



Tourism Matters

JUNE 2012

Gathering Momentum for 2013



AS WE embark on what will hopefully be a busy season for 2012 a lot of work is taking place behind the scenes to prepare for 2013 already. You may have already heard murmurings of a number of new projects in the pipeline for next year, and beyond, including *The Dublin*, a new initiative for Dublin (see pg 3), *The Wild Atlantic Way*, a new route along the Atlantic Seaboard (pg 5), a new *Tourism Towns Award* (pg 4), and *The Gathering, Ireland 2013*, possibly one of our biggest

projects ever, which aims to be one of the largest tourism-led initiatives ever seen in Ireland.

Recently launched by Minister of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Leo Varadkar, along with An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny and An Tánaiste, Eamon Gilmore, *The Gathering* is a simple but potentially very powerful initiative, driven by local communities.

The Gathering is simply asking everyone in Ireland to reach out for one special year (2013) to family, relatives, alumni, affiliates, networks etc. and invite them to Ireland as part of an organised "Gathering" during what will be a special year of celebration. This initiative has the potential to mobilise

local communities, business, sports and arts groupings towards contributing something practical and positive to the recovery of our economy. But equally as important, tourism can also become a major beneficiary of the initiative.

More visitors means more spending locally on tourism-related goods and services and in the longer-term, it is hoped that this project will rekindle an important segment of our future tourism market.

More than most, tourism businesses also have a major role to play in *The Gathering*. Whether it is facilitating local meetings, contributing to gathering ideas, organising a gathering of visitors from abroad or, of course, ensuring that all visitors experience the very best of Irish hospitality and customer care while in Ireland, tourism businesses have a significant contribution to make towards the success of this initiative.

The Gathering project originated with a Fáilte Ireland examination of how we could best use the Irish diaspora to improve tourism and boost the Irish economy.

Supported by the Government, an initial dedicated €5m fund has been allocated to support the project in terms of providing the necessary tool-kits to local communities, grant-aiding some special events and funding a communications campaign at home and abroad.

Within Fáilte Ireland we have established a dedicated team to manage all aspects of

the project. This also includes colleagues from Tourism Ireland to ensure a strong international message of invitation to Ireland in 2013. Such is the scale and complexity of the project that we have now appointed a new Project Director, Jim Miley, to lead our dedicated Gathering team (find out more from Jim in a the TM interview on pg 12).

The Gathering team are currently working with Local Authorities and other key players around the country to establish a number of groups who will work on the ground providing practical support to communities and individuals to make it happen, as the New Year's Eve launch of *The Gathering* approaches momentum is quickly building and our listing of national and local partners is growing daily.

A wide variety of groups and organisations are already involved in mobilising their own networks to 'gather', including household names such as the GAA, IFA, Comhaltas, Google, KPMG and many others (see pg 8 for more). The first in a series of Community meetings also took place recently giving communities a chance to learn more about *The Gathering* and how they can get involved. Plans for a year-long calendar of flagship, national and local festivals and events are also progressing well and should form a very entertaining and enjoyable environment for our visitors.

So, as *The Gathering* builds serious momentum and accelerates towards launch at year-end, I would ask you to join with us in the wider tourism industry and give your time and energy and help ignite *The Gathering* spirit in your own community and submit your own ideas for a gathering or two to our Gathering Team.

Find out more about how you can get involved with *The Gathering*, and get details of the series of upcoming meetings that are taking place around the country on page 8.

You can also visit *The Gathering* website: www.thegatheringireland.com or call the Gathering Team on (01) 884 77 66 to find out how you can get involved.

I look forward to your active support and helping tourism lead the way with the Gathering in 2013.

This is a great opportunity for you, your business and Irish tourism – so be part of it!

Shaun Quinn
CEO Fáilte Ireland



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Pictured at this year's Meitheal where *The Gathering Ireland 2013* was announced to international buyers from 20 different countries were (l-r) Fáilte Ireland Chairman, Redmond O'Donoghue, Ruth Andrews, CEO, ITOA, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Leo Varadkar, Shaun Quinn, CEO Fáilte Ireland.

Galway Getting in Gear for Volvo

THE VOLVO Ocean Race is returning to Galway this July, but this time it will be for the Grand Finale. Visitors to Galway during the event can expect to be enthralled as the fleet arrives in from Lorient, France on 3rd July to one of Ireland's biggest festivals of 2012.

Set to embrace all cultures from each of the race stopovers, The Volvo Ocean Race Grand Finale 2011-2012, will be an eight day festival of marine, sport, culture and arts, entertainment and food. This year, Galway will extend the festival to include the Global Village across the harbour, which will add to the entertainment and hospitality focus of the Race Village and will include a networking, exhibition and conference area for the business to business sector.

Visitors can also expect high quality standards and transparent pricing during the festival as local Galway businesses have signed up to Fáilte Ireland's Quality, Value and Service Charter.

The initiative is being supported by the Irish Hotel Federation (IHF), Restaurants Association of Ireland (RAI) and the Vintners' Federation of Ireland (VFI), and was rolled out in partnership with accommodation and food and beverage providers in Galway.

Participating businesses have all received Fáilte Ireland Customer Care training in time for the event and are proudly displaying a charter sticker prominently on the windows of their establishment for customers to see.

Recognising the value of local businesses working together, Fiona Monaghan, Fáilte Ireland in the West emphasised:

"With this charter, we are encouraging everyone involved in tourism in Galway - from hotels and guest houses to restaurants, publicans, retail business and transport services - to use the Volvo opportunity and play their part in showcasing Galway and to put their best foot forward. We look forward to welcoming the race back to Galway and to working with our local industry partners in ensuring it is, once again, a major success".



Padraig O'Ceidigh, Chairperson Fáilte Ireland West, Cllr Hildegard Naughton, Galway City Mayor, Enda O'Coineen, Chairman Let's Do it Global, Fiona Monaghan, Head of Operations Fáilte Ireland West & Joe O'Neill, City Manager launching Fáilte Ireland's Volvo Ocean Race Value, Quality & Service Charter launch the charter in the Radisson Blu Hotel, Galway.

The Wild Atlantic – Your Only Way

THE WILD Atlantic Way is set to be Ireland's first long-distance driving route for tourists, featuring a 1,400km driving route from Donegal to West Cork. Recently featured in a high profile series of articles in *The Irish Times* it aims to rival similar projects in Australia and South Africa, drawing more tourists to the west of Ireland, increasing their dwell time, spend and satisfaction by linking destinations and attractions under one single theme.

As well as providing a driving route, the Wild Atlantic Way is as much about getting people out of their cars and into the landscape and engaging with local people. Where possible, Discovery Points will link up with trailheads for cycling and walking routes.

Just last month, €1.8m was allocated to the first phase of the initiative, which will be implemented in Connemara over the next year.

This first phase of the Wild Atlantic Way will take place in Connemara, and over the past six months, Fáilte Ireland has been working closely with Galway County Council, along with a dedicated Steering Group comprising Údarás na Gaeltachta, the Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT), National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) and key members of the tourism industry, to prepare an appropriate Interpretation and Infrastructure Plan for Connemara.

Speaking at the official launch in Connemara, Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Michael Ring explained:



Angela Bane, Bane and Mullarkey and Paddy Mathews, Fáilte Ireland at the launch of the first phase of The Wild Atlantic Way.

"The Wild Atlantic Way will open up the whole of the west coast to visitors. It will be a way to entice visitors off the beaten track and help them to discover new areas of the west coast."

"€1.8 million has been assigned to the first phase pilot project here in Connemara. The area was chosen because of its current popularity as a destination for self-drive visitors, particularly from France and Germany, and because it lies midway along the route."

"More and more visitors to Ireland are taking charge of their own holidays. They want to set their own route, and choose their own itinerary. The Wild Atlantic Way will offer them this choice thanks to the wide range of road loops, maps, online applications and brochures."

A comprehensive plan for Connemara has been developed by The Steering Group which seeks to improve the quality of the driving experience for visitors, including the provision of gateway signage, orientation

points and a network of 19 Discovery Points. The €1.8m, which has been allocated by Fáilte Ireland for the project, will be implemented by Galway County Council over the next year.

Paddy Mathews, Manager of Destination Development with Fáilte Ireland, believes the project will be a great addition to what Ireland has to offer visitors:

"Developing a route like this is an important part of ensuring Ireland is able to provide visitors with an unforgettable experience. It will open up a huge number of towns and attractions to them and showcase the scenery and unique culture of the west coast of Ireland providing easy access to a range of experiences along the route.

"We, in Fáilte Ireland, are working with all 12 Local Authorities along the western seaboard to help turn this initiative into a reality and their involvement is crucial to the success of the project."

It is intended that the Wild Atlantic Way will provide a brand and product of sufficient scale and singularity to gain that all important visibility in our overseas markets.

Discussing plans for the next stage of the project, Mr Mathews continued:

"Now that we know what is involved in planning a high quality tourism driving route, and while the Connemara plan is being implemented, Fáilte Ireland will commence work on the development of a single brand for the Wild Atlantic Way and get to work with all 12 Local Authorities along the West Coast to identify the most appropriate route for the Wild Atlantic Way."

"We are also eager to hear suggestions for the Route from all parties and would encourage the, to contact me at paddy.mathews@failteireland.ie".

'Pretty Little Liars' Shay Mitchell Blogs her way Around Ireland



Earlier this year, Shay Mitchell, star of American TV show *Pretty Little Liars* blogged her way around Ireland, her father's home country. During her trip Shay updated her blog, and social media fans (665,000 fans on Twitter and 322,000 fans on Facebook), with daily photos, video and views of Ireland showing there's many ways to showcase Ireland to various audiences.

Speaking about her trip Shay explained: "It is so inspiring to be visiting Ireland for the first time!! I have always wanted to explore the land of my ancestors."

"I think social media is the perfect place for people to talk about a holiday destination - whether it is building the anticipation before they leave, providing details of what is happening during the trip or reminiscing once they get home."

€4m *Dubline* Tourism Initiative to Boost the Capital



A SIGNIFICANT €4 million tourism development for the capital, *'the Dublin'*, has been recently launched by Fáilte Ireland.

The Dublin will be a unique cultural and heritage walking trail running across the city from College Green to Kilmainham and will provide visitors with a fully-interactive and innovative way of hearing the story of Dublin through incorporating technology, dynamic signage including wi-fi links, and dedicated branding.

The Dublin will build on €5.5 million worth of recent tourism capital investments in Meeting House Square, at Dublinia and for The Book of Kells exhibition at Trinity College. It will involve:

- further investment in visitor attractions and infrastructure, including the development of a significant new visitor meeting point along the route;
- the development of themed walking trails based around the central route;
- better access to the heritage of the area through online, mobile and traditional media;
- improving the pedestrian environment;
- high profile marketing of the *Dubline* to both domestic and international visitors.

Dublin is the strategic cockpit for overseas tourism to Ireland generating €1.5bn for the economy each year, with three quarters of overseas visitors staying in Dublin at some point in their trip to Ireland.

Speaking about why Fáilte Ireland is delighted to be pushing this initiative, Shaun Quinn, CEO, Fáilte Ireland said:

"We believe we can build on this remarkable potential to increase the quantity of visitors we welcome and to enhance the quality of their experience here. The 21st Century tourist is not a passenger. In the digital age of the



Lord Mayor of Dublin, Andrew Montague with Ethna Murphy, Fáilte Ireland and Viking Characters, Donal Mc Cormack, and Karolina Brumm

internet, iPads, X-Boxes and smartphones; the modern traveller is hands-on and wants to actively engage with their environment. They want to learn more and do more in the places they visit.

"Increasingly, a successful tourism destination needs to be able to tell its story and to provide opportunities for visitors to engage with the narrative. We believe that *the Dublin* will allow us to do just that and will help us to raise our game in marketing Dublin as a world class destination."

Speaking at its official launch in Dublin recently, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Leo Varadkar emphasised:

"Projects like this will give Dublin a competitive edge when it comes to attracting more overseas visitors to the city. This is not only good for tourism but also for businesses, retailers and jobs in the city."

Fáilte Ireland, Dublin City Council and the OPW will develop the *Dubline* over

the next three years to make it a new, must-do experience. Some of the next steps of the project will include delivering a route orientation with way finding and walking trails; improving access to heritage along the route through innovation; improving the pedestrian

environment, further investment in visitor attractions and infrastructure.

The full plan for the project can be seen in a highly engaging, interactive online report at www.dubline.ie.



The Dublin will run from College Green to Kilmainham taking in some of Dublin's key attractions including Dublin Castle, Christchurch and St. James's Gate.

John Bowman Heads up Diaspora Group

FÁILTE IRELAND has established a group to carry out a scoping study into the establishment of a Diaspora Centre in Ireland. The group, which is being chaired by John Bowman, will develop the terms of reference for the study which got underway in May and guide the implementation of the study once it begins.

It is believed that a diaspora of approximately 71m Irish people exists across the globe and finding an appropriate way to connect with these people would clearly bring significant benefits for Irish tourism.

Speaking about the establishment of the group, and the importance of the project itself, Aidan Pender, Director of Strategic Development, Fáilte Ireland, who also sits on the group said –

"Finding the right way to make that connection is crucial. The establishment of a Diaspora Centre, its design, function, form and fit-out will be critical and it is important to get this right. It is important also that we keep in mind the balance between the physical world and the virtual world in doing this. A properly designed online presence can be as important, perhaps more important, than an exclusive focus on bricks and mortar. The important thing is to develop a

diaspora facility that is well designed, well branded, appealing, and readily accessible.

The group also includes Fiona Ross, Director National Library of Ireland, Pat Cooke, Heritage Department of UCD, Virginia Teehan, Archivist and Director of Cultural Studies in UCC, Andrew Todd, Tandem Design, Museum designers and Maureen Conway, Director Irish School of Animation.

Towns in the North West begin preparing for the Tourism Towns Award

IN ORDER to support and celebrate our tourism towns, Fáilte Ireland recently launched a new Tourism Towns initiative in conjunction with the national 'Tidy Towns' competition.

This new initiative – Tourism Towns Awards 2012 – is designed to encourage those towns and villages which have been recognised for their achievements in the 2011 Tidy Towns competition, to make a similar commitment to developing the tourism potential of their town or village.

The scheme is currently being piloted as an element within the Tidy Towns competition 2012, and the 100 towns and villages which scored the highest marks in last year's competition were considered eligible to compete in the 2012 Tourism Towns category.

Almost half of the 100 eligible towns have now applied for the new Tourism Towns Award.

This includes a number of towns in the North West region who, in a bid to get ahead, attended a recent Fáilte Ireland workshop in the North West which provided guidance and information on the new Tourism Towns Award and the National Tidy Towns Competition.

The workshop was facilitated by National Tidy Towns Adjudicator, Debbie Nesbitt and agencies that provide support for tidy towns were present to give advice and answer questions including the waste awareness, heritage and cultural and enterprise sections of Donegal County Council, Donegal Local Development Company, Údarás na Gaeltachta and Fáilte Ireland.

From the 35 towns and villages in Co. Donegal which took part in the National Tidy Towns Competition in 2011, six have been invited to enter for Tourism Towns Awards: Malin, Bunrana, Raphoe, Letterkenny, Carrigart and Glenties.

Sligo Celebrates a Season of Yeats



Attending the official launch of *A Season of Yeats* were (l-r) Bernie Butler, Chairperson of the North West Forum; Rosaleen O'Grady, Mayor of Sligo; Minister Michael Ring; Martina Bromley, Fáilte Ireland's Head of Operations in the North West and Michael Fleming, Cathaoirleach, Sligo County Council

'A SEASON of Yeats' – an exciting new tourism initiative for Sligo which sets out to help the county make the most from its connection to W. B. Yeats and the Yeats Family has been approved €200k in funding for the next three years.

The aim of this new initiative, which is being led by Fáilte Ireland, local interest groups and tourism businesses, is to present a variety of cultural events and deliver a unique

visitor experience for national and international visitors to Sligo – in particular those wishing to connect with all aspects of the Yeats Family's cultural heritage and legacy.

The Season of Yeats began on June 13th, the anniversary of the poet's birthday, and will initially continue over a six week period, growing to a longer season over the next three years.

The programme features exhibitions of Jack and John Yeats' work at The Model, readings and performances of W.B. Yeats' work at Hawk's Well and Blue Raincoat's Theatre and

at Drumcliff; a series of talks and films surrounding the Yeats Family; promoting an integrated inclusive Yeats programme in Sligo, which will see a series of quality events around music performances and further exhibitions.

As well as providing funding, Fáilte Ireland will drive the Yeats initiative in close collaboration with all stakeholders, ensuring Sligo can deliver a quality programme of Yeats' themed events, appealing to a wide audience at home and abroad. A dedicated website www.seasonofyeats.com has also been developed, comprising information on all of the events and activities that are part of the initiative. The website is being delivered on a strong social media forum, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.

Martina Bromley, Fáilte Ireland's Head of Operations in the North West explained how *A Season of Yeats* has translated locally:

"Working with local tourism interests in Sligo, we came to the conclusion that the development and promotion of a unified Yeats theme would be key to creating a distinctive selling point for Sligo, alongside the landscape, crafts, literary, music and arts appeal.

"Sligo is Yeats country and, given that the Yeats family are now almost a Global brand, it's absolutely imperative that we use this perfect local asset to market ourselves to tourists and visitors".

Dublin to Become Rugby Capital of Ireland in 2013

DUBLIN IS in line for a major economic boost next year when the Irish capital becomes the epicentre of European club rugby with the staging of both the Heineken Cup and Amlin Challenge Cup finals in May 2013.

An estimated €30million was generated from the 83,000 fans attending the Cardiff 2011 finals this year. 8 out of 10 fans attending the finals came from outside Wales with 61% staying at least one night in the host city, while those who attended both finals stayed even longer.

With both 2013 finals being played in close proximity, up to 70,000

supporters will have the opportunity to visit the city and savour what has become an unmissable weekend festival of European club rugby and a fantastic opportunity for Irish tourism.

Following this news, Keith McCormack, Head of Events at Fáilte Ireland said:

"Hosting international events, particularly sporting events, is good for Irish tourism. Any event that can attract this number of international spectators will always bring a welcome boost to visitor numbers, and indeed visitor spending.

"Interest in this event is already clear with tickets already sold out for next year. It is our hope that the success of this initiative, which is timed

perfectly with The Gathering, can act as a blueprint for many others in the months and years to come."

In the spirit of "bundling", Fáilte Ireland has come together with the European Rugby Cup (ERC) to incentivise loyal fans who will travel to Dublin by offering a special value 'Dublin 2013 Golden Ticket' package for next year's finals weekend which includes admission to both the Heineken Cup and Amlin Challenge Cup finals as well as a one-day Dublin Pass which gives the user free access to over 30 tourist attractions in the capital.

The Grass gets Greener in Kerry as Tralee Wetlands Opens

KERRY HAS some of the most scenic and unspoilt natural environments in Ireland, so it's little wonder that a growing number of tourism businesses in the county are taking steps to conserve and care for its most precious of natural resources.

There are currently just under 40 tourism businesses certified as green tourism providers in Kerry ranging from hotels, B&BS, restaurants and bars, to activity centres and visitor attractions. This is the largest cluster of green tourism businesses in the country.

Building on this, a new major tourism attraction to Kerry, the Tralee Bay Wetlands Centre, was opened earlier this year. The first nature tourism project of its kind in the south of Ireland, this new centre was developed by Tralee Town Council, with support from Fáilte Ireland, and it is envisaged that the centre could attract as many as 70,000 visitors to the county capital each year.

It adjoins the Tralee Bay Nature Reserve which encompasses over 8,000 acres extending from Tralee town to the Maharee Islands and is a designated Natura 2000 site.

The site is divided into two areas – an activity zone and a nature zone. The activity area is free to access. This includes the activity lake where pedal boats, canoes and rowing boats are available for hire. There are lakeside walks and a picnic area. A smaller lake has been stocked with



freshwater fish with demonstrations for those who wish to learn how to fish.

Access to the nature zone is via the eco-friendly visitor centre. Here, the diversity of the Tralee Bay ecosystem is explained using static and interactive displays, audio visual and hands-on activities. There is a modest entrance fee but this includes a guided tour, 10 minute safari boat trip through the freshwater wetlands and access to the 20 metre high viewing tower (stairs and lift) which affords panoramic views of Tralee Bay.

Following the opening of this centre, another large cluster of businesses have signed up to avail of Fáilte Ireland training supports with a view to becoming certified as green tourism providers in 2012.

Fiona Buckley, Head of Operations for Fáilte Ireland in Kerry emphasised:

"Fáilte Ireland is delighted to have been able to support this project, which not only invests in the environment, but in tourism for the region. Furthermore, we are thrilled to see the continued interest Kerry businesses are taking in providing today's visitors with an even cleaner and greener experience".



Minister of Tourism, Transport and Sport, Leo Varadkar pictured at the opening of Tralee Wetlands

GAA Championship Tickets now Available in Discover Ireland Centres

A GAA ticketing initiative, making the games more accessible to visitors during the summer months, is currently being rolled out across the country with tickets for Championship football and hurling matches now available for sale in over 20 of Fáilte Ireland's Discover Ireland Centres including Donegal, Sligo, Galway, Cork, Killarney, Kilkenny, Waterford and Mullingar.



Kevin Kidney, Head of Destination Development, Fáilte Ireland.

The initiative, which is being run by Fáilte Ireland in conjunction with the Gaelic Games Association (GAA), is encouraging visitors to Ireland to sample Ireland's culture by attending a football or hurling match while they are in here in Ireland.

Traditional Irish culture is a key motivating factor for visitors when choosing to holiday in Ireland. In 2010, 2.9 million visitors engaged in heritage/culture and spent an estimated €1.7 billion while in Ireland.

Commenting on the initiative, Kevin Kidney, Head of Destination Development, Fáilte Ireland said:

"Our Gaelic Games can offer visitors an insight into something that is absolutely unique to Ireland and is a living part of modern Irish culture. This ticketing initiative will serve to raise awareness of our Gaelic Games both in the domestic and overseas markets as a great thing to do while on holiday, providing a fun, unique and memorable experience. We would encourage tourism businesses to let visitors know that tickets are available through the tourist information offices."

More information on fixtures and on GAA can be found on www.discoverireland.ie/gaa and at www.gaa.ie

Visitors to the games in Croke Park can also take in one of Dublin's newest attractions, the Skyline tour – a new rooftop tour which boasts some of the most spectacular panoramic views of Dublin city and its surroundings.

Certificate of Irish Heritage



President Obama received his Certificate of Irish Heritage from An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny.

IN A bid to enhance its relationship with the Irish Diaspora the Government has introduced a new Certificate of Irish Heritage which provides recognition of one's Irish ancestry.

The Certificate is a great way to build brand Ireland, raise awareness within individual families of their family story, and engage people in their Irish roots and anyone born overseas who has at least one Irish ancestor can get a certificate personalised with their name and details of their ancestry.

The certificate has been presented to a number of well-known faces including,

Lord Sebastian Coe, President Bill Clinton and President Obama.

Taoiseach Enda Kenny, who presented President Obama with his Certificate, said afterwards "This is a chance for everyone who has a sense of their Irishness, from Boston to Brisbane, to receive an acknowledgement of that from the State."

Find out more about the Certificate at www.heritagecertificate.ie

One in Four Book Accommodation on Mobile Web

Is Your Business Ready to Capitalise on this?

THE MOBILE web is fast becoming a key area for Irish tourism businesses – this was the message at Fáilte Ireland's recent e-business conferences held in Sligo and Dublin.

Trends now suggest that up to 25% of people may soon be booking their accommodation through their mobile phone. It's statistics like these that highlight the importance of keeping up-to-date with online technology. Ensuring Irish tourism businesses can remain ahead of the internet curve, Fáilte Ireland invited a number of key speakers from TripAdvisor, Google and Facebook to the conference, which was entitled "Your Online Focus – Home and Away".

Delegates took away a number of learning's from the conference including; how they can make their sites easier to find on Google; and the benefits of setting up a business page using social networking sites like Facebook. The role of customer reviews and how to effectively manage this enormously powerful

and popular review platform was also addressed at the conference.

Stephen Dudley, Fáilte Ireland's E-business Manager, emphasised:

"We were particularly delighted that TripAdvisor took part in the conference this year. Tourism businesses today are operating in an environment where half of travellers base their choice for a trip on other people's experiences and reviews. Ensuring that you are up to speed with online reviewing and know how to deal with it must be an integral part of a hotel's day to day activity."

A video interview with Victoria Delaney, TripAdvisor is available to view on FáilteIrelandTV, Fáilte Ireland's official YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/failteirelandtv).

Following the conference, Scott Field from Google emphasised the importance of businesses being mobile ready:

"Mobile users are searching for an immediate result that is available locally so it is really important for a business to have an e-commerce website that is enabled for mobile devices or they will

lose out on valuable business. One out of every five online travel queries is carried out from a mobile device so businesses need to learn how to turn this change in search behaviour into a business opportunity."

You can get more information on web supports and access online resources at www.failteireland.ie



Pictured at Fáilte Ireland's Web Check Conference, held at the Radisson Blu St. Helen's Hotel, Stillorgan, Co. Dublin are (l-r): Amanda Horan, Fáilte Ireland; Deridre Twomey and Anne O'Mahony, Kilkenny Ormonde Hotel; Clodagh O'Connell, Kilkenny Hibernian Hotel and Carmel Nolan, Lyrath Estate Hotel.

Case Study: Making Gains Online

How the G Hotel is Attracting Online Customers

TO DATE, Fáilte Ireland has helped over 3,500 small and medium enterprises to plug into their full online potential through our Web Check and e-business training programmes.

These training programmes cover a range of online topics including search engine optimisation, Google adwords and analytics, social media and much more.

We caught up with Judith Pasztor-Duffy, Marketing & Media Relations Manager at The G Hotel recently, and she told *Tourism Matters* exactly how her hotel has benefitted from these training supports.



Judith Pasztor-Duffy Reports

In recent times it has become clear that our online strategy needed to become a key element of the hotel's marketing activity. Our website conveys our brand message of high quality, luxury product. This is all well and good, but of no use if visitors cannot find our site. Directing traffic to the site seemed like a logical first step to improving our online presence and increasing online sales.

With the help of specialists, we also carried out extensive link building and search engine optimisation in order to maximise our position on the major search engines.

That done, identifying our 'online weaknesses' played a crucial next step in how we developed our strategy, and conversion rates proved to be a key area for development when it came to winning online bookings.

To that end, we worked very hard in the last couple of months to make the online browsing / booking process seamless, clear and easy to navigate so customers would not be "overwhelmed" by the site – resulting in increased revenue figures. As part of this we have

recently converted to a new booking engine in order to enhance online reservations and make the customer experience ever more seamless.

In terms of bookings, our own website is a priority – so having an attractive site which has a strong brand name both on the domestic and international market helps a lot. We are also featured on all the major 3rd party booking engines and global distribution channels, which gives us wider audience reach.

Social media is another major part of our online activity, we have almost 10,000 followers on Facebook, and there is a very strong community feel on the page. Online media is also important and we have recently produced a promotional video for the hotel that is being showcased on YouTube. We have also recently created a LinkedIn and Pinterest account for the hotel – these two channels represent the next stage in our social media plan.

I believe it is universally accepted in the travel industry that online is key to success and the team here at The G is

extremely supporting in achieving our online goals.

Developing and implementing an online strategy takes a lot of time and energy. You have to keep up with the latest online developments, which are moving all of the time. Regular training, discussions with our booking engine provider and keeping an eye on trade journals will help – It was at this stage where the support of Fáilte Ireland, through their Web Check and e-business training, came in particularly useful.

Both Fáilte Ireland and our booking engine provider were very active in providing online marketing seminars, and this was an invaluable part of helping us remain upskilled and up-to-date.

If there was one piece of advice that I would give any tourism business looking to improve their business online, it would be to enlist the help of specialists and always keep your customers in mind. Make your site visually attractive and crucially, be sure to make it as easy as possible for them to book their stay with you.

Making *Failteireland.ie* Work for You



Contact Us – tell us what you think by sending us feedback on the new site

Improved Search Facility

Follow us – Social Media Links

Latest News

New Training Calendar



Kevin Moriarty
Reports

AS PART of Fáilte Ireland’s continued commitment to improved customer service, an extensive review was carried out on its corporate website,

www.failteireland.ie, taking in feedback from the tourism sector and associated bodies and groups.

This review has resulted in a number of extensive changes and improvements being made to the site, which is now live.

So what’s new?

The new and improved website has just

recently gone live and includes a number of new additions to the site which we hope you will find both interesting and useful.

The site has a new look and feel which was designed to make the site easier to navigate and more intuitive. Where possible, most information is now only a few clicks away. An improved search facility on the site has also been developed making content and publications easier to find, and content across the site has been updated so that it is concise, relevant and easy to read.

As well as improving what we have, a number of new sections have been added to the site including a new section providing advice for start-up tourism businesses including sector specific research, financial projections and self assessment templates.

A range of business tools are available on the site such as calculators, templates and checklists that will help businesses assess the health of their business, develop a marketing plan, make financial decisions and create effective actions plans.

We have also created a five step plan to developing your locality that outlines how to turn your local area into a tourism destination, which offers a quality experience to its visitors.

A number of case studies on a range of relevant topics including how to write a marketing plan have also been added to

the site, which will be updated and added to on a regular basis.

A new dedicated tourism news and features section is also new to the site and will provide regular updates on what is happening across the industry and within Fáilte Ireland. You can subscribe to our online newsletter, which is now also available on a fortnightly basis.

So, what’s next?

This is just the start of a programme of improvements. Other future additions to the site will include more online training, enhanced online services for payment and registration and an online forum for the Irish tourism industry to talk to both Fáilte Ireland, and each other, about burning tourism issues.

Tell us what you think

This is a site built specifically as a resource for the tourism trade, and your opinion and feedback is very important, particularly at this early stage when there is so much more to do.

To ensure that we make the right improvements we need your continuous feedback. Please let us know what you think by emailing websitefeedback@failteireland.ie

New to www.failteireland.ie

- **Improved design**, content and navigation
- **Business tools** – financial projections, self-assessment, effective action plans, create a business plan
- **Start-up information** – 6 step plan to creating a successful tourism business
- **Develop you locality** – capitalise on the special qualities of your area
- **News and features** section to keep you up to date

Check out the new site today at www.failteireland.ie

The Gathering – Coming to a Town Near you Soon



Some of those who have already committed to organize gatherings include (l-r) Martin Gaffeny, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, Terence O'Rourke, KPMG, Mary Fitzgerald, Woodlands House Hotel, Adare, John Lawlor, Scouting Ireland and Martin Gallagher, The Gallagher Clan.



The Gathering team is calling on every community, from city suburbs to rural villages, as well as clubs, associations and businesses to start thinking about how they might work together to develop compelling events which celebrate their

own unique stories and engage the interest of their networks and connections around the world.

This was the message at the first of a series of community meetings being held across the country designed to explain what *The Gathering* is and to discuss how each locality can make the most out of it. The first of these meetings took place in Roscommon this month and was attended by more than 150 people.

Speaking after this first meeting, newly appointed Project Director for *The Gathering*, Jim Miley said:

"The level of engagement and passion experienced at the meeting was unprecedented. It is encouraging to see so many local community groups, and indeed individuals, not only coming up with ideas, but committing to implement them for next year after a short meeting.

"*The Gathering* is a people's project and will only be a success if the Irish people row

in behind the initiative and get involved. Tonight's meeting certainly inspires me to believe that this will happen and *The Gathering* Team is eager to get going on the ever growing schedule of community meetings."

Those attending the meetings have the opportunity to work together to come up with ideas for *The Gathering* and it is envisaged that up to 100 meetings could take place across the country by October. A number of commitments were made there and then at the Roscommon meeting to plan an event for 2013. Among the ideas discussed at the meeting as potential 'Gatherings' in Roscommon in 2013 was a Lost Lambs of Roscommon event, an Away with the Faries festival and a Star Gazers Campaign.

County Gathering Organisations have also been set up for each county to support local areas to get the most out of *The Gathering*. These groups are made up of members include sporting bodies, cultural and musical organisations, local

authorities, local development companies and representative bodies. These groups will work to steer the development of *The Gathering* is each county ensuring any community interested can get involved.

A large number of companies and organisations are already involved including *Google* and *Facebook*, *KPMG* and *PwC*. National community groups as well as smaller groups, businesses and individuals have also pledged their commitment to arrange their own gatherings.

Adding to the series of special events or 'gatherings' being created by communities, groups and individuals throughout the country, will be a series of a themed festival and event programmes of (combining both existing festivals expanded for *The Gathering* and some new festivals and events) designed to encourage more visitors to Ireland next year. These themes will reflect what Ireland is best known for worldwide and will include sport, music, dance, heritage, food – to name but a few.

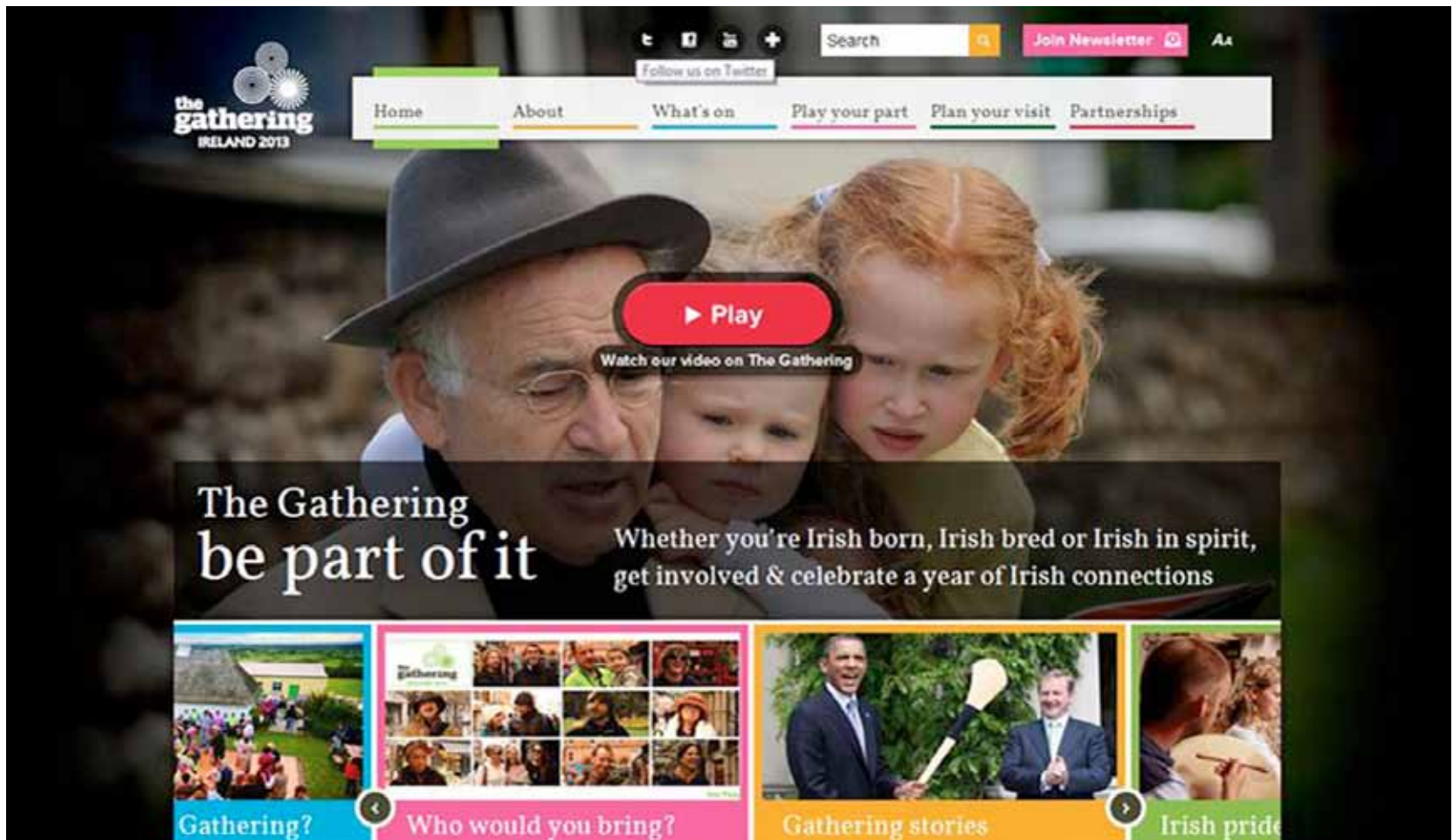
Minister Varadkar, who is spearheading the initiative said: "I want *The Gathering* to be an event that belongs to everyone in Ireland, and which everyone in Ireland feels part of. The public response from people at home and abroad has been fantastic with ideas for potential gatherings coming in every day. These range from family Gatherings, school reunions and even a gathering of twins. Towns and communities are also pitching in. *The Gathering* team are receiving queries and offers of help from individuals and organisations throughout the world."

To support this, Fáilte Ireland has opened the online application process for the National Festivals and Participative Events Programme 2013 early this year, and the deadline for applications was 22nd June 2012. This early call for applications aims to deliver funding decisions for the National Programme during or before September 2012 allowing festival and event organisers plenty of time to promote their events in the run up to *The Gathering*.

A full list of pledged events can be found on www.thegatheringireland.com as can a full list of scheduled meetings. Both of these lists will be added to on a regular basis, so keep an eye out.



Among those attending the Roscommon Community Meeting were (l-r): Tony Greally, Abbey Hotel; Michelle Peake and Tim Hayes, Hodson Bay Hotel; Jim Miley, The Gathering Ireland



How You Can Be Part of It

- 1) Many tourism businesses already have established international networks – we want you to spread the word and make sure your networks as well as family, friends and colleagues at home and abroad know about The Gathering Ireland 2013.
- 2) Special gatherings will be taking place near you in 2013 so link in with your community and support the events that are taking place in your area.
- 3) A local steering group will soon be in place in every county in Ireland to inform and help anyone with an interest in being involved. A public meeting will also be held in your area over the coming months so make sure you link in with your local steering group and come to the meeting.
- 4) You can also organise your own gathering in 2013. Why not plan an event that taps into your own networks overseas and invite them to Ireland to be part of it.
- 5) Link with The Gathering – use our brand to encourage visitors to come to Ireland in 2013. Email info@gatheringireland.com for more information or to request The Gathering logo.
- 6) Join forces with the events taking place in 2013 - prepare special packages around some of these events in your area.
- 7) Follow The Gathering online– Check out our website www.thegatheringireland.com Sign up to our newsletter, find us on Facebook, like our page and share it with friends– www.facebook.com/thegatheringireland Follow us on Twitter– www.twitter.com/gatheringIRL Watch our new videos– www.youtube.com/gathering2013

Upcoming Community Meetings

Ennis, Co. Clare – Templegate Hotel
Monday, 2nd July, 7pm

Tralee, Co. Kerry – Venue tbc
Wednesday, 4th July, 7pm

Cavan Town, Co. Cavan – Kilmore Hotel
Wednesday, 11th July, 7pm

Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow – Lord Bagenel Hotel
Tuesday, 17th July, 7pm

A full list of dates for community meeting is being regularly updated and can be found at www.thegatheringireland.com

Who's Doing What in 2013?

A number of local 'gatherings' have already been announced for 2013. Here is just a taste of what's already happening around the country.

Special Interest Group Gathering

Comhaltas has a national and international network of 415 Branches in 15 countries. They plan to mobilise these branches to get involved and invite international Comhaltas members to Ireland in 2013. They will re-unite musical families for clan sessions in Ireland. All Fleadhs and Seisiúns in 2013 will be Gathering themed.

Alumni Gathering

Leading multi-national, **KPMG** are mobilising their alumni networks to play their part in The Gathering Ireland 2013. They have confirmed an international alumni event in Ireland for 2013 which could be attended by up to 1,000 delegates. A very significant proportion of these will be international delegates.

Clan Gatherings

Adrian Gallagher is working on the second **Gallagher Clan Gathering** which is set for September 2013. The first gathering took place in 2007 when hundreds of Gallaghers descended on Donegal. Invitations will be sent to all Gallaghers, those with a Gallagher in their family tree or even those with no Gallagher family connection but who have an interest in the Gallagher homeland, which is Donegal and the counties surrounding it to join in the gathering in 2013. Limerick Hotelier Mary Fitzgerald is also working on a Fitzgerald clan itinerary around Ireland which is being programmed with a tour operator in the USA.

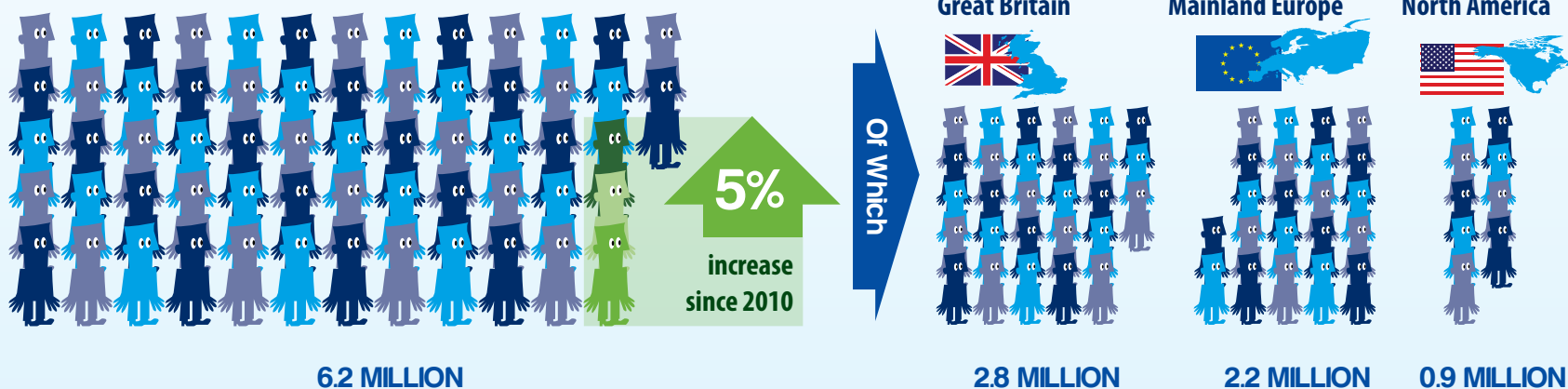
Community Group Gathering

Scouting Ireland has 42,000 members in Ireland and connections to scouting groups all over the world. They plan to organise scouting events specifically for The Gathering. The International Scouting Jamboree will also be hosted in Ireland in 2013 and will be gathering themed. Scouts that have moved overseas will be invited back as part of the International Jamboree for a Gathering day. Local groups will also host local initiatives to connect with their own networks overseas. Each of their national campsites will organise a gathering camp to bring in overseas groups. They are also considering an international conference - a world scouting meeting in 2013.

Ireland's Tourism Performance at a Glance

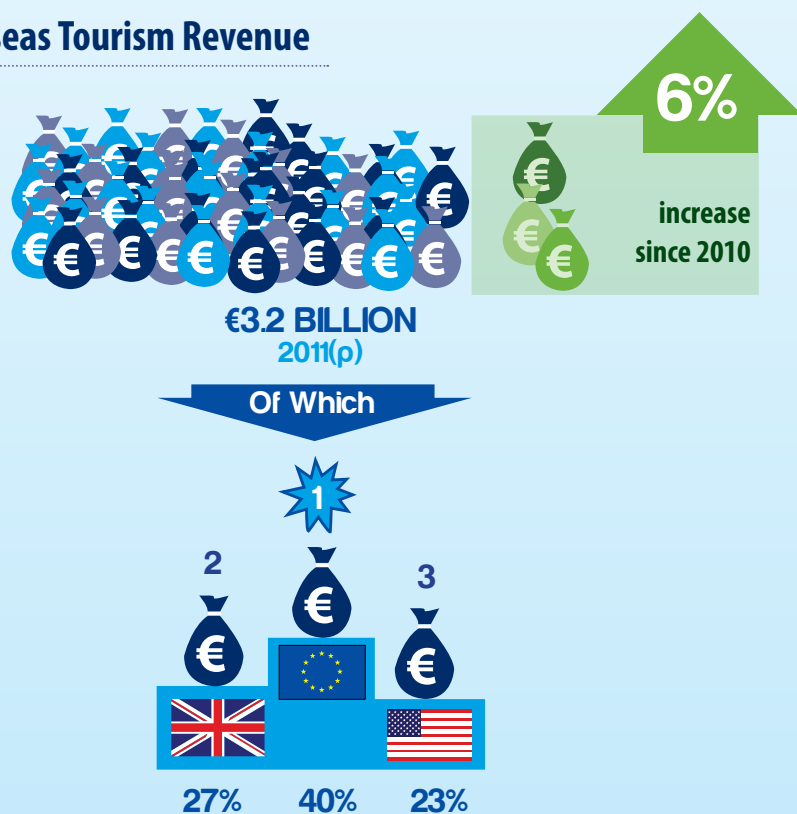
WHAT HAPPENED IN 2011

Overseas Visitors



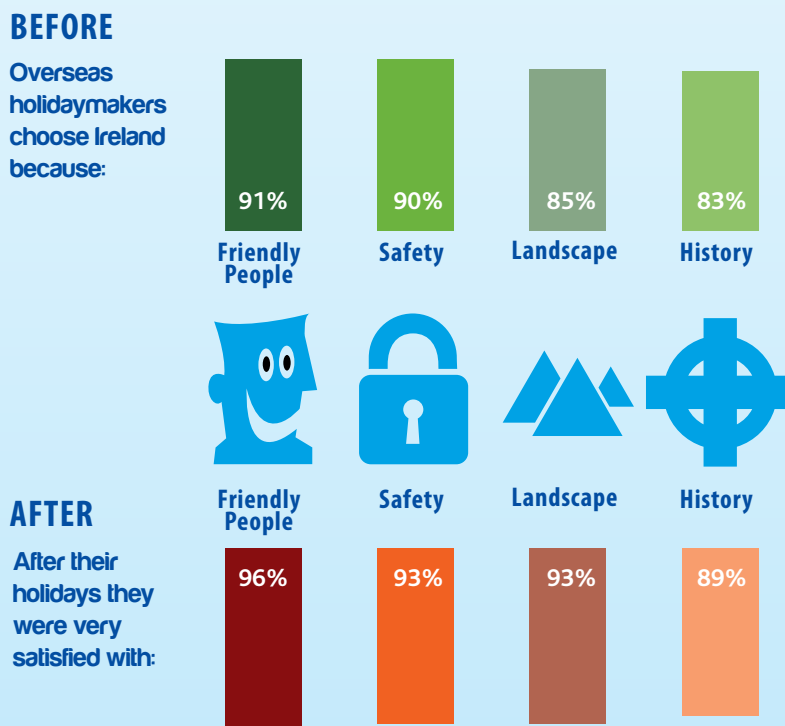
Source: Estimates, CSO/Fáilte Ireland/NISRA

Overseas Tourism Revenue



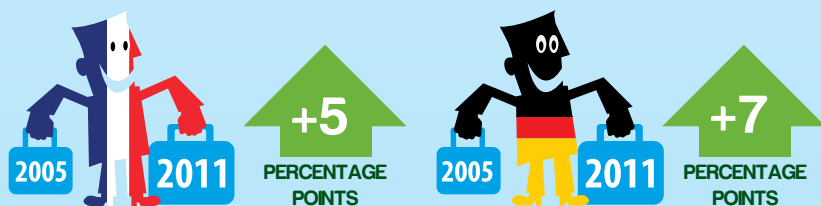
Source: Fáilte Ireland Estimates

Why Choose Ireland?



Source: Fáilte Ireland Post Survey of Overseas Holidaymakers – Summer 2011

Value For Money



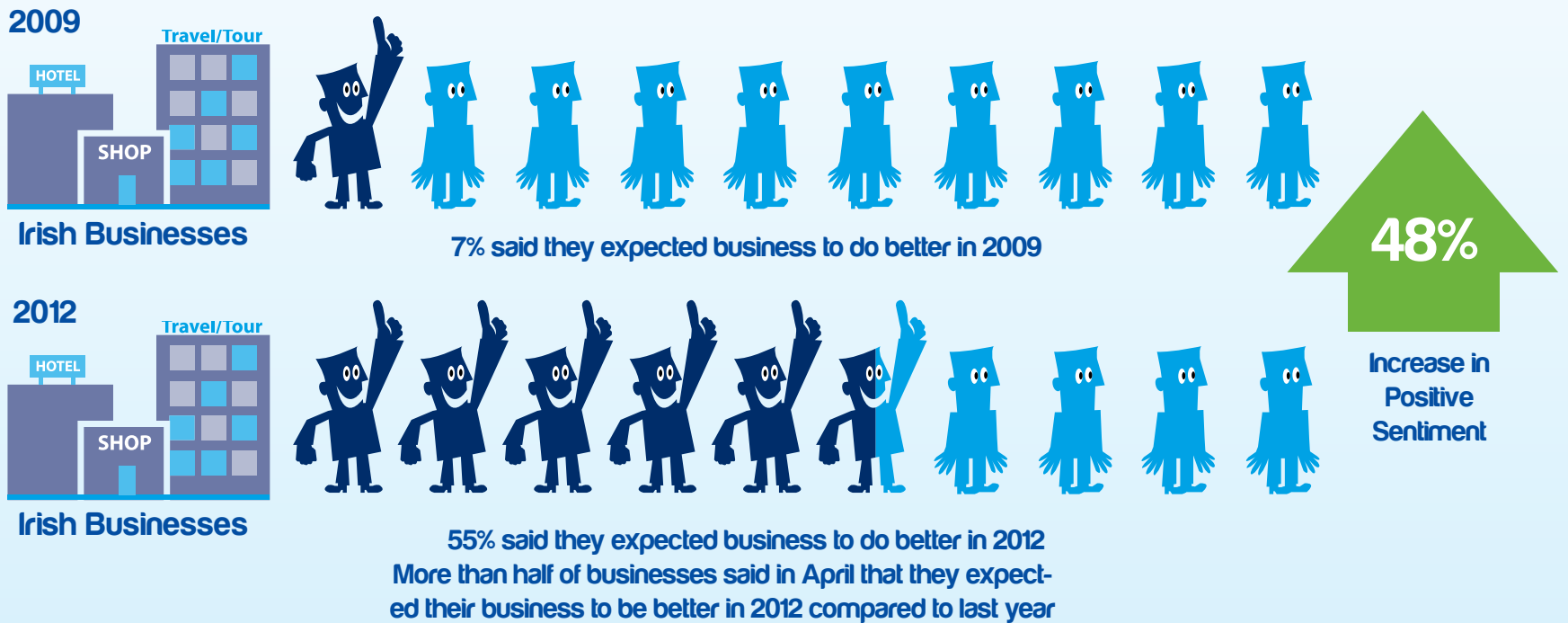
The proportion of French and German visitors rating Ireland as good/very good value for money has almost doubled since 2005/2006

Source: Fáilte Ireland Survey of Overseas Travellers, 2000-2011

"I think people in Ireland have realised that they can't charge what they want anymore and prices have become more competitive, so the perception that there is poor value for money here is really changing for the better"

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN 2012

Business Sentiment



Source: Fáilte Ireland Tourism Barometer April 2012

What's Helping Business?



Source: Fáilte Ireland Tourism Barometer April 2012

What's Hindering Business?



To find out more, and access the latest research and insights into Irish tourism, go to www.failteireland.ie

TM Interview

JIM MILEY is "really excited" about coming on board *The Gathering Ireland 2013* initiative. He sees it as a project that has "huge potential to do something in a different way" for Ireland. Since taking on the role of Project Director he has been struck by the response he has received from Ireland's tourism industry, community representatives, tourism interests and elected officials who, he says, appear to be eager to do something not only for tourism, but "for their country, and for themselves".

Just over a month into the role, Laoise Bray talks to him about the project, his hopes for success, and what *The Gathering* team are up to.

When we first meet, I ask Jim to describe what it is that *The Gathering* is ultimately trying to achieve.

He explains:

"A Gathering is two people or more. If an individual brings in one person to stay in their home – that's a gathering. Why? They will bring money into the country. They will spend money in local restaurants, pubs, theatres and visitor attractions. All of this is an extra spend in Ireland, which essentially is the main aim of *The Gathering*."

"It differs from other destination marketing campaigns because it is about two things. It's about working with the public, community and tourism trade to produce new and interesting reasons for people to come to Ireland and it's about increasing visitor numbers by getting individuals, families, communities and groups to extend a personal invitation to all of their connections, to come to Ireland in 2013."

There is a flurry of activity taking place around *The Gathering* at the moment. Recently launched by An Taoiseach and An Tánaiste, *The Gathering* team have been working furiously behind the scenes for some time.

"The key focus for us in these current months is on mobilising the nation. A Gathering Coordinator has been nominated in every county across the country, and people from County Councils, Leader Companies, GAA, Chamber of Commerce, Active retirement groups will work alongside them to form a county group who will "steer" *The Gathering* at a local level.

"Their role will be to activate local communities to work together to repackage existing ideas and create new ones that will act as a magnet to draw people into their local area. They will also co-ordinate particular activities in particular areas making sure people are working towards a common purpose."

A series of public meetings aimed at pulling people together have just commenced across the country, explaining what *The Gathering* is, and asking members of the community what they want to do with it.

The meetings are about informing, they are about having a conversation



THE INTERVIEW
Jim Miley

Project Director,
The Gathering

at a local level, where it matters, and this is an important first step. It is hoped that up to 100 public meetings will have taken place by this October.

"The key part of these meetings is that they will provide opportunities for people to share their ideas and hopefully work together to make the absolute most of these opportunities."

Interest in the first meeting, which took place in Roscommon earlier this month, was extremely positive, Miley explains -

"Not only did a number of fantastic ideas come out of the meeting in Roscommon, but commitments were made there and then to take these ideas and turn them into a reality for 2013."

Already some hugely significant events are already confirmed for 2013.

"We are working with any organisation that has any capacity to bring people to Ireland and me and my team are trying to provide the glue to stick it all together."

"KPMG were one of the first out of the traps to say that they are organising an alumni event for 1,000 – 1,500 to come to Ireland. There is also a serious 'clan gathering' competition emerging. We have The Gallagher's of Donegal, the Fitzgerald's of Adare and Kelly's and Winston's of Mayo and Roscommon organising clan gatherings."

A sporting theme is also emerging with a number of very interesting sports related activities taking place. "There is likely to be a significant

basketball event taking place, plans are still in the offing for this, and we have the GAA, FAI and the IRFU all organising significant international sporting events for next year.

Collectively we are expecting these to bring in at least 10,000 visitors between them just on their national events. This doesn't include their club events which will also be taking place nationwide.

"We are also working with organisations such as Ireland Reaching Out and Connect Ireland, as well as with Irish schools on an ambitious awareness campaign."

When it comes to tourism, Miley believes that each confirmed event presents the tourism trade with a real opportunity.

"Each confirmed event will have a programme of activities themselves, but it is quite likely that the people coming to the event will stay in Ireland longer than the duration of any one event. This is where the opportunity exists for tourism businesses not organising their own gathering to link in with organisers and create packages for visitors not only encouraging them to extend their stay but enhancing their experience."

From September onwards there will be a calendar of events on the site and people will be able to manage their events online. It is thought that the website itself, once this calendar is up, will also act as marketing tool where people can post their events and attract an audience that they may not have otherwise attracted."

Miley continues: "*The Gathering* is also co-ordinating efforts to target some of Ireland's key source markets.

"Minister Michael Ring has just led a British roadshow in late June, which targeted key Irish networks in Liverpool, Manchester, Edinburgh and Birmingham. Similarly in the US Market, Minister Varadkar plans to visit the US targeting the key networks and Irish Diaspora. The plan is that he will also travel to a number of cities and will visit key events such as the Milwaukee Festival, which attracts over 150,000 attendees.

"As the 2012 high season is put to bed later this year, we are planning to put out the call to international markets to come to Ireland in 2013. This will include an extensive national and international ad campaign which will be complimented by a significant

publicity campaign. The message of *The Gathering* will also be wrapped around all tourism marketing activity taking place domestically by Fáilte Ireland and internationally by Tourism Ireland.

But what does success look like for Jim Miley?

"We are aiming to attract an additional 325,000 people to Ireland in 2013. I'm confident we can deliver that – hopefully we can even exceed it.

"But numbers are only one component of success. The real success of *The Gathering* will be the legacy that it creates. The Gathering is putting a structure on a marketing channel that has always been there for Ireland. We've always had the Diaspora, and we have always had the connections with people who want to come to Ireland. What the Gathering offers is a more structured way to making that connection, and delivering something useful from it.

"What we are saying to tourism providers is that there are very powerful databases all around you – in visitor books, church records and school roll books. What *The Gathering* is doing is encouraging people in local communities to use these resources to identify potential visitors, invite them to Ireland and build Ireland's economy.

"*The Gathering* is as big as we, as a country, want to make it. Relatives and friends extending invitations is more powerful than any ad in any paper, and the Irish tourism trade have a huge opportunity here to get involved at community level, build these databases to make a difference that will be powerful for the future, not just for 2013 but year on year.

"What's also important is that once we get these visitors here to Ireland, we need to make a return visitor out of them. This is where the true success will come from – by creating a new set of ambassadors for Ireland that will return home and sell Ireland as a destination for us.

"If that happens, then to me, *The Gathering* has been successful."

Anyone interested in attending a public meeting, getting involved, or learning more about *The Gathering* can go to

www.thegatheringireland.com