation plan are being scoped
- Work is on-going to develop the Boyne Valley Greenway and restore navigation on the Boyne River
- Boyne Valley Centre for Food Culture in Ireland project. A vision for this was launched in November 2022.
- Carlingford Vision '31 - The Gateway to the Cooley Peninsula plan is complete and includes:
  - Carlingford and Cooley Peninsula Destination and Orientation Development plan completed in Draft.
  - Industry Cluster developed.

## MONAGHAN DESTINATION EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

- Plan launched in partnership with Monaghan Council at Castle Leslie Estate in June 2022.
- Development of a visitor proposition for an attraction of scale in Glaslough and an outdoor vision for Lough Muckno Estate, Castleblayney on-going.
- 2 Industry clusters developed in North and South of county.

# BUILDING BRILLIANT EXPERIENCES

## BEYOND THE TREES AVONDALE, CO WICKLOW

[PROJECT VALUE: €19 MILLION. FÁILTE IRELAND INVESTMENT = €6.1MILLION]

The redevelopment of Avondale House and Forest Park provides an iconic and world-class visitor destination in Rathdrum, Co Wicklow. This €16 million project is a partnership between Coillte, Fáilte Ireland and EAK (erlebnis akademie AG).



## JOHNSTOWN CASTLE ESTATE, CO WEXFORD

[PROJECT VALUE: €7.5 MILLION. FÁILTE IRELAND INVESTMENT = €2.5 MILLION]

This investment by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Fáilte Ireland includes castle conservation works and exciting new offerings including new tours, a visitor centre, 4km of lake walks and the redevelopment of the Ornamental Gardens.

## IRISH RACEHORSE EXPERIENCE, CO KILDARE

[PROJECT VALUE: €3.2 MILLION. FÁILTE IRELAND INVESTMENT = €2 MILLION]

Fáilte Ireland's investment of almost €2m launched a new indoor attraction at the Irish National Stud and Gardens, which incorporates an immersive experience which allows visitors to purchase, train and race a thoroughbred horse from foal to finish.

## KNOWTH, DONORE, CO. MEATH

[PROJECT VALUE: €1.9 MILLION. FÁILTE IRELAND INVESTMENT = €1.4 MILLION] GRANTEE: OPW

The second of three capital investments in the Brú na Bóinne complex, this project saw the construction of a new visitor centre, a state-of-the-art exhibition and AV room, a new courtyard area, conference/educational space, along with new and improved visitor facilities.

## BUTLER GALLERY, KILKENNY CITY

[PROJECT VALUE: €5.6 MILLION. FÁILTE IRELAND INVESTMENT = €1.1 MILLION]

The relocation of Butler Gallery from Kilkenny Castle to the Evan's Home, a protected structure and a former almshouse located in Kilkenny city centre to create a contemporary art gallery.

## NEW VISITOR EXPERIENCE, KILKENNY CITY

[PROJECT VALUE: €4.6 MILLION. FÁILTE IRELAND INVESTMENT = €3.2 MILLION]

GRANTEE: KILKENNY COUNTY COUNCIL AND KILKENNY CIVIC TRUST

The new attraction will tell the story of Ireland's medieval capital through the real people of the time and will include the opening-up of the Tholsel on the city's High Street, as well as enhancing the existing Medieval Mile Museum.

## MOUNT CONGREVE HOUSE AND GARDENS, WATERFORD

[PROJECT VALUE: €6.2 MILLION. FÁILTE IRELAND INVESTMENT = €930K]

GRANTEE: WATERFORD CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL (A RRDF PROJECT)

This project involved the partial redevelopment and restoration of Mount Congreve House, new visitor amenities including a visitor centre with café and retail space as well as enhancements to the existing gardens.

## WEXFORDIA

[PROJECT VALUE: €10.76 MILLION. FÁILTE IRELAND INVESTMENT = €1.16 MILLION]

GRANTEE: WEXFORD COUNTY COUNCIL (A RRDF PROJECT)

€10.76m is being invested in three new projects in Wexford. These include the development of a New Norman Experience, refurbishment work on the Dunbrody Famine Ship and the renewal of prominent town centre sites in New Ross, as well as the completion of architectural and interpretation plans for new compelling tourism experiences at Hook Lighthouse and The Irish National Heritage Park.





# CAPITAL INVESTMENT

## DESTINATION TOWNS

In 2019, €15.5million Destination Towns Fáilte Ireland funding was allocated through the Local Authorities to boost the attractiveness and tourism appeal of towns nationwide. €5,997,886 was awarded to 12 towns in Ireland's Ancient East: Carlow, Cork City, Monaghan, Portlaoise, Kildare Town, Drogheda, Trim, Cashel, Kilkenny, Waterford, New Ross and Wicklow Town.

## URBAN ANIMATION

Fáilte Ireland's Urban Animation Capital Investment Scheme for Local Authorities supports sustainable tourism development through public realm and urban animation projects that have the potential to transform and re-imagine urban centres.

€2,376,419 was awarded to four locations across Ireland's Ancient East. Some of the projects include culture and heritage trails, light installations, digital culture screens, murals, an upcycled copper brewery tank and sculptures.

Cork City Council (€673,310), Kilkenny County Council (€439,875), Louth County Council (€672,208) and Waterford City and County Council (€539,275)

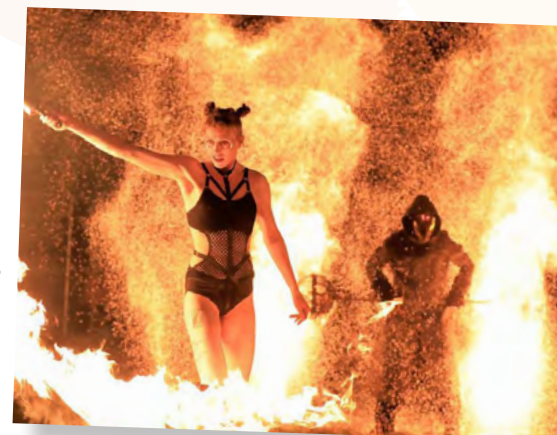
# FESTIVALS AND EVENTS:

Festivals are crucial to the tourism industry, motivating over 200,000 visitors to come to Ireland. In 2022 Fáilte Ireland delivered over €1.5m in Festivals funding across Ireland's Ancient East. This includes funding to 7 national festivals, 5 new outdoor active and innovation festivals and a large number of local events throughout the region. In 2022 we invested for the first time in participative festivals to encourage visitors to stay and explore the local area. Examples include the Ocean to City festival in Cork and the Boyne Valley Walking Festival.

## PÚCA

Established in 2019, Púca is a three-day immersive, vibrant and contemporary festival, strongly rooted in tradition with a programme of events centred around spectacle, music and food. 36,000 visitors attended the 2022 festival, making a positive economic contribution to the festival hubs of Trim, Athboy and surrounding areas of Co. Meath.

Festivals are crucial to the tourism sector, motivating over 200,000 overseas visitors to come to Ireland and contributing €108m to the economy every year. As a flagship event for Fáilte Ireland, we are committed to developing Púca into a world-class festival that positions Ireland as the Home of Halloween internationally over the next number of years.



# OPENING THE OUTDOORS

## PLATFORMS FOR GROWTH

Fáilte Ireland has partnered with the Local Authorities to deliver €19m in funding to build year-round world-class facility centres at 22 locations across Ireland where water-based activities are a key visitor attraction. €4.25m has been allocated to Ireland's Ancient East:

- Claycastle Sports Activity Facility, Claycastle, Youghal, Co. Cork
- Kilkenny Water Sports Hub, County Hall, John St, Kilkenny
- Tramore Water-Sports Activity Facility Centre, Promenade, Tramore, Co. Waterford
- Ardmore Water-Sports Activity Facility Centre, Public Car Park, Cois Tra, Ardmore, Co Waterford
- Curraclloe Water Sports Activity Centre, Whitegap, Curraclloe, Co. Wexford

## BLUEWAYS

The rivers, canals, loughs and coastlines of Ireland's Ancient East provide a vast array of opportunities for exploration and enjoyment by visitors and locals alike. The Blueways Partnership driving this initiative is an all-island body comprising Waterways Ireland, Tourism Northern Ireland and Fáilte Ireland in conjunction with Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland. The Suir Blueway Tipperary and Boyne Valley Blueway in Meath were among the first to receive world accreditation in 2022. Our Blueways Toolkit can be accessed here <https://www.failteireland.ie/Product-development/Activities/On-the-water/Blueways-resources.aspx>



## GREENWAYS

Greenways are predominantly traffic-free paths, designed for use by cyclists, pedestrians, families, wheelchair users etc, opening the great outdoors for everyone. With stunning routes throughout the countryside and along the coast, Ireland's Ancient East Greenways offer endless adventure and a range of activities for all visitors. Following the success of the Waterford Greenway, Fáilte Ireland are actively working with our tourism industry and stakeholders to turn the Greenways infrastructure into world class visitor experiences, through initiatives such as industry workshops and the creation of the Greenway Visitor Experience Interpretation Toolkit. <https://failtecdn.azureedge.net/failteireland/Greenway-Visitor-Experience-Interpretation-Toolkit.pdf>. Ireland's Ancient East have also begun planning a support programme for the South East Greenway, a 24km cycling and walking route linking New Ross with Ferrybank, County Waterford through South Kilkenny.



## IRELAND'S MOUNTAIN BIKE EXPERIENCE

[PROJECT VALUE: €13.68MILLION. FÁILTE IRELAND INVESTMENT = €950,000].

RURAL REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT FUND (RRDF) PARTNERSHIP PROJECT WITH FÁILTE IRELAND AND COILLTE

- Fáilte Ireland together with Coillte supported by the RRDF Partnership Project are securing Ireland's position as a world class Mountain Bike Destination, with 195km's of mountain bike trails and 5 centres in the country, 2 of which are in IAE: Ballinastoe Mountain Bike Trail in Wicklow and Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trail Laois. By early 2024, it is intended the bike trail and the trail head building at Baunreagh Co. Laois will be completed.



# INDUSTRY SUPPORTS

## ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Fáilte Ireland has created an extensive range of business supports in consultation with industry experts to meet recruitment, marketing and finance needs.

See the full calendar of available supports here <https://supports.failteireland.ie/support-programmes-schedule/>

## KEY ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

The Ireland's Ancient East team works directly with 130 tourism businesses throughout the region to identify business critical issues and solutions and generate insights and opportunities to be converted by industry into business and destination growth.

This programme helps participating businesses to manage and improve their own performance through benchmarking and helps us develop appropriate interventions and supports. For more information contact your regional representative.

## TOURISM CAREERS – EMPLOYER EXCELLENCE

In recent times, the hospitality sector has struggled with staff recruitment and retention. Fáilte Ireland's Tourism Careers team works to help hospitality businesses to address these issues, as well as promoting exciting opportunities and careers in the Tourism and Hospitality industry through national campaigns and initiatives such as the Employer Excellence programme [www.tourismcareers.ie](http://www.tourismcareers.ie)

On the Fáilte Ireland website, businesses can access our products, sample programmes and sales toolkits to enhance business development and adapt their offering to key markets.

Businesses can make the most out of expanding tourism sectors and yearly industry events and get involved with Fáilte Ireland's ever-evolving sales campaigns.

A key example of an annual industry event is Meitheal, which is a three day face-to-face workshop that gives the Irish tourism industry and overseas tourism buyers from over 20 different countries the opportunity to meet and do business. 99 businesses from Ireland's Ancient East participated in Meitheal 2022. For more information on routes to market, please see the Fáilte Ireland Trade Portal <https://tradeportal.failteireland.ie/>



## TOURISM IRELAND

Tourism Ireland is responsible for marketing the island of Ireland overseas. Industry can engage with Tourism Ireland through overseas trade and consumer promotions, digital opportunities and submitting offers to visitors on the Tourism Ireland website <https://www.tourismireland.com/opportunities>

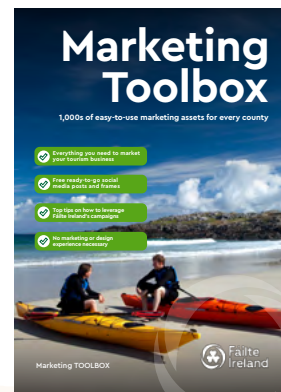




## KEEP DISCOVERING CAMPAIGN

In 2022 the Keep Discovering Domestic Campaign saw a marketing investment of €10m across all high frequency channels including TV, press, radio, media partnerships and an extensive PR plan. 2022 also saw the addition of a powerful new channel to the mix – the weather sponsorship on RTÉ. This is the biggest media sponsorship in Ireland and will run for the next 5 years.

**Marketing Toolbox** - Fáilte Ireland's marketing toolkits are easy to navigate and filter, with everything from social media frames, email marketing templates, ready-made posts tapping into key occasions and tips on where to go and how to leverage our campaigns - [www.failteirelandmarketing.ie](http://www.failteirelandmarketing.ie)



## CONTENT CAPTURE

A series of photo shoots were conducted in Ireland's Ancient East in 2022 to capture the vast array of assets that complement the strategic goals of the brand.

The project has accomplished the following goals:

- Captured 1,800 images and 200 video assets from 100 locations across all 12 Ireland's Ancient East counties
- Received 650+ images from third party uploads to Ireland's Content Pool

To view, download or add images to Ireland's Content Pool please visit <https://www.irelandscontentpool.com>





## DIGITAL THAT DELIVERS

The Digital that Delivers programme ensures that tourism businesses maximise sales from online channels and increase reach and bookings through connected distribution. The Digital that Delivers programme delivered over €1,000,000 in grants to 73 business in Ireland's Ancient East in 2021, funding projects such as bookable experience development, website upgrades, digital marketing and data measurement. Project participants saw a 90% increase in website traffic and 176% increase in bookings. More information on our Digital that Delivers programme can be found here <https://www.failteireland.ie/digitalthatdelivers.aspx>

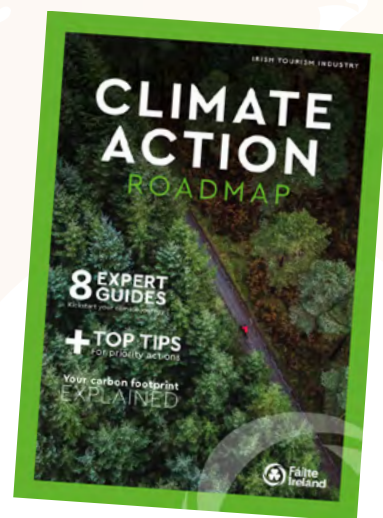
# Digital that Delivers

## CLIMATE ACTION

Fáilte Ireland has called out Driving Climate Action as a strategic priority and is committed to helping businesses in Ireland's Ancient East become more sustainable.

The Climate Toolkit 4 Business is a fantastic online resource which is a clear and accessible tool which will give businesses an estimate of their carbon footprint and a personalised plan on how to reduce it <https://supports.failteireland.ie/carbon-calculator/>

Fáilte Ireland has also produced a series of 8 expert Climate Action business guides to enable tourism businesses to make practical operational changes to reduce their carbon footprint <https://supports.failteireland.ie/climate-action/>





# MEET THE TEAM



**Brian O'Flynn**  
Head of Ireland's  
Ancient East Region



**Justine Carey**  
Manager, Ireland's  
Ancient East



**Mary Houlihan**  
Manager, Ireland's  
Ancient East



**Derek Dolan**  
Manager, Ireland's  
Ancient East



**Mark Mohan**  
Manager, Ireland's  
Ancient East



**Sarah Fitzpatrick**  
Officer, Kilkenny



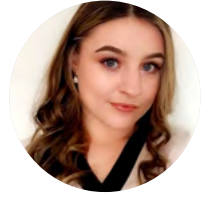
**Caren Caruthers**  
Officer, Tipperary  
and Carlow



**Sarah O'Dwyer**  
Officer, Laois



**Eimear Whittle**  
Support and  
Marketing Matrix



**Kerryn O'Sullivan**  
Graduate  
Programme



**Aileen Dowling**  
Officer, Wexford



**Deirdre Cole**  
Officer, Cork City



**Jessica Nolan**  
Officer, East Cork



**Ivona Carr**  
Officer, Waterford



**Rose Green**  
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**Caroline Henry**  
Officer, Kildare



**Lorraine Sheenan**  
Projects Officer



**Orla Delaney**  
Officer, Wicklow



**Fiona Moore**  
Officer, Key Accounts



**Mary Allen**  
Support



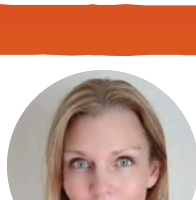
**Nessa Corbett**  
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**Shane Raftery**  
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**Martina O'Dwyer**  
Officer, Meath (E)  
and Louth (S)



**Marie McCormack**  
Officer, Meath (W)



**Ruth Quinn**  
Support



**Deirdre O'Mahoney**  
Project Co  
Ordinator, Finance



**Jane D'Arcy**  
Support

