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Tourism Matters

OCTOBER 2011

Biggest Ever Tourism Initiative Launched



Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Leo Varadkar TD, launches proposals for The Gathering at the Global Irish Economic Forum held in Dublin Castle.

THE MINISTER for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Leo Varadkar TD, launched proposals for the biggest tourism initiative ever staged in Ireland at the recent Global Irish Economic Forum (on October 7th 2011).

'The Gathering' will be a year-long event throughout 2013 where people at home and abroad can play a part in the country's recovery, potentially bringing 325,000 extra visitors and at least €250m in revenue to these shores.

Speaking as he launched the proposal at the Global Forum, Minister Varadkar said: "This is an invitation to the world to come and join in Ireland's renewal. It's an opportunity for people at home and abroad to play a part in rebranding Ireland on the world stage."

"It will revitalise the tourism industry, create jobs and promote economic recovery. We hope the initiative will bring extra visitors to Ireland in 2013, boost the tourism industry, create jobs and inject millions of euros into the economy."

'The Gathering' was developed by Fáilte Ireland to provide a significant boost in visitors to Ireland and to generate a much needed increase of tourism-related revenue for the island. Significantly, it also gives the tourism industry a pivotal role in helping restore the country's fortunes.

Fáilte Ireland CEO Shaun Quinn emphasised: "This is the biggest initiative ever in tourism and will support the

revitalisation of our tourism industry – and all the jobs it sustains – and will also provide us with a compelling vehicle to tap into the wider Irish diaspora and draw on their energy and resources to benefit this country and its economic recovery.

"It is also a golden opportunity for the tourism sector to play its part in our country's economic recovery and underline the industry's significant importance to the Irish economy.

"This initiative has the potential to bring international attention to Ireland, enabling Irish people at home and abroad to showcase all we, as a nation, have to offer. That will be good for tourism and good for this country's global image."

'The Gathering' will be a unique one year programme of events designed around happenings and gatherings, which will showcase Ireland in areas such as arts, sports, food, learning, genealogy, science and technology and hospitality as well as the Irish people through their desire to welcome friends, family and associates for a visit to enjoy all that Ireland has to offer.

It is envisaged that the eventual programme will comprise of three distinct strands:

- A flagship festivals programme featuring unique headline festivals;
- A special interest events programme featuring smaller, intimate special interest, business or sporting events and festivals;
- A community-led [fringe] events programme comprising events and

happenings devised and organised by community groups at national and local level. Ideally the larger of these would take place in conjunction with the flagship programmes.

On the latter, it is envisaged that community-led events will be delivered through national and local community groups and associations that will be invited to create and organise events and happenings to coincide with flagship events. Shaun Quinn explained:

"This is what makes 'The Gathering' different – it will involve a mobilisation of all Irish people behind a shared common purpose. It will involve counties, towns, suburbs and communities organising their own homecoming events to reach out and connect with those who have moved away, live in other parts of Ireland or overseas and have not met in a long time."

The next steps towards implementing the ambitious programme are already underway.

It will require a great deal of coordination between different state agencies at home and overseas as well as community groups, voluntary organisations and a variety of high profile Irish champions of the initiative from the arts, cultural and sports worlds.

'The Gathering' will be officially unveiled to the world early in 2012. It is also envisaged that a number of special events will take place in key markets at this time leveraging high-profile Irish people. A promotional campaign will also be launched in the domestic market.

Top Activity and Adventure Experts to Meet in Mayo

THIS YEAR'S annual Tourism Adventure and Activity Forum will take place in Westport on the 3rd and 4th of November.

Now in its third year, the Tourism Adventure and Activity Forum offers a unique opportunity for adventure and activity operators from all over Ireland to access the latest research and information on international best-practice and developments in the sector.

The forum will also, for the first time, give those attending the opportunity to meet and do business with approximately 40 overseas tour operators who are interested in programming activity and adventure holidays in Ireland.

A series of workshops will also take place and a number of guest speakers from the activity and adventure arena will address the forum.

Anticipating the conference, Fáilte Ireland's Manager for the Leisure and Activities sector, Ethna Murphy stressed:

"Fáilte Ireland has, over the years, invested in angling infrastructure, activity facilities, cycling routes and a host of other facilities so that Ireland can offer the best and most varied range of marine and countryside activity and adventure.

"The challenge now for tourism operators is to fully exploit both our natural environment and our man-made infrastructure to provide the best experience to our visitors and to entice as many visitors as possible.

"Knowledge is power, and this forum aims to ensure that participants leave with as much up-to-date intelligence and contacts as possible."

Businesses interested in attending the forum can register on www.promotionsireland.ie or email adventure@failteireland.ie



Fáilte Ireland
National Tourism Development Authority
Fáilte Ireland 88-95 Amiens Street Dublin 1
Email: laoise.bray@failteireland.ie
View online at: www.failteireland.ie

Take a walk in the North-West



Horn Head offers visitors spectacular views of the natural beauty visitors can experience.

A SPECTACULAR coastal looped walk "McSwyne's Gun Loop" and a walks scheme for Horn Head, Dunfanaghy in County Donegal were recently officially opened by Minister of State, Dinny McGinley.

The new looped route, located at Horn Head, Dunfanaghy, offers walkers the opportunity to enjoy the spectacular surroundings and natural beauty of the peninsula and is intended to suit all levels of fitness, catering for both the occasional and leisure walker.

The Horn Head walks scheme, which is designed to support the development, enhancement and maintenance of our way-marked trails, ensures that maintenance is carried out by the 18 local landowners who have signed up to the walks scheme on the trail, further enhancing the visitor experience and supporting the local economy.

Paul McLoone, Head of Operations for Fáilte Ireland in the North West, said:

"Walking in Ireland has never been more popular with both domestic and overseas visitors and it is wonderful to see the development of this walking trail in a coastal area as stunning as Horn Head. It is one of the best coastal day routes in the country and will help attract visitors not only to the town of Dunfanaghy but the County of Donegal."



Local landowners, businesses and stakeholders at the launch with Minister of State, Dinny McGinley, TD.

New Opportunity for Trainee Chefs to Earn and Learn

ONE HUNDRED and fifty aspiring chefs are set to benefit from Fáilte Ireland's new culinary traineeship programme as they began their training in seven Institutes of Technology and Colleges of Further Education around the country in September.

The National Traineeship in Professional Cookery was designed to support the jobs initiative, and is based on a solid foundation of practical culinary skills and techniques. Reinforced by a formal academic qualification with the minimum amount of time required away from the workplace, trainees will, over a two-year period, learn:

- *The theory and practice of professional cookery;*
- *Menu design; cost control; food science*
- *Health and safety*

Further benefits to the trainee include:

- *Continue to earn while you learn with an employer of choice*
- *Enrich your job immediately as you acquire more skills*
- *Enhance your employment prospects and career opportunities*
- *Access state-of-the-art training and learning facilities*
- *Potential for progression to a BA in Culinary Arts*

Participating establishments also gain from the programme by securing a long-



Launching the new National Traineeship in Professional Cookery are (l-r) Ed Cooney, Executive Chef at the Merrion Hotel; Sean O'Malley, Education Manager, Fáilte Ireland; Hannah Reidy, Commis Chef, Merrion Hotel and Paul Murphy, Education Policy Officer, Fáilte Ireland.

term commitment from their staff, while at the same time producing increased skills and productivity. Additional benefits to the employer include:

- *Little or no cost associated with participating on this programme*
- *A designated trainers workshop, organised for a designated mentor*
- *Increased levels of staff commitment to your business i.e. minimum 2 years*
- *Improved employee performance and increased productivity*

Another key element of the new traineeship is the role of the 'Industry Mentor'. Approved establishments (list available on www.PickTourism.ie) will be requested to nominate a qualified mentor to help guide the trainee through the programme and ensure learning objectives

and deadlines are met. The industry mentor should be someone, in a more senior position than the trainee, who possesses the necessary skills to guide the trainee successfully through the programme.

The programme is open to everyone, from school leavers and unemployed persons to culinary staff looking to up-skill. Those undertaking the traineeship can gain a high level, internationally recognised professional qualification (Advance Certificate FETAC Level 6) while at the same time work full-time in an approved establishment.

Over the next two years, it is expected that up to 500 trainees will benefit from this initiative. Those interested in the programme can access more information at: www.picktourism.ie or contact Paul Murphy on 01 8847891 or by email paul.murphy@failteireland.ie

To Mulranny, and beyond...

VISITORS TO the West can now experience more sights and sounds of the Great Western Greenway as the Mulranny to Achill extension was officially opened by An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, TD. and Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Michael Ring, TD. This extension, which was developed following an investment package of €3.5m, sees the Great Western Greenway now span 42km from Westport to Newport and from Mulranny to Achill.

Traditionally the Great Western Midlands Railway, the Great Western Greenway is perfect for off-road walking or cycling. Now connecting Mayo's major tourism hubs Westport and Achill and encompassing the beautiful quaint villages of Mulranny and Newport.

The first of its kind here in Ireland, the facility has the potential to attract huge numbers to the area and provides other benefits including encouraging new business start-ups such as bike hire companies and cycling and walking tour operators in the area.

Speaking at the opening, Ethna Murphy, Manager for the Leisure and Activities sector at Fáilte Ireland emphasised the benefit of developments like this for Irish tourism.

"The Great Western Greenway is a perfect example of how we can take underused local assets and use them to develop the appeal and tourism

potential of an area, through improving and enhancing what the local community has to offer.

"As the national tourism development authority, Fáilte Ireland is committed to working with local communities on development projects such as these to ensure that Ireland is primed and ready to provide the best experience to our visitors and to entice as many visitors as possible to visit and return to Ireland."

The key to the success of the Great Western Greenway was the support from all 160 landowners who granted permissive access through their lands along with the investment from the Department of Transport, Fáilte Ireland, Mayo County Council and the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government. Without their support this facility would not have been made possible.

All Tee'd Up for Tourism



The victorious European team celebrate securing a 15-13 win over the United States at Killeen Castle.

GOLF WAS clearly on the menu for Ireland this summer and golf ambassador and three time major winner Padraig Harrington along with recent champs, Graham McDowell, Rory McIlroy and Darren Clarke were all been doing their bit to build Ireland's international reputation as a premier golf destination.

Kicking off the golf this summer was the Irish Open, which welcomed more than 86,000 attendees to Killarney over the August bank holiday, who enjoyed a weekend of some of the world's most renowned golfers playing on one of the most spectacular golf courses in Ireland.

The Ladies Irish Open followed closely behind in Killeen Castle, Co Meath. The perfect aperitif to the Solheim Cup in September.

The Solheim Cup (sometimes described as the Ladies Ryder Cup) brought some of the world's best female professional golfers arrive play on the same course, where they competed for one of the most sought after awards for female golf.

The tournament welcomed more than 80,000 attendees over the weekend of play, and the event itself is estimated to be worth €35m to the Irish exchequer. Emphasising what hosting this female-led event means to Ireland, Keith McCormack, Head of Golf, Fáilte Ireland said:

"Ladies golf has never been as strong as it is today with 50,000 active female golfers playing regularly around the world.

"In fact, women's golf is currently the fastest growing segment of golf worldwide,

with 10 million golfers now playing regularly (5 million of those are in the US).

From a tourism perspective, 70% of female golfers are the travel decision-makers spending more on average than male golfers, so there has never been a better time for Ireland to be hosting such a prestigious tournament.

I thoroughly believe that this event delivered a valuable legacy at an important time for Ireland, reinforcing our national recognition and identity as a world class golfing destination."

Not only do these events provide Ireland with the perfect platform to showcase our courses, and indeed our golfing prowess, to a global audience of millions (approximately 400 million visitors each for the Irish Open and Solheim Cup) but they also provide the perfect opportunity for businesses in the surrounding areas to capitalise on the influx

of visitors and ensure that they give them a reason to recommend and return to Ireland.

With the support of Tourism Ireland domestic and overseas media attended each of the events including renowned broadcaster Peter Kessler and US golf writers Jeff Wallach, Tom Harack, and Hal Phillips, who golfed their way from the North West to Killarney to attend the Irish Open, furiously blogging their experiences to their online followers every step of the way.

Fáilte Ireland welcomed up to 300 members of domestic and international media to Ireland for the Solheim Cup and they enjoyed a high class golfing experience, local people and spectacular scenery.

Notwithstanding the spectacular golf which global audiences enjoyed a feast of entertainment and animation was laid on for those attending these events. The Irish Open shared the stage with Killarney Summerfest, which made certain visitors experience a range of entertainment, animation, craic agus ceol throughout Killarney. The Solheim Cup also provided something for all the family as a festival of golf took place in Co. Meath throughout the weekend.

To ensure visitors' needs were not only met, but exceeded, businesses in Kerry and the Boyne Valley also came together and signed up to charters which committed to offering a high quality, value for money experience.

Further good news also came for golfers this summer when a new online search facility, allowing them to search for and book their tee-time on www.discoverireland.ie/golf in real time, was launched giving Irish golf courses an added advantage when it comes to attracting visitors. Anyone interested in booking a tee-time online can now log on to www.discoverireland.ie/golf to check out the latest special offers and book their next game of golf. Golf clubs which are not already connected to this facility and would like more information on it can contact their local Fáilte Ireland team.

Bundoran on Crest of a Wave for Eurosurf '11

THE EUROPEAN Surfing Championship came to Ireland for its fourth time this September bringing 13 teams of Europe's surfing elite to Bundoran, Co. Donegal to fight it out for the top prize.

Over 20,000 visitors arrived in Bundoran over the course of the ten day event and it was the Portugese team that was celebrating after being crowned European Surfing Champions 2011.

The event itself was expected to generate €3m for the local economy and in addition provided a fantastic opportunity to market Ireland to the growing outdoor adventure demographic which currently generates revenue of more than €1.1bn annually to Ireland.

Speaking after the event, Fáilte Ireland's Martina Bromley said:

"Eurosurf was not only a top class event in its own right but it supported the concept of the West Coast, and particularly



the North West region, as a showcase for outdoor activities, superb world class surfing and stunning landscape and scenery. The event gave Bundoran a chance to shine as one of Europe's best surfing destinations and this has been attested to globally with over half a million hits on the EuroSurf website during the course of the event."

The highlight of the European Surfing calendar, this event was a significant addition on Fáilte Ireland's 2011 events calendar. Fáilte Ireland worked closely with local industry to ensure that the event is a great success and one that generated as much publicity as possible, not just overseas but in Ireland as well.

Surfing in Ireland has grown from strength to strength in the past number of years, evidenced on a daily and weekly basis by the number of cars travelling to coastal towns along the western sea-board in order to catch some of the world renowned waves the coast is famous for.

Movies like "Waveriders" starring Irish surfer Richie Fitzgerald, who competed as part of the Irish team this year, have also propelled the popularity of this recreational sport around the country and indeed around the world. Surf Schools are springing up across the west coast of Ireland and are now big business all year round and a key part of activity tourism.

Over 15 different businesses are now in operation in Bundoran linked directly to surfing. The Surf Schools in Bundoran employ 15 full time staff and 45 seasonal staff and welcome in excess of 40,000 visitors per annum.

Fáilte Ireland is currently working with key businesses in the surfing sector and looking at the potential to build surfing facilities in Bundoran and Strandhill. Surfing businesses are also part of our development of an adventure hub in Sligo as well as our Family Fun initiative in Bundoran.

Kildare West Wicklow Destination Group

TOURISM BUSINESSES from across Kildare and Wicklow joined together over the summer to raise the tourism profile of their counties. Members of the tourism industry from both counties met at a recent networking event organised by Fáilte Ireland's local team in the East and Midlands to explore how they can work together to promote both counties as part of the Kildare Wicklow destination.

Pól O Conghaile, well-known travel writer, spoke at the event about what he felt the counties have to offer and more importantly, how they could work together to capitalise on their assets. Since last year, Fáilte Ireland has been working with a range of public, private and community sector tourism and business stakeholders across Kildare and Wicklow to develop a destination strategy for the area. A steering group, chaired by Professor Tom Collins of NUI Maynooth, is working to implement the goals set out in this strategy.

The strategy places a focus on the development of local infrastructure and ensuring a high quality in the tourism offering available. Plans to provide education and training for the tourism trade and wider community as well as to roll out marketing and promotional programmes to develop Kildare Wicklow into a world-class tourism destination are already underway.

Speaking about how important it is to have tourism enterprises and stakeholders working towards a common goal, Kevin Moriarty, Head of Business Development, at Fáilte Ireland stressed:

"Encouraging businesses to work together and to build knowledge about what we have to offer in Kildare and Wicklow is crucial if we are to look at developing the Kildare Wicklow destination. We need to understand what our visitors are looking for and be creative about how we meet and exceed their needs and expectations. Working together is the approach we need if we are to win more business and ultimately keep the Kildare Wicklow destination ahead of our competitors."

Congrats to Cornell Graduates



Congratulations to the most recent graduates from Fáilte Ireland's Executive Management Programme as they picked up their certificate in Strategic Hospitality Management at a ceremony held at Trinity College recently. The programme saw twenty owners and senior managers from across the Irish tourism industry study on a range of job-related topics covering strategy, marketing, finance, management and operations. The eight month course involved a number of modules held throughout Ireland as well as an operations module held in Cornell University, New York. The programme also included a series of web-based learning courses, webinars and video conferencing culminating in the award of a certificate in Strategic Hospitality Management accredited by Cornell University. Pictured are: (front row l. to r.): Alan Smullen, Croke Park; Mairead Delaney, Carlton Hotel Group; Gemma Jordan, Maldron Hotel Smithfield, and Martin Mangan, Conrad Hotel, having completed the Fáilte Ireland Executive Management Programme; with Tom Kline, Cornell University, USA and Mary Hall, Fáilte Ireland (back row).

Getting Coached for 2012



Fáilte Ireland, the national tourism development authority, is kick-starting the 2012 tourism season with a number of workshops around the country for a group of leading International Coach Tour Operators. Pictured at the first workshop, which was held in Fitzpatrick Castle Hotel, Dublin are (l-r): Michael Fitzsimons, Fáilte Ireland; Fiona Delahunty, Mount Juliet Hotel Kilkenny; Nicky Logue, Fitzpatrick Castle Hotel Dublin and Michelle Maguire, Ireland's Blue Book.

Date for Your Diary



OUR ANNUAL industry briefings will be held around the country in mid-January 2012 so be sure to mark your diary so that you can attend.

The briefings will take a look at what activity is planned in your area for the coming year and we will also be looking for your views and input into the year ahead.

The dates for the briefings will be as follows:

Regional Industry Briefings 2012

Sligo – 9th January
Westport – 10th January
Galway – 10th January
Athlone – 11th January
Maynooth – 11th January

Kilkenny – 16th January
Cork – 17th January
Killarney – 17th January
Limerick – 18th January
Dublin – 19th January

Further details on venues and times will be available in the coming weeks.

2,000 Bed and Breakfasts sign up to Classification Scheme

FOLLOWING THE introduction of the 'New Vision' strategy for Bed and Breakfasts last year, Fáilte Ireland has been working closely with B&B Ireland and non-affiliated members of the sector to implement a number of new developments.

Amongst those is the introduction of a voluntary classification scheme, which allows bed and breakfasts to be assessed independently and rated based on what they are offering. To date, more than 2,000 businesses have registered under the scheme which is supported by a new quality assurance symbol.

A further 200 bed and breakfasts have signed up to the new categorisation scheme which allows properties to offer specialist services in a number of different areas including walking, golf, angling, adventure, farmstay, food, pet-friendly, gaeltacht and eco-friendly.

Finally, a newly-produced 'Irish Home B&B - Get Closer' DVD, designed to tell the 'New Vision' story through the eyes of the operator will be available shortly. The DVD incorporates interviews

with Irish Home B&B operators and discussions on their classification, categorisation, customer care, unique personal experiences and more.

The DVD also features Catherine Fulvio who provides useful menu ideas and tips on running an Irish Home B&B.

To get a copy of the DVD contact Gemma Shannon on 01 8847139 or gemma.shannon@failteireland.ie



Approved B&B owners taking part in the newly developed Fáilte Ireland Bed and Breakfast Development Programme, which took place over five days in the Fáilte Ireland Development Centre Limerick earlier this year.

Reviewing the Situation – for Caravans, Camping and Self Catering

TO GUIDE the development of future plans, Fáilte Ireland is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of the Irish Self Catering and Caravan & Camping sectors.

The aim of these reviews is to develop and strengthen the position and long term sustainability of these sectors. To do this, Fáilte Ireland has sought the input of the tourism industry and its stakeholders.

The reviews are currently underway and the first stage of the process - an online survey for each of these areas - was completed last July. A sample of

the sector were asked to complete the survey and the results are currently being collated to form a picture of what demands and issues are facing these industries in the current climate.

A number of in-depth focus groups have also taken place where we have discussed key challenges and issues with the sector in greater detail.

Once complete, Fáilte Ireland plans to deliver a results-driven report, which will include recommendations regarding sustainability, development opportunities, marketing & branding, quality standards and business supports. It is on target for October 2011.

Local Focus



TV celebrity chef, Neven Maguire, at his charity cookery demonstration, showcasing the best of local Carlow produce (from left): Rosemarie and Mary Jordan, The Forge Restaurant, Kilbride Cross, Ballon, Co Carlow and Amanda Horan, Client Services Officer, Fáilte Ireland South East.

FÁILTE IRELAND'S local teams are trained to help tourism businesses unravel their issues and get to the core of the problems they face. The Client Services team is an integral part of how these supports are provided and should be any businesses first port of call when looking for support, training or even advice.

Amanda Horan, Client Services Officer in the South East tells *Tourism Matters* how the local teams support local businesses, and how you can go about accessing their expertise.



Amanda Horan Reports

Fáilte Ireland has a number of local teams across the country who are working on the ground to ensure businesses are not only getting the supports they need, but are accessing the supports most appropriate for them.

We offer a wide range of supports to tourism businesses seeking assistance in areas from direct business supports and training to information, advice, research, marketing and promotion, quality and standards and investment opportunities. However, with so many supports available, it can be difficult knowing which one is right for your business. This is where the local team can help.

Most businesses first contact the local team because they have a specific issue they want help with. This is really where the conversation starts.

Working with you, a Client Services Officer will help you identify the core of the issue/s you're facing, and will then direct you on the various information, training and supports we can provide to assist you in addressing the issue.

Often when we sit down with a business owner or manager to discuss an issue, various concerns emerge and we identify a range of areas where we can

provide help and support.

We will also consider other less urgent, but perhaps equally important business issues, which also need to be considered for the business to reach its full potential.

Every business is different, even those from the same tourism sector face different challenges whether that be influenced by location, current visitor markets, to staffing levels, technology resources or quality standards. Therefore the needs of every business are different, and the solutions required vary.

This is why we tend to approach working with a business in a bespoke way. Of course there are many areas of skills development and business planning that are common to all businesses and these largely inform our approach in creating and delivering our range of business workshop and training series on a scheduled basis each quarter.

It really is about a two-way conversation with the business owner/manager so that your local team can help and guide you to a solution that works for you and your business.

So, when should a business contact you if they are in difficulty?

Ideally we would like businesses to contact us before they feel they are in difficulty so we can develop an on going relationship with the business that is grounded in building a business's capability to sustain itself into the future and grow. This, in some instances, involves making considered and difficult choices which may require amending the business model to reflect the economic climate or changes in consumer/visitor lifestyle, spending and holiday choices.

Businesses looking to access supports and meet their local team can simply visit our website to access the details of their regional Fáilte Ireland office who will be happy to put them in contact with the Client Services Officer in their area see: www.failteireland.ie/regional contacts for further information.

We will then arrange a call to discuss the matter and possibly set up a face-to-face meeting to explore the issue and take it from there.

Closing the Deal with Overseas Customers

BETWEEN THEM Great Britain, the US, Germany and France account for over 70% of all holiday visits to the island of Ireland. With the rate of economic recovery in each of these markets directly related to demand, it is believed that potential for growth in these markets does exist. In fact, recent figures from the Central Statistics Office report growth of up to 13% in the numbers of overseas visitors coming to Ireland in the first half of this year.

That said, targeting overseas markets is a very different experience to driving business from the domestic market and can appear daunting for many businesses, particularly those which have been struggling over the past few years.

To help businesses make the most of these markets, and target them effectively and efficiently, Fáilte Ireland, in collaboration with Tourism Ireland, has developed the Sales Connect Toolkit, an online resource that provides all the information needed to position and secure business from these markets.

With over 200 pages of tips and tools, the toolkit starts from the very beginning, so even those unsure about how to begin tackling this upswing can find out where to start.

The process of effectively targeting and selling to Ireland's key markets is broken



SALES CONNECT TOOLKIT

A practical guide to help you win more overseas business

down by the toolkit into three steps:

Step One: Researching and understanding your overseas market

- Research the customer profile for each of the four key markets

- Identify the main target markets for Irish holidays
- Understand how tourists plan and purchase their holiday
- Identify air and sea access from the target markets to Ireland

- Know who the main tour operators that programme Ireland are

Step Two: Understanding the distribution channels

- Demystify the jargon of travel distribution
- Get up to speed on how travel is distributed by other Irish product providers
- Develop a distribution strategy for the business
- Know how to sell through a mix of travel intermediaries

Step Three: Building relationships and promoting your business overseas

- Work with local partners to package your product
- Learn how to promote your product overseas through in-market and in-Ireland workshops, familiarisation trips, and media visits through Fáilte Ireland
- Make the most of trade and consumer fairs and make effective sales calls
- Get involved in co-operative activity with Tourism Ireland

Success is all about knowing what your customers are looking for and providing it to them in the easiest possible way. Even if you are looking at targeting other markets, the advice and tips contained in the toolkit still apply and can be followed.

The Sales Connect Toolkit will help you achieve all of these things, and is available to download FREE of charge from www.failteireland.ie

Speaking from Experience

LESS THAN 18 months into her new role as General Manager of Bellinter House, Co. Meath, Cora Dwyer tells *Tourism Matters* what she and her team have been doing to grow business outside of the domestic market.

Cora Dwyer Reports



When it comes to overseas markets Bellinter House is focusing on a few – namely Germany, France, the UK and Spain. Why? Well not only is it where all the figures are suggesting the visitors and growth is coming from, but also because that is where we are witnessing growth.

We have made many changes to the hotel since I started last year, including refurbishing the house. But before guests can get here to enjoy the new quirky decor and the relaxed atmosphere of the

house, they need to book in, which means we need to make the sale.

Focusing on this, we have made some measured decisions in the past 12 months.

Budgets are tight, and this has meant that we have had to be much more targeted with our marketing. With the new M3 guaranteeing ease of access to visitors travelling around the country and indeed from Northern Ireland, our marketing and advertising has focused specifically around celebratory holidays, long weekends – time when people can, and are, looking to travel. We also made an effort to “speak our target market’s language”, using words and phrases they can relate to and recognise.

I also had the opportunity to travel to the German Ladies Open to promote the Boyne Valley region, this year taking full advantage of the upcoming Solheim Cup,

and making use of my degree in German. Apprehensive as I can be to use it, I found that being able to communicate with potential visitors gave me that all-important edge, reinforcing that no matter how bad my grammar may, or may not be, making an effort is all visitors want. This came home with me, and I now find myself helping guests, as best I can, by using my languages, and encouraging staff to do same.

Our next steps are to ensure we are reaching our overseas markets will be to translate our website – not the entire site, but the all-important home page, information pages and of course the one that seals any deal, the booking engine.

We also plan to focus more attention on the US and entice them to Bellinter House, and the Boyne Valley, with packages involving the history of the house itself as well as the history of the area and its many attractions.

Following all of this investment, I can confidently say that we have witnessed a certain amount of growth, certainly from the German and French markets. Time will tell with the UK as the autumn season continues.

As for the lessons taken out of this work – knowing your market, when they are looking to travel, and using their language and turn of phrase certainly gives you a five-second head start when it comes to getting their attention. Once you have that, the rest is down to making sure you can carry that interest through to a sale using ease of booking whether or not that’s online or in their native language. From there, the fate of the return visit will rest on their stay, which we, in Bellinter House, always try to make as comfortable and enjoyable as possible.

Targeting the 21st Century Tourist

IN SEPTEMBER Fáilte Ireland held its annual e-business conference bringing technology and Irish tourism together to help Irish businesses sell more effectively to the 21st Century tourist.

This year's conference, entitled "Engage, Explore and Ignite Your Online Presence", focused on how tourism businesses can use effective social media and mobile web as key sales channels.

The internet has fast become the travel agent of choice for our overseas visitors. Our 2010 visitor attitudes survey found that almost 70% of overseas holidaymakers used the internet to plan their trip to Ireland and when it comes to choosing Ireland as a destination the internet comes up trumps with almost half (48%) of holidaymakers surveyed citing the internet as the source of information which led to them choosing Ireland. After choosing to come to Ireland, visitors continue to use the internet to book or purchase other elements of their holiday. The most popular purchase/booking made online in 2010 was booking air or sea carriers at 96% which was then followed by accommodation at 73%.

120 delegates from the Irish tourism industry attended the conference and heard from a number of online experts such as Brian Brady, Google Ireland, who outlined how mobile devices can add to an online marketing strategy and Andrew Weld-Moore, Manager of Online Sales Operations at Facebook, who examined the benefits of using social networking sites, such as Facebook, to optimise your businesses web presence.

Speaking about how mobile devices will impact on the Irish tourism industry Brian Brady, Google Ireland explained:

"Today over 50% of new internet connections is coming from mobile devices. By 2013 there will be more mobile internet users than desktop internet users, meaning smartphone devices will be the primary method of accessing the internet for the majority of people globally. As the mobile web expands and mobile applications proliferate, the opportunities available for businesses to reach consumers and grow their businesses will increase as well.

"The mobile revolution represents an enormous opportunity for the travel sector to acquire users. In Ireland, currently 7% of all travel related queries come from smartphone devices; in 2009 this was less than 1%, which is evidence of the exponential growth. In the UK 14% of all travel related queries come from

smartphone devices, illustrating the continuing trend among consumers to rely on their smartphone device as the first step in the travel decision making process.

"Critically however, 79% of websites are not optimised for the mobile web and my presentation at Fáilte Ireland's conference focused on presenting the emerging trends in mobile usage and illustrate why it is essential to integrate mobile into your overall marketing communications plan."

Andrew Weld-Moore, Manager of Online Sales Operations at Facebook then told delegates about how tourism businesses can use the power of social media to gain personal recommendations for their business:

"More than 30 billion pieces of content are shared every month on Facebook and each person has an average of 130 friends that these actions are shared with through their news feed. This creates a personalised experience where you discover relevant information through the lens of your friends and communities.

"We have always known that a recommendation from a friend is the best kind of marketing and, on Facebook, those in the tourist industry can make the most of the social graph and let people talk to their friends about the places and things they've enjoyed."

Fáilte Ireland's new e-business tool – an online booking comparator application which can be accessed on the WebCheck Facebook page was also launched at the conference.

This open access online comparator, which was demonstrated on the day, compares the booking system features for both Direct Booking Engines and Online Travel Agents (OTAs). The comparator can be used to compare the costs, services and technical features of 15 different companies instantly, making it easier for businesses to choose an OTA that best suits their needs.

A workshop also took place during the day which allowed attendees to meet with direct booking engine companies and Online Travel Agents (OTAs) to discuss their offerings face-to-face and make any enquiries they needed.

For more information on Fáilte Ireland's web supports log on to www.failteireland.ie/web



Pictured at the conference are (l-r) are Brian Brady, Google; Stephen Dudley, Fáilte Ireland; Jenny Taaffe, iZest and Andrew Weld-Moore, Facebook.

Why are Trade and Consumer Promotions Important?

EXHIBITING AT trade and consumer shows, and participating in workshops, offers businesses a number of opportunities to target and sell to potential visitors overseas. Not only do they give a unique opportunity to generate new leads, they can also link in with suppliers, check out the competition and do some networking.

Often what you can achieve at one trade show could take you weeks, or even months, to achieve from home. But participation requires careful planning, including choosing the correct show, setting clear objectives, creating an effective exhibition and promoting your presence.

To get the most out of your investment in trade promotions, you need to clearly identify your purpose and set measurable goals that you can evaluate afterwards. Successful participation in trade shows is achieved over three phases: your preparation, attendance at the trade show, and the follow-up. Everything you do before, during, and after the promotions should contribute to achieving your goals.

That said, before you pack your bags and head off around the world, you need to ask yourself is this the right strategy for you? Are there other things you need to attend to

first? For example, have you thought about potential packages that you could develop which you can then promote via the web? Have you recently met with incoming tour operators / Destination Marketing Companies (DMCs) to update them on new product developments or to explore how you could do more business together? Have you sent out press releases to the relevant contacts in Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland so that they know all about you?

Tips for a successful

"30 Second Pitch"

- Describe who you are by the type of operators/tourists you serve, and how your product gives them a unique experiential offering.
- Briefly outline what your company offers and where it's located relative to access points.
- Tell them the compelling benefit that differentiates you from the competition.
- Give them details on your prices and pricing structures. If you focus on your prospect's world and the questions that are foremost in their minds, they are more likely to engage with you.

Dublin is in Season this Autumn

FÁILTE IRELAND has this autumn launched a new campaign to promote a world-class series of culture, arts, theatre and music events taking place in Dublin during September and October as part of the new *Dublin Festival Season*.

Dublin Festival Season offered visitors to Dublin the chance to experience the very best of contemporary culture in its many forms and over a number of years aims to grow the number of domestic and international visitors to Ireland during this period by building international awareness of Dublin Festival Season as an iconic international event.

The introduction of the Dublin Festival Season is part of Fáilte Ireland's strategy to develop a new umbrella brand that will drive increased domestic and overseas tourism by bringing together what previously has been a fragmented collection of events which were difficult to exploit for tourism.

This approach is influenced by Edinburgh's successful marketing of its cultural events, where a number of separate festivals taking place in August have become known overseas as the Edinburgh Festival. The Edinburgh Festival attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors



and contributes over £123 million to the Scottish economy each year (source; *Edinburgh Festivals Impacts Study*, May 2011). Rory McCarthy, Fáilte Ireland's Festivals Officer, emphasised:

"We believe we can build both domestic and international awareness of the Dublin Festival Season as an iconic 'must see' event and we want potential visitors in our key tourism markets to know that from the beginning of September to the end of October, they can experience the very best of contemporary culture in one of the most sociable, easy-going and fun cities in Europe.

"We've targeted this campaign at adult groups and couples and we hope that a trip to Dublin Festival Season over time becomes an annual essential for anyone with an interest in culture and the arts."

The key events that took place in Dublin during Festival Season include the

Ulster Bank Dublin Theatre Festival which presented 553 performances of 28 cutting edge shows, the ABSOLUT Fringe, which presented 84 shows (with 535 scheduled performances) and involved 895 artists. Another well-established event is Culture Night, which offered over 100,000 free evening visits to 156 visitor attractions and rarely seen cultural gems on September 23rd.

Dublin Festival Season also showcased a number of exciting up and coming events including: The Mountains to Sea Book Festival in Dun Laoghaire, the Dublin Fashion Festival, Dublin Contemporary 2011, Open House Dublin and Hard Working Class Heroes.

These cultural events were complemented by other commercial and festive events including Arthur's Day, when some of the world's top acts played in pubs all over the capital and the 18 day party

Oktoberfest in Dublin's Docklands.

Rory McCarthy continued:

"The creation of the Dublin Festival Season brand gives us a new clear and focused message for our domestic and overseas campaigns including Tourism Ireland promotions in the UK, Netherlands, France and Germany.

"In addition, Fáilte Ireland brought over 30 top overseas journalists and cultural commentators to Dublin during Festival Season to generate positive coverage overseas."

The Dublin Festival Season will continue to evolve and, in 2012 and 2013, Fáilte Ireland will work with key stakeholders to attract significant numbers of overseas visitors to Dublin during the Festival Season by generating earlier overseas promotion and increasing the visibility of Dublin Festival Season on the streets of the capital.

Minister of State for Tourism and Sport, Michael Ring TD, commented:

"I'm pleased to welcome Fáilte Ireland's initiative for a new 'Dublin Festival Season' brand. This brings together a number of events under one umbrella, and boosts tourism in the city.

With tourism playing such a central role in re-generating our economy, we always need to look at how different sectors can benefit each other. Festivals, wherever they are, offer a valuable contribution to the development of tourism in Ireland and I look forward to the development of the Dublin Festival Season over the coming years."

To view the full listing of festivals and events go to:

www.discoverireland.ie/dublinfestivalseason

Discover Ireland at the touch of a button

FÁILTE IRELAND has launched a new discoverireland.ie mobile phone app to make it easier for visitors to search for special offers, things to do, and places to see from the comfort of their own phone.

The new app, which is available for iPhones and Android phones, brings tourist information to the fingertips of visitors, encouraging them to travel around Ireland by letting them access weekend trip ideas in regions all around the country; information on the top visitor attractions in each region and guides to what's on.

Visitors unsure about what they would like to do can seek inspiration from the app, which will point out which attractions many other holidaymakers have frequented and also makes suggestions on trips the user might like. You can even add any of the events from the What's On section directly into your iPhone calendar so that you won't forget when they're on.

The discoverireland.ie mobile website can also be accessed directly from the app so that users browse through the full contents of the site including approved accommodation, special offers and much, much, more.



North Kerry – Don't Forget your Passport

ACCORDING TO North Kerry Family Fun children turned up in their droves to attractions in Kerry to collect their North Kerry passport this summer.

The North Kerry passports were a new initiative by the North Kerry Family Fun group to promote the area and encourage families to visit local attractions over the summer. The passports were FREE and once children are residents of listed accommodation providers or had purchased an admission ticket to an attraction, they could receive a stamp on the passport.

After they had collected five stamps they could claim a prize from any listed member and once they have collected 10 stamps they received a free family pass to a listed attraction of their choice.

Kieran Ruttledge, Chairman of North Kerry Family Fun, who were promoting the passport giveaway, said he was excited by the response to the concept by children and parents from Kerry and beyond.

"This is a colourful and entertaining undertaking by the 35 tourism businesses involved in the North Kerry Family Fun Hub which was established three years ago by Fáilte Ireland to promote North Kerry as a family-friendly destination. The group is managed by a voluntary steering committee representing members from attractions, activities and accommodation providers in Tralee, Listowel, Ballybunion, Tarbert and Castleisland."

Exciting New Degree Programme for Tourism

A NEW and innovative three-year degree programme for owners and senior managers in the tourism industry has been launched with 25 participants from tourism businesses located in all parts of the country. The programme – the Fáilte Ireland B. Sc. in Small Enterprise Management – is the first of its kind for the tourism industry and has been designed by Waterford Institute of Technology in collaboration with Fáilte Ireland.

Commenting on the launch of the programme, Kevin Moriarty, Head of Business Supports with Fáilte Ireland, said:

“Tourism is critical to the recovery of the Irish economy. Fáilte Ireland’s investment and interest in the design, development and delivery of this programme is in keeping with the organisation’s strategic priorities, which include enhancing the effectiveness of managers in tourism and hospitality enterprises.”

The programme emphasises the development of key personal skills and exposure to specialist knowledge in business development. It responds to the need for the tourism entrepreneur to be able to thrive in a radically changed landscape with the power and influence of the Web, changing tourist profiles, economic downturn and increased competition. On completion, participants will have developed the skills necessary to develop their enterprises so that they will be in a much stronger competitive position.



Pictured at the Waterford Institute of Technology were (l. to r.): Tony Ennis, Ennis & Co Business Consultants, Enniscorthy; Dr. Tom O’ Toole, Head of Business School, WIT; Kevin Moriarty, Head of Operations and Business Supports, Fáilte Ireland; and Susan Grant, Christchurch Cathedral, Waterford.

A Real Reason to Continue Discovering Ireland this Autumn

AS WE move out of the summer season, Fáilte Ireland has kick started the autumn season as the latest Discover Ireland supplement ‘hit the shelves’ on the 10th September.

Launched by Minister for State with responsibility for Tourism and Sport, Michael Ring, TD, the new Discover Ireland Autumn Special Offers brochure was distributed to three quarters of a million people via national and local newspapers as well as through Fáilte Ireland’s tourist information office network across the country last month. Offering a host of great deals on breaks and accommodation and lots of inspiration and ideas for planning a getaway, the brochure includes over 230 special offers with a strong emphasis on spa breaks and treats.

Autumn is a time for treats and many of the featured accommodation in this edition have added treats and ‘value extras’ to their special offers. They range from free extra nights in hotels and holiday homes to free wine when you dine, chocolate treats and discounts off spa and beauty treatments.

The distribution of the brochure is being supported by a national radio and press campaign which commenced in the same week with a new radio ad hitting the national airwaves.

A number of match-funding campaigns in the Lakelands and Westport will also take place over the autumn showcasing what these areas have to offer visitors during the months ahead.

Each of these campaigns, and the special offers, are made possible through the contributions and participation of hundreds of tourism businesses.

Earlier this year Fáilte Ireland undertook some research into how effective the messages of the Discover Ireland campaign have been in the first quarter of the year and results show that a strikingly high percentage of adults (87%) in the Republic of Ireland are aware of some element of the campaign. Remarkably, this high awareness is consistent across all demographics, which shows the appeal of the campaign to a broad range of domestic holidaymakers.

Furthermore, the findings show that over one and a half million adults in the Republic of Ireland have been prompted to take some action by the campaign with close to half a million adults confirming that they have been driven to www.discoverireland.ie as a result.

Commenting on this, Orla Carroll, Head of Marketing and e-Business for Fáilte Ireland, emphasised:

“The willingness of the industry to work with Fáilte Ireland on our home holiday campaign is a true reflection of the determination of the sector. Businesses are ready to fight for every last bit of business out there and, teaming up with our campaign, we hope, will ensure that they get a real return on investment.”



Minister for State with responsibility for Tourism and Sport, Michael Ring, TD, launches the Discover Ireland autumn campaign with the assistance of Tourism Information Officers Philip Christie and Amy Maguire in Eyre Square.



MY STORY

Deirdre McGlone, Harvey's Point



HAVING STARTED my first job in a local guesthouse at the age of twelve, I fell into and in love with "the buzz", the challenges and the triumphs of working in hotels. The main chapter of my story began twenty-two years ago when I found myself floating following graduation from college with a degree in European Studies specialising in French and German. Instead of heading to work in the Commission in Brussels, I went to London and worked in hotels there. But destiny was to bring me home to the hills of Donegal and entirely by chance, I took a job as a receptionist in a hotel that was just about to open. This hotel was Harvey's Point. This 'summer job' is now my life, my passion and home to my wonderful family, Marc my husband, my children, Carl, James and Christina and my brother-in-law, Jody who had the vision to build Harvey's Point in the first place.



Each year since we opened, Harvey's Point has become bigger and busier. Despite our remote location, the hotel has become a destination in itself for romantic couples on a leisure break, for weddings, Sunday lunch and our summer dinner cabaret. Food is a big part of our business and our addition of fifty-six palatial suites in 2005 has enhanced our product greatly. Our vision is to be recognised as one of the leading hotels in Ireland and we endeavour to achieve this by continuous investment in our property and our people. There is no doubt that it is the 'people who make the place' and we are fortunate that as a family owned and managed hotel, we have a team who genuinely care for our guests and for whom the extra mile is easy.

Surviving through tough times

As a team, we have celebrated the highs and stuck together when times have been difficult. In the past few years, we

had to take tough decisions to ensure our survival as a business and, interestingly, perhaps this recession has given us the courage and determination to succeed. We had to implement a 10% pay cut and a three-day week during winter. On a personal level, I had initial difficulty in taking these decisions which I knew would impact on the livelihood of our staff but through effective communication and the objective of having no redundancies, I was amazed at the solidarity shown.

Without compromising on service levels, we have had to improve our efficiency levels and overall productivity. Above all, we had to get the message out that Harvey's Point is open for business and is a unique destination offering high standards of hotel keeping and hospitality. We have learned to be creative in bundling packages together where it's not just a price-led offer of two B&B plus one Dinner. We wanted to offer a 'Harvey's Point Experience' giving guests the option of activities that we can tailor make for

them such as in-house wine tasting, cookery demonstrations, guided walks etc.

Using technology to bring customers closer

Innovation is key to the success of any business and we are always thinking of new ideas to keep our business fresh and developing. For example, our 'Live-Chat' service on our website means that a guest can be online and discuss their enquiry/booking with us without lifting the telephone. Interaction with people is so important and we see how something as simple as a chef chatting to guests has a great effect. It is so easy to impress a guest even by having each member of staff smile and greet them in passing.

How do we do our PR?

Our hope is that our guests are our ambassadors in spreading the word and our reservation system tracks and

measures the percentage of repeat and word-of-mouth bookings. Over the years, we have invested in inviting journalists to Harvey's Point and we have had great assistance from Conor Kenny, Noreen D'Arcy and currently the great Frank Corr. Responding to all Trip Advisor reviews also has its advantages, while effective use of social media networking is crucial. Keeping in contact with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland is well worthwhile. But really, it is down to knocking on doors or even camping on the doorstep to achieve results.

Harvey's Point has had its share of what I refer to as 'Catering Crossroads' and I have been known to call on the 'Catering Gods' from time to time! It is about finding your path, knowing your destination and learning how to get there. It is about having the leadership, the skills and the stamina to keep going. It is about luck and above all it is about love, love for the people who pay our bills and the people who make a good place great!

ResearchUpdate

Increasing Confidence in 2011 Tourism Performance

Headline findings - 2011 is proving to be something of a transitional year for Irish tourism.

THE FÁILTE Ireland Tourism Barometer Survey, conducted among almost 1,000 Irish tourism enterprises in September, shows confidence with tourism performance in 2011 returning to levels last seen in 2007. Four in ten respondents to the survey expect overall business levels in 2011 will be up on last year with just three in ten anticipating declines. This is consistent with levels last recorded in the September 2007 and is ahead of similar findings recorded in the intervening three years.

Year to date

Despite this general increase in confidence, and we do need to recognise how difficult the last three years have been for Irish tourism, the survey findings indicate that the main population centres and the tourism hotspots are doing well, but outside of these areas enterprises continue to struggle. The continuing negative reports on the global economy are affecting consumer confidence and slowing the rate of recovery. Many enterprises are reporting increased levels of business in 2011, but while reported increases are modest, generally not exceeding 5%, those reporting declines are frequently quoting drops of more than 5%. As a result, a number of sectors are indicating that business is down on balance for the year to date. Hotels and self-catering are the best

performing accommodation sectors based on industry sentiment, while B&Bs, guesthouses, hostels and caravan/camping suggest a more difficult trading environment. Visitor attractions are also reporting increased business. The hotel sector is the only one holding its own in terms of profitability and room yield with both showing no significant change on last year, all other sectors report profitability down.

Prospects

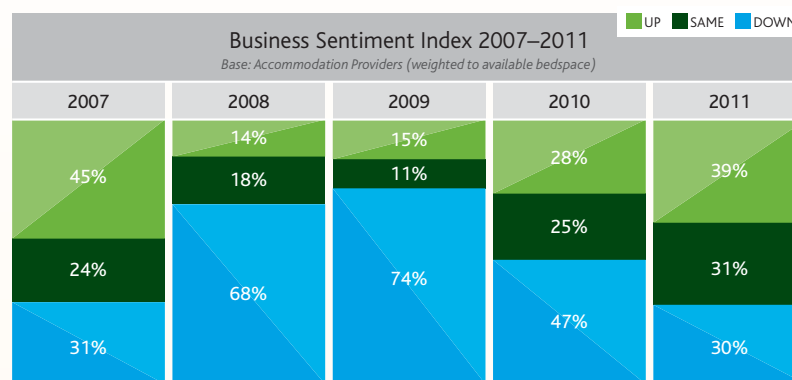
A surprising feature of the survey is that enterprises are less optimistic regarding their prospects for the remainder of the year than they are in respect their performance to date. The continuing economic uncertainty may have made many enterprises somewhat reluctant to appear too bullish when looking to the future.

Factors affecting business performance

Positive factors that are reported to be contributing to tourism growth in 2011 include the relative strength of the repeat visitor market in some quarters, individual, local and national marketing efforts, including the national tourist boards, the fact that more Irish people are choosing to holiday at home, the positive impacts of local events, and the continuing positive reaction to the visits of Queen Elizabeth and President Obama. The tax cuts resulting from the Government's jobs initiative also receive favourable mention. The main issues of concern for the industry are the state of the global and national economies, the negative impacts of low priced competition in the accommodation sector, in particular bank/NAMA financed hotels, and the continuing high costs of doing business coupled with the reduced spending by visitors.

Markets

The latest Central Statistics Office estimates covering the period January to July show overseas visitors up 12% with British arrivals up 9% and Mainland Europe, North America and other long haul markets showing double digit



Tourism Barometer Survey – September 2011

growth. The impact of volcanic ash in 2010 is evident with Britain and Mainland Europe showing only partial recovery as arrivals remain below 2009 levels for the same period, whereas more encouragingly North America, and the other long haul markets in particular, are showing real growth in 2011. In contrast to the macro CSO based estimates, tourism enterprises responding to the Barometer Survey regard all of the major overseas markets other than the United States as being down on last year on balance. Tourism enterprises are focussed on their holiday/leisure business, whereas CSO visitor estimates include VFR, Business and other, non-leisure related purposes, and to date we have no official indications as to the relative performance of these key segments.

ACCOMMODATION SECTORS

Hotels are the most optimistic sector with half reporting increased overall business to date in 2011. Domestic business in hotels would appear to be somewhat stronger than overseas but the difference is not significant. Weekend breaks continue to be the key driver of domestic business for hotels, followed by mid-week breaks and general leisure. There appears to be little evidence of growth in domestic corporate business. Despite the increases reported in arrivals in hotels, overall profitability remains on a par with 2010 with just over two

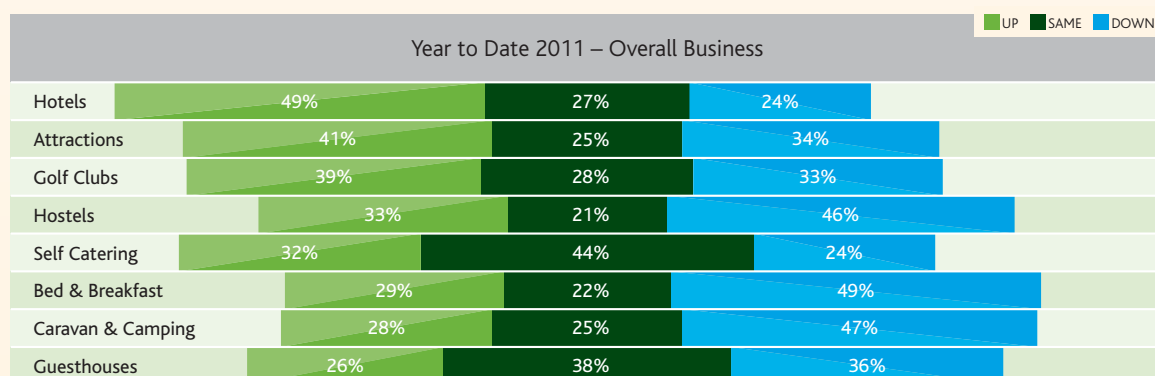
in five hoteliers reporting average room yields down on last year while just under two in five cite increased yields. While expectations regarding arrivals remain up on balance for the remainder of the year, only a third of hotels are anticipating overall growth, while four in ten expect their domestic nights to be up.

In contrast to hotels, guesthouse and B & B proprietors report their overall business down on last year for the year to date, with only one in four guesthouse and three in ten B & Bs reporting increased business. Both sectors report declines from all of the main source markets, including domestic. Less than one in five guesthouses or B & Bs have seen any increase in profitability. Neither sector expects any improvement in business volumes during the remainder of the year.

Of the remaining accommodation sectors, a third of self-catering operators report their business up for the year to date and overall three in four report business up or on a par with last year. Domestic business is cited as being up on balance while overseas guestnights are marginally down. A third of hostels also report increased business due to a stronger domestic performance, with overseas again down marginally on balance. Caravan and camping operators, while down on last year overall, report strong domestic performance. All of these sectors report their profitability down on last on balance and they expect their volume business to be down on last year for the remainder of the year.

OTHER SECTORS

Both visitor attractions and golf clubs report their tourism business up on last year on balance for the year to date, but remain as circumspect as accommodation providers on prospects for the remainder of the year. Two-thirds of golf clubs expect to retain last year's tourism levels. Despite the increased volumes reported to date, profitability for both remains down on balance when compared to last year.



Tourism Barometer Survey – September 2011

TM Interview

MINISTER FOR Transport, Tourism and Sport, Leo Varadkar, has been in his newly appointed role since February 2011. Just over six months in the job, he talks to Laoise Bray about how he views the potential of Irish tourism and addresses some of the more pressing issues for the industry such as local authority rates and access to credit.

Now that you have been in the post of Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport for almost six months, what are your first impressions of the role tourism has to play in Ireland, and of what Ireland has to offer the visitor in particular during the current economic downturn?

I've been struck by the way that tourism generates business and jobs right across the country. It's a unique industry, because it's an export industry that benefits some of the most rural and remote parts of Ireland, as well as the cities. We all know that export-driven growth is the path to sustainable recovery. So tourism has a key role to play in supporting and creating sustainable jobs right across Ireland.

I have also been impressed with the level of commitment shown by the people who work in the industry. Ireland became a little too casual towards customers during the Celtic Tiger bubble. However, the industry which I have seen as Minister is one where everyone, from owners and managers as well as frontline staff, recognises the importance of giving visitors a memorable experience.

This has real benefits for Ireland. At a time when the Government is determined to restore our reputation, it's invaluable to have tourists going home with a positive impression of Ireland as a professional, friendly and good-value destination.

What do you see as your first few "wins" as Minister for Tourism?

First of all, tourism has been given a central role in the Government's Jobs Initiative. Within 100 days of taking office, tourism's importance was acknowledged with a series of significant measures to improve competitiveness, increase numbers and stimulate employment.

We have cut VAT on tourism-related goods and services to just 9%, reduced employers' PRSI, and are in the process of reforming the JLCs in a way that will benefit both employers and staff.

We also made a serious offer to abolish the travel tax, included in the Jobs Initiative Finance Act, in return for a serious commitment from the airlines to deliver more visitors. This was complemented by a very attractive



THE INTERVIEW
Leo Varadkar
Minister for Transport,
Tourism and Sport

CURRENT ROLE:

Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport

PREVIOUS ROLES:

Fine Gael Front Bench Spokesman for Communications, Energy & Natural Resources, and previously Fine Gael Front Bench Spokesman on Enterprise, Trade & Employment

BIRTH PLACE/HOME:

Blanchardstown/Castleknock

EDUCATION:

Trinity College Dublin (Medicine)

HOBBIES:

Running, film and theatre, reading

rebate package from Dublin Airport Authority. When I did not receive the necessary commitments, I was able to go back to my colleagues and secure agreement for €8.5 million of air travel tax revenues to boost tourism marketing efforts.

Meanwhile, the new visa waiver scheme is making it easier for visitors from emerging markets to travel on to Ireland after visiting the UK.

Tourism has been branded as one of the few sectors that could assist Ireland in coming out of the current economic downturn. Do you see this happening?

Tourism provides jobs across a range of skills levels and in a variety

of different situations - whether it's a student working in the summer break, a parent working part-time, or a multi-lingual manager. As I said before, tourism makes those jobs available everywhere from rural Kerry and Donegal to inner-city Dublin.

Tourism also generates export revenues for Ireland from overseas visits, while domestic tourism helps to keep money in the country.

Tourism can also help to restore our international image and reputation, and ultimately persuade people to invest in Ireland. For example, a major international conference in somewhere like the Convention Centre in Dublin gives us a chance to engage with major players who might otherwise not even consider Ireland.

One of the issues of most concern to the tourism industry is a difficulty in accessing credit for smaller businesses. What would you say to those holding such concerns?

The credit crunch affected everyone, but small businesses have been particularly badly hit due to the liquidity difficulties in the banks. The Credit Review Office was set up to conduct a simple and effective review process for small and medium-sized enterprises, sole traders and farm enterprises that have been refused credit from banks participating in the NAMA scheme.

The process reviews a decision to refuse, reduce or withdraw credit facilities, including applications for restructured credit facilities, on sums between €1,000 up to €250,000. They accept applications from enterprises that have had their application for credit refused or reduced or have had credit facilities withdrawn, and feel that the bank's decision is unjustified. They will also carry out an independent and impartial review of the bank's decision.

I would encourage any SME experiencing difficulties to contact the CRO.

Businesses are also expressing concerns about the effect of local authority charges and the wider regulatory burden on their ability to trade. What can you say about these?

All businesses are examining their cost base and I am aware that there has been a focus on the level of local authority rates. Most of the businesses I talk to recognise that services have to

be paid for. They simply want fairness and fair burden sharing, as well as efficient use of the rates monies by the local authorities.

There are broader plans for domestic charges such as water metering and next year's domestic charge. Local authorities have also taken a number of steps to support local business and employment generally, including examining their costs to maximise efficiencies which, in turn, impacts positively on business. Cost bases have been reduced, including reductions in staff numbers and payroll costs.

The Local Government Efficiency Review Group has brought forward measures to further reduce the local authority cost base. Minister Hogan has already taken some moves in this area, such as the amalgamation of the Limerick and Tipperary Council areas. The Tipperary merger should lead to a drop of about 6% in commercial rates for North Tipperary ratepayers.

Authorities are also adopting a flexible approach to collecting rates and other local charges. There have been calls to speed up of the revaluation process and Minister Hogan recently said that he was examining ways to accelerate the process. I know hotels are particularly badly hit due to the current the method of calculating local authority rates and have benefited from revaluation, although other tourism businesses have seen their contributions rise.

The start of the Dublin City revaluation last May marks a major step in the national programme. Around 25% of all commercial properties in the country will have been revalued when it's complete. The new valuation list for Dublin City will be published in 2013.

In relation to water, it may come as a surprise, but water charges in Ireland compare favourably internationally.

In conclusion-

The Government has shown its determination to help tourism businesses, with the Jobs Initiative launched earlier this year. I will continue to fight the corner for tourism at Government level, and ensure that the industry remains central to our plans for economic recovery. I believe there's a great future for the industry, and for its role in rebuilding the country.