

tourism matters



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MAY 2011



Attending Meitheal, Ireland's largest annual travel trade workshop, which was organised by Fáilte Ireland, in conjunction with Tourism Ireland were (l. to r.): Rachel Moylette, Downhill House Hotel; Ann Daly, National Museum of Ireland; Cian Landers, Pillo Hotel, Galway; Bernie McKeogh, Adare Manor; and Linda Blanchfield, Louis Fitzgerald Pub & Hotel, Dublin.

Opportunity knocks for Irish tourism

AS THE 2011 season gets well underway we have some reasons to be optimistic. This month offers Ireland an opportunity to extend our world famous welcome on the occasions of the visits to Ireland by Queen Elizabeth and President Obama. These events are so important right now as we strive to rebuild our image abroad and reach out to potential visitors from two of our key markets – the UK and North America.

They say that timing is everything and the arrival of our VIP guests does coincide with the first early signs that tourism into Ireland is finally beginning to recover after three very difficult seasons.

The pace of recovery in overseas visitors to Ireland will be dictated to a large degree by economic factors in our key source markets of Britain, the US, Germany and France. With the exception of Britain, the signals are already positive.

Anecdotal evidence from the marketplace would suggest a recov-

ering level of interest in selling Ireland amongst the travel trade. Our own intelligence from within the Irish trade would support that view with bookings improving albeit slowly.

There was further evidence of possible growth at our largest ever travel trade workshop (Meitheal), which took place at the RDS last month. 275 international trade buyers from 20 countries took part, of which 56 were first time visits.

This renewed interest in holidaying in Ireland is not unexpected.

Our visitor surveys indicate that Ireland's appeal as a holiday destination has not been adversely affected by our wider economic woes. In fact, in some respects, our appeal has improved (see Pg 7).

Thankfully, the warmth of our welcome, or the "fáilte factor", is perceived to have emerged unscathed from our tiger years and to be as appealing as ever before. Much as we might ignore it, our welcome and spontaneity remain central to our overall appeal.

Fortunately, we have also

become much more competitive as an industry and as a destination. Keen competition between tourism businesses in a climate of weak demand has contributed to a marked improvement in our value for money ratings over the past year as judged by visitors from all markets.

So, consumer confidence in our key markets is edging upwards and tourism is beginning to benefit. Interest in visiting Ireland is growing, our appeal remains strong and we now offer better value than for

many years.

This augers well for job creation down the road. Tourism is a highly labour-intensive industry, accounting for one in ten jobs, often in parts of the country not well serviced by other industries. The importance of the 'personal touch' will ensure it must stay that way, and any significant recovery will bring with it a corresponding increase in employment. In fact, we are already witnessing a number of new job opportunities materialising through a variety of business start-ups around the country and while this is good news, it is still too early to uncork the champagne.

Complementing the overseas markets, the home market will remain an important market for many businesses again this year, although this market will continue to remain under pressure as household incomes continue to tighten. There is some potential in winning more than our fair share from the out-bound foreign holiday market, should more Irish consider holidaying at home this year, and offering good value packages will be more important than ever.

Mindful of this, we will continue to invest in the home holiday market this year through our Discover Ireland campaign, with much of this investment focused on reaching those who research their breaks online (almost 70%). We plan to do

this through our updated Discover Ireland website, www.DiscoverIreland.ie, as well as an online marketing and social media campaign that will ensure Ireland is part of the online conversation.

Our key markets overseas are awakening once more. We are still fighting hard on the home holidays front. We are moving gradually towards an improved alignment of quality and value in what we have to offer. So, all we have to do is wait?

Actually no. While Ireland is poised and ready to welcome international visitors with our unique hospitality we must remember that we cannot wait for the overseas markets to come to us. We will have to work hard to meet them in the middle – because once they decide to travel again they won't necessarily come back to Ireland, unless we give them a good reason to.

Hundreds of tourism businesses are already "getting this" message and are working with us on a number of programmes around closing that sale. As we head into the high season Fáilte Ireland will be working closely with tourism businesses on the ground to ensure they receive all the supports they need to win back much needed overseas visitors – and their revenue.

Shaun Quinn
CEO – Fáilte Ireland



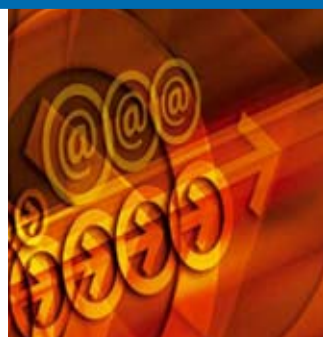
Attending Meitheal were (l-r) Shaun Quinn, CEO, Fáilte Ireland, Leo Varadkar T.D., Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport and Redmond O'Donoghue, Chairman, Fáilte Ireland.

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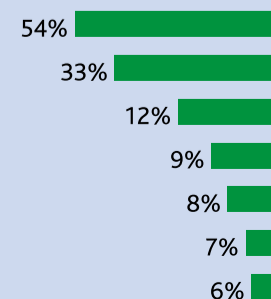
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International tour operators enjoy a unique experience on St Patrick's Day as they lead the Dublin parade in a Roddy Doyle inspired open top bus.

A new angle on St Patrick's Day parade

A GROUP of top international journalists, with a combined viewership/readership of more than 160 million worldwide, had the unique opportunity to lead the St Patrick's Day Parade in Dublin this year, when they came to Ireland on a familiarisation trip organised by Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland.

The journalists spent a number of days taking in the unique atmosphere created around the festival in Dublin, which culminated with them leading the parade in an open topped bus designed as the cover of Roddy Doyle's book 'Brilliant'. This gave them a unique view of the parade, and ensured they were fully immersed in the excitement and truly Irish ambience only St Patrick's Day can deliver.

Following on from the distinct literary theme of this year's Dublin parade, which celebrated Dublin as the UNESCO City of Literature, the visiting media also attended the 'Commitments' concert and the 'Dublin Swell' event — witnessing first-hand the richness of Ireland, and Dublin's, literary connection. A number of other cultural and tourism activities were also provided for the visiting media.

Gillian Binchy, Fáilte Ireland's Publicity Manager emphasised: "St Patrick's Day is an iconically Irish day around the globe, and this was a unique opportunity to present the international media with a truly positive story about our nation. As the parade moved off, we had TV crews, radio, print and bloggers from around the world onboard the lead float — we even had NBC from the United States broadcasting live

from the parade this year.

We hope that the visiting media will in turn provide Ireland with a valuable showcase to their international audiences. No other country would get that kind of attention and nobody could buy it."

Since the parade we have already seen complimentary coverage in the Huffington Post and in Kim Forrester's Blog to name but a few.



Making Ireland easier to discover

TOURISM BUSINESSES can now benefit from a number of new opportunities to promote themselves with the introduction of a new e-ticketing system and display areas in the Discover Ireland Centres across the country.

This new facility sees the Discover Ireland centres and Tourist Information offices transformed into "Box Offices" which will allow visitors to purchase tickets to all approved events, tours and attractions that are on offer throughout the country making it quick and easy for visitors to enjoy some of the interesting and exciting events

taking place across the country.

Our Tourist Information offices are dedicated to visitor servicing and are 100% focused on visitors needs. This new service enables staff to assist and help pre plan the visitors' time while in Ireland — securing tickets and pre-booking admission to various attractions across the country. It also affords compa-

nies the opportunity to showcase and sell their products and services throughout the national tourist information office network.

Any tourism business interested in availing of this facility can contact Ticketsolve Ltd, to discuss uploading their product or service on the system for sale in the network of offices. For more informa-

tion please contact Paul Hanly at phanly@ticketsolve.com or phone 01 4151294.

Businesses can now also promote their offerings to visitors as they come into the Discover Ireland centres by taking advantage of our new display areas in the centres.

This new facility, which is available in all centres across the country, is a great value publicity opportunity for local businesses to promote all that they have to offer to visitors to the information centres — particularly in the lead up to local festivals and events.

Display areas will be made available on a weekly basis and

English Language Training — A new area of growth

NEW RESEARCH carried out by Fáilte Ireland on the English Language Learning sector has indicated that there is potential for considerable growth and significant revenue increases in the sector over the next few years.

This research was shared with members of the industry at a recent conference held by Public Affairs Ireland entitled — "Challenge and Change, the future for the business of English language training in Ireland."

The new research shows that the number of overseas students studying English in the 112 language schools in Ireland increased by 3% from 2009 — 2010. Moreover, these students generated revenue of approximately €297m for the Irish economy — a 17% increase on 2009.

Where did the students come from?



- 7/10 European students come from France, Spain and Italy
- Student numbers from South America and the Middle East/Africa increased by 80%
- Students from new and developing markets stay longer and spend more, spending 40% more in 2010 (a total of €200m)

Students coming to Ireland spend approx €400 each per week making it a lucrative market for the Irish tourism industry. These students not only offer a chance to improve visitor numbers through holiday recommendations to family and friends, they also represent the visitors of the future, making their experience while studying in Ireland more important than ever.

The EFL market currently employs almost 4,000 people in Ireland with over 100 schools around the country.



Next year

Speaking about the prospects for next year and beyond, Fionnan Nestor of Fáilte Ireland's Destination Development Division stressed — "The market is showing great potential for growth over the coming years and with education and further development at the forefront for many countries, we believe the sector has the ability not only to withstand the current economic conditions, but to move forward and grow further."

"To ensure we realise the full potential of this country as an EFL (English Foreign Language) destination, Fáilte Ireland is working with the sector to promote Ireland as a premier English language learning destination providing direct supports such as web marketing skills and internet training to assist the sector to market itself."

information on availability of free display area is available from your local Discover Ireland centre or Tourist Information office.

There's more good news. Visitors hitting the road straight from the airport can now enjoy more information for their holiday from six of the new Apple Green Motorway stops located in Castleblennham North and South; Enfield East and West and Lusk North and South.

Each of these motorway stops now allows visitors, stopping off for petrol or snacks to access self service information on Ireland using a

series of large pull-out information panels, touchscreen units which are directly linked to the Discover Ireland website and display maps of Ireland offering visitors information on travel routes.

Each pull-out panel contains information on events taking place on this North Eastern road route including cultural and heritage attractions, upcoming festivals and events such as the Solheim Cup and The Boyne Valley, Lakelands and Inland Waterways regions.

New editor for Tourism Matters

LAOISE BRAY of Fáilte Ireland's Communications team has taken the reins as Editor of *Tourism Matters* following the recent retirement of John Brown.

John Brown edited *Tourism Matters* for eight years (since 2003), and Bord Fáilte's *Link* magazine prior to that, before he retired from Fáilte Ireland last December.

John's commitment to the mag-

azine, and indeed to Fáilte Ireland, can be seen through the many editions of *Tourism Matters* that he has put together over the years, keeping everyone up-to-date with everything Fáilte Ireland is doing to develop Irish tourism.

We would like to thank him for his commitment to the magazine, and wish him all the best with his retirement.

New national B&B training programme

FÁILTE IRELAND has introduced a new Irish Home B&B Skills Development Programme across the country, the first of which kicked off last February in the West and South West.

This brand new programme is part of Fáilte Ireland's commitment to re-energise the Bed and Breakfast industry in Ireland by supporting bed and breakfast owners to build on their existing skills, and assist them to continue delivering the unique experience that visitors expect and only the B&B can offer.

The programme is made up of a range of modules covering core aspects of running a B&B and includes demonstration and practical participation in areas such as cookery; menu development; health & safety regulations; accommodation and customer care.

Explaining the origins of the new programme, Tracey Coughlan, Fáilte Ireland, pointed out – "This programme has been developed as part of our commitment to recognising and continuously improving the quality and standards of B&Bs across the country and supporting the sector to grow their business in 2011. The Irish welcome and the Irish people are an important part of why visitors choose Ireland as a destination, and we hope that this new training programme will work to ensure that this unique part of what we offer visitors continues."

Bed and breakfast owner Kathleen Browne, Headley Court B&B who has already completed the programme, explains what she gained from it "I am delighted with the fresh ideas I took away from the new B&B programme organised by Fáilte Ireland. Since completing it, my guests are now enjoying fresh home-baking with my new extended recipes".

As part of the work to reposition, distinguish and strengthen the uniqueness of what the B&B has to offer, Fáilte Ireland has recently introduced a new categorisation and classification programme for the sector.

The new schemes allow B&Bs to differentiate themselves and what they offer, and provide clarity in relation to pricing, product offering, range of services and standards available. The classification scheme also provides B&Bs with a tool to help them attract new customers based on specialist services they can offer to walkers, anglers, golfers, food lovers and more.

For further information, or to become involved, go to www.failteireland.ie/bandstandards or contact your local Fáilte Ireland team.



Serving up an Irish welcome – Kevin Quinn, Fáilte Ireland Chef Instructor, Limerick (far right), brings programme participants through their paces in Limerick with Tracey Coughlan (far left) and Dean Panter (centre) Fáilte Ireland.

North West hosts top golf buyers

50 GOLF tour operators from the world's top golf trade organisation, the IAGTO (The International Association of Golf Tour Operators), came to Ireland for the first time to attend a special Fáilte Ireland workshop at Harvey's Point Hotel, Donegal. Here they met 70 of Ireland's golf industry members to learn first-hand what Ireland has to offer the overseas golfer.

The IAGTO hosts several workshops for their members around the world each year, but this is the first time Ireland has hosted one. The workshops allow golf destinations, such as Ireland, an opportunity to give the world's most important tour operators and buyers an experience of what this country has to offer – golf and otherwise.

The IAGTO, is the global trade organisation for the golf tourism industry and comprises almost 400 of the top specialist golf tour operators in over 50 countries. It is estimated that the IAGTO controls more than 80% of golf holiday packages sold worldwide (outside of Asia) with a turnover of more than €1 billion per year.

Keith McCormack, Head of Fáilte Ireland's Golf Division, explained "This is big news for the golf industry. As many of these tour operators do not feature or sell Ireland as a golfing holiday destination at the moment, they represent rich potential for significantly increasing visitors to our shores. To achieve this, it is important to give them an opportunity to sample, for themselves, exactly what is on offer in Ireland, and to get them to meet a wide range of our golf clubs, accommodation providers, transport providers and local tour operators."

President and Chief Executive of IAGTO, Peter Walton, welcomed the opportunity for IAGTO members to visit Ireland saying – "This is by far the largest and most important international golf tourism event to have been staged in Ireland and it is taking place at a crucial time when outbound golfing markets are recovering, at different paces, from the economic downturn. This event will allow buyers and suppliers to fine tune this summer's product and offers, whilst planning ahead for the 2012 season."

The Irish golfing community meets and welcomes almost 150,000 visitors annually. Golf is one of Ireland's greatest tourist attractions, contributing an estimated €110 million to the economy.

Ireland has been chosen to host a succession of international professional golf championships over the past number of years. This year the highlight of Ireland's sporting calendar will be The Solheim Cup – the ladies' version of the Ryder Cup – which will be hosted in Killeen Castle,

County Meath, from 23rd to 25th September. Fáilte Ireland will continue to support and capitalise on the recently rejuvenated Irish Open, which remains a key event on the annual European Tour calendar.

As Ireland's Golf Ambassador, Pádraig Harrington extended a special welcome to the visiting delegates – "Ireland is world-renowned for the high quality and wide choice of golf courses. However, there's much more than just fantastic golf. There's award-winning accommodation, a range of outdoor activities to complement a golf tour, and a unique culture and heritage that can only be found in Ireland.

"The Irish people really make Ireland stand out amongst other golf destinations, it's the friendly welcome that makes a tour to Ireland memorable and will make any golfer want to return."

Fáilte Ireland has been working with the golf industry, through a national golf forum, to put in place a number of initiatives that will support the industry and help it back towards growth. These were outlined at an industry briefing day held in the K Club last.



Pictured at the workshop were (l. to r.): Paul Diver, Sandhouse Hotel, Rosstown, Co Donegal; Martina Bromley, Fáilte Ireland in the North West; John Farren, Ballyliffin Golf Club, Donegal; Peter Walton, President/CEO, International Association of Golf Tourism Operators (IAGTO); Mary Ruane, Holyrood Hotel, Bundoran; and Phillip McGlynn, Great Northern Hotel, Bundoran.

Cork set to benefit from festivals in 2011

FÁILTE IRELAND has joined forces with Cork City's Festival Forum to promote and develop the city's festivals and events. As part of this new partnership, the city's 2011 Festival and Events calendar was launched to generate awareness of the number of festivals taking place in Cork and what they have to offer.

Speaking at the event Fiona Buckley, Head of Operations for Fáilte Ireland in the South West, stressed the importance of the city working together on projects such as this: – "This forum is a great example of Cork City working together towards a common goal across the various sectors from tourism to retail, restaurants to transport. It is our vision that the city is renowned as a festival city that is animated and most importantly, is well served to welcome visitors, both from home and abroad."

The rewards a local area can reap by hosting a festival is clearly illustrated in a recent economic impact analysis of the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race which attracted more than 100,000 visitors to Kinsale and Cork and generated up to €5.6 million in economic activity for the local economy – more than half of which was accounted for by accommodation, food and beverages.

Commenting on the figures, Fiona Buckley stated: "From a tourism perspective the media coverage that Kinsale, Cork and the region received through the Clipper project will ensure that Cork is recognised as a tourism destination in the coming years. In addition, the economic report found that 98% of the 17,000 overseas visitors that came to Kinsale and Cork for the festival would return to Cork as a result of the Clipper festival and 97% would recommend Cork to their friends."

The festival in Kinsale was helped by the arrival of the fleet of 10 Clipper yachts six days ahead of schedule and the fantastic weather during that period highlighted the significance of the recent development of the Cork Port marina and its impact on the local tourism sector.

The economic impact analysis of the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race was carried out by IFM Sports Marketing Surveys and published by the event sponsors, Fáilte Ireland, Cork City Council and Cork County Council

Kildare and Wicklow look to the future

Attending the "Look to the Future of Kildare and Wicklow" networking event recently (l-r): Kevin Moriarty, Fáilte Ireland; Brigid Manley, The Westgrove Hotel; Gay Byrne; Katja Nolan, Maynooth Campus. The event, which is one of a series planned by the new Kildare Wicklow Destination Development Group was attended by more than 90 businesses, representing accommodation, activities, visitor attractions and festivals.



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Interest and optimism at Meitheal 2011

MORE THAN 15,000 one-on-one business meetings took place over two days as 275 international buyers descended on Dublin to attend Meitheal 2011 in the RDS.

Among the overseas trade that attended were 56 operators new to the Meitheal experience, hoping to include Ireland in their programmes. An increased level of interest could also be gauged within the Irish industry, with 550 members of the Irish tourism sector attending the event this year – an increase of more than 35% on last year.

Meitheal is one of the most important dates in the Irish tourism calendar. It is an extremely valuable opportunity to forge deeper and stronger commercial relations between Irish tourism and the international travel trade, in a welcoming and enjoyable setting, sampling and savouring the very best of Irish hospitality – and this year was no exception.

The trade show was kicked off with a new evening event designed to profile and promote some of the lesser known and specialist visitor experiences available in Ireland. These included interactive displays of traditional and contemporary arts and cultural performances as well as demonstrations and exhibitions of specialist tourism experiences throughout Ireland, allowing our overseas guests to truly immerse themselves in, and enjoy, the Irish experience.

Offering a unique opportunity to showcase all that Ireland has to offer to the overseas attendees, Fáilte Ireland's Trade Engagement team ensured that visiting buyers took in the sights and sounds of Dublin City as well as some of our top attractions in key destinations around the country.

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Leo Varadkar T.D. addressed domestic and international visitors to Meitheal after the first day of appointments, emphasising the Government's commitment to tourism, stating – "As we are all fully aware, tourism will provide an extremely important contribution to the economic recovery of this country and as such is extremely deserving of priority status for development within Government. I can assure you this Government is placing tourism at the very heart of our economic regeneration policies and, as Minister, I will be working for you over the coming year."

"Even now, just a few weeks into my post as Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have been encouraged by the positive signs starting to emerge throughout the sector."

Meitheal is just one of a number of cost effective opportunities for Irish trade to meet and do business with overseas buyers in Ireland.

Look out for upcoming In Ireland promotions taking place this year on www.promotionsireland.ie with overseas buyers in Ireland.



(l to r): Eva Dearie, Fáilte Ireland in the West; Eithne Cosgrove, Hotel Westport; Michael Ring T.D., Minister of State for Tourism and Sport; Joe Queenan, Foxford Woollen Mills Visitor Centre; Shona O'Malley, Clew Bay Hotel; and Kay Devine, Downhill House Hotel.



The National Wax Museum give overseas operators a taste of what visitors can expect at the interactive evening.



(l-r) Paul Wylezol, IAT Chairman, Ambassador to Ireland Loyola Hearn, Cormac McDonnell, NTO, and Ciara Scully, Destination Development Division, Fáilte Ireland, point to Ireland's part of the International Appalachian Trail (IAT)

Ireland walks onto international map

IRELAND will be included in the International Appalachian Trail (IAT) – an extension of the world renowned and globally popular Appalachian Trail which stretches from Georgia to Maine and welcomes an estimated 2.5 million hikers each year.

The proposed link will see the Irish section of the international trail start at the spectacular coastal cliffs of Slieve League in County Donegal and extend to the Antrim coast, finishing in Ballycastle.

It is proposed that the new section will utilise existing trails in South Donegal eastwards from Slieve League (Bealach Na Gael-tachta – Slí Colmcille, Bluestacks Way etc) and would then continue into Northern Ireland.

Organisers hope to link the IAT to all terrains that were once part of the prehistoric Appalachian

Mountains of Pangaea – including Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Norway and Greenland.

It is anticipated that such a link, based on a shared geology, would promote greater tourism and education opportunities between these regions and also serve to promote the fantastic walking opportunities that exist in each country.

Ciara Scully from the Destination Development Division at Fáilte Ireland says –

"We are delighted to support the extension of the IAT to Ireland. It will help position Ireland in the

USA and Canada as a top walking destination and it is a fantastic marketing opportunity to develop a cross-border walking trail."

"Research carried out by Fáilte Ireland into the potential of walking for tourism shows walking as the most popular activity to attract visitors to Ireland over the next five years.

"Over the past four years, Fáilte Ireland has invested €10 million in upgrading linear walking routes as well as supporting the development of 250 fully off-road looped walks in scenic areas. We will continue to

invest in the infrastructure required to position Ireland as a world class destination for walkers."

Walking represents one of Ireland's top activities and was enjoyed by almost 1.9m visitors in 2009 and is extremely popular with both domestic holidaymakers (over 860,000 people per annum) and overseas visitors (up to 830,000 per annum) enjoying the wide range of walking facilities around the country.

Many of Ireland's finest walking routes can now be read about in a new book by Christopher Sommerville, "Walking in Ireland – 50 walks through the heart and soul of Ireland."

Christopher Sommerville is one of the UK's best-known travel writers and his new book brings together a comprehensive guide to the fifty most stunning walks all across Ireland.

This book provides a great opportunity to highlight the wide range of walking routes available for visitors to Ireland and will hopefully entice more people to consider Ireland as a holiday destination.

Speaking about walking as a pastime, Sommerville says: –

"Country walking is the fastest growing recreational activity in Europe. Not yomping along the side of a main road in wobbly shorts with an iPod plugged in and grim expression plastered on, hoping to shift a couple of kilos between lunch and tea, but the kind of wandering, exploring, independent walking that puts you in touch with the countryside and opens you up to nature."

Gift of the gab wanted for new home holiday campaign

DISCOVERIRELAND.IE has launched a dynamic new campaign called "Talk for Ireland" aimed at getting people to talk passionately and with pride about holidaying in Ireland.

The aim of the campaign is to encourage people to share their favourite destinations, activities, attractions and festivals with each other on the new DiscoverIreland.ie Facebook page as a way of encouraging people to take breaks in Ireland this year.

To really get the ball moving we would like to encourage any tourism business already active in social media to share this campaign with their followers via their website, Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Those willing to share their

favourite places to holiday in Ireland will have the chance to win weekly prizes, as well as entry into a grand prize draw where they'll get to experience the current Discover Ireland 'The Fun Starts Here' TV ad for themselves!

To enter the competition, participants simply have to do is simply upload a video, or a captioned image, onto Discover Ireland's new Facebook page www.facebook.com/discoverireland.ie, which expresses exactly what it is they love about taking a break in Ireland.



Theresa Byrne, Marketing Co-ordinator, Fáilte Ireland (centre) launches Talk for Ireland with sister and brother Kellie and Aaron Williams.



More than 15,000 one-to-one business meetings took place at this year's Meitheal held in the RDS.



Catherine Fulvio, Ballyknocken Cookery School and Ballyknocken House meets with Holidays Empire at Meitheal 2011.

Raising the bar for Irish pubs

A NEW accreditation scheme especially for Irish pubs has been launched by Fáilte Ireland with the support of the Vintners Federation Ireland (VFI).

The new approval scheme, which is based on the typical customer experience and expectations, will aim to ensure continued high standards for the Irish pub industry and increase the consistency and quality of service provided in Irish pubs to visitors, both domestic and international.

In the coming months a specially designed approval logo will be visible in accredited pubs and a marketing campaign will take place to bring this to the attention of consumers. Accredited pubs will also be featured on the Discover Ireland website.

Briefing sessions on the scheme are taking place as part of the VFI Roadshow around the country. For further details email enquiries@vfi.ie or phone 01 492 3400 to register for these events.

For more information on the National Standards Framework Pub Accreditation and the approval criteria

go to www.failteireland.ie. Publicans who wish to participate in the scheme can also contact their local VFI representative or email approvedpubs@failteireland.ie.



Business tourism is booming for Ireland

THE BUSINESS events market has better prospects over the next 12 months than at any other time since 2007 – this was the message delivered by Fáilte Ireland's Business Tourism team at a recent industry day in Croke Park where Fáilte Ireland reiterated its commitment to bringing international business to Ireland.

170 members of the industry arrived in Croke Park to hear the team's plans for 2011 and how they can access support to attract international association conferences, corporate meetings and incentive trips to Ireland.

Business tourism is a key area of strategic importance for Fáilte Ireland and the future is looking positive.

Among the plans presented to the business tourism industry were plans for a new digital strategy, further development of the *Meet in Ireland* brand, continuation of the successful association conference lead generation process, as well as a new lead generation process for corporate meetings and participation at key international promotions.

€36m worth of conference business for Ireland has already been identified and won for this year and over the last two years Fáilte Ireland's Business Tourism team has motivated 181 'Conference Ambassadors' who have the potential to bring in conferences worth over €232m in total to the Irish economy.

What international conferences means for Irish Tourism:

- **Come for Business, Stay for Pleasure:** International delegates spend, on average, six days in Ireland with almost one in four using the trip for both business and pleasure as they extend their stay by two and a half days.
- **High Spend in Ireland:** The average value of an international delegate to the Irish economy is €1,300 – 1,500.
- **High Satisfaction:** 85% of delegates surveyed on their experience of Ireland as a business destination would recommend Ireland as a conference destination to colleagues and eight in ten said that it was likely that they would return to Ireland for a holiday or short break in the future.

- **Business Tourism is more than just Dublin:** Almost 70% of all "concentive" (corporate meeting with an incentive element) travel to Ireland in 2010 was held outside Dublin.

What's new for 2011?

The team has pledged that 2011 will see even more opportunities for Irish trade to participate in international promotions events with the addition of a new American business tourism show, IMEX America, to the existing 16 promotions already available to attend.

These promotions, which are held in our key overseas markets (UK, France, Germany and North America), provide a platform for Irish Regional Convention Bureaux, professional conference organisers (PCOs), destination management companies (DMCs), venues, hotels and university venues to meet with key international buyers working in the areas of association conferences, corporate meetings and incentives.

Practical and financial supports are on hand to ensure every international association conference exceeds expectations, and continues to enhance Ireland's professional reputation overseas. For more details log onto www.meetinireland.com.

Five big international conferences in Ireland this year

1. 3,000 delegates came to Ireland for the 6th Congress of European Crohn's and Colitis Organisation Conference generating €4.5m
2. The Rotary International Conference welcomed 3,000 delegates to Ireland last April and they generated €4.5m
3. This month 12,000 delegates will attend the International Hairdressers Competition generating €18m
4. This August, 2,750 delegates will attend the 58th Session of the International Statistical Institute generating 4.1m
5. Another 3,000 delegates will also come to Ireland this month for the TM Forum Management World Conference generating €4.5m

The Burren

Ireland's newest eco-tourism destination

THE BURREN Eco-Tourism Network, a group of dedicated local tourism businesses, is piloting Ireland's national ecotourism certification programme to make the Burren Ireland's newest ecotourism destination.

The group is made up of local tourism businesses and offers visitors opportunities to engage with the protected landscape of the Burren in a manner which is sustainable for the environment and the local community.

Should the pilot scheme be successful, the Burren will become the second of Ireland's ecotourism destinations. Further information can be found at www.burrenecotourism.com

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Winner's Corner

Culinary success

A NUMBER of graduates from Fáilte Ireland's culinary programmes came home triumphant from the Chef Ireland 2011 competition with a total of eight awards. The successful students were Andrius Juknys, Chef in 'Carton House'; Visham Sumpth, Sous Chef with 'The Green Hen'; Daniele O' Shaughnessy, also a Chef at 'The Green Hen' and Nicholar Gonta, Chef in 'Johnny Fox's Pub'.

Making new marketers

A TOTAL of 20 participants from a range of tourism businesses across Ireland were presented with certificates after completing Fáilte Ireland's Tourism Marketing Network earlier this year. The network assists tourism

businesses to increase their customer base particularly in key overseas markets and culminates with each participant developing and presenting marketing plans for their own businesses.

Strategists of the future

A TEAM of four students representing Fáilte Ireland's Trainee Management Development Programme (TMDP) were selected as outright winners of the Irish Hospitality Institute (IHI) National Business Management Game 2011. Competing participants spent two days devising a strategy, planning and managing a fictitious hospitality business and, as victors, will spend three days on a tutored trip in Reims, North East France.

CUTTING EDGE: Simple steps to promoting your business online

by Ian Cleary, Razorcoast and Alex Keys, E-Business, Fáilte Ireland



PROMOTING YOUR business online has become the thrifty way of marketing your business in a difficult economic climate. But now, with almost half of all overseas visitors identifying the internet as a factor in choosing Ireland as a destination, giving your business an online presence is a necessity. Once you have identified your all important social media objectives, audience and messages, here are a few simple steps to get any business started on ensuring they are front and centre in the online world.

1. Are you listening online?

Do you want to know what people are searching for online? Or what people are saying about your business online? You can keep yourself up to date, for free, using Google Alerts.

Google Alerts are easy to use! Simply enter the topic you wish to monitor, for example, the name of your business, and each time that word or phrase is mentioned online, whether that's in a blog, on a website, in a news article, you will get an email alert to tell you where and in what context it has been mentioned online.

This is a simple way to help you monitor what's been said about you, identify new target markets and capture new publicity opportunities. You can watch a step by step video on setting up Google Alerts online by searching for 'Google Alerts' on YouTube www.youtube.com

You can also search your keywords on Twitter (www.twitter.com) to see what people are saying about things that matter to your business.

2. Put your business on the Map – Get onto Google Maps

Another simple step to making your business present in the online environment – Mapping your business on Google Maps means that when someone searches for your business or a place name in your area, a map, with details of relevant services in this area will appear in Google. This is another free service and it's a great way of appearing in searches. Go to www.google.ie/places and click the Sign up now button.

3. Join the biggest social network in the world

Facebook is a very important social media tool for the tourism industry. Setting up a Facebook page is a cost free way to promote your

business. On Facebook you can run free online competitions to attract fans to view current offers and promotions. For more experienced marketers you can also run ad campaigns on Facebook reaching millions of potential customers.

Facebook does not allow you to promote your business using your personal profile so make sure to create a business page. Go to www.facebook.com/pages/create.

4. Catch it on tape

Google is giving more and more priority to video, as are most people who surf the net. Start capturing some of the exciting and unique products and services you are offering and upload it to YouTube. All you need is an inexpensive digital camera and a cable to connect to your PC and you can upload directly onto YouTube. You can even set up your own area within YouTube called a channel. Do you offer white water rafting, unique spa facilities or cookery classes? Why not give your customer a video snapshot of what is on offer.

What's next?

Mobile – There have been several times when we were told that mobile is going to take over, well it's happening now. There will be huge growth in Smart phones and on these phones there will be applications which will replace some website functionality.

Fáilte Ireland is currently running a number of free Web Skills workshops around the country, including mobile skills, so talk to your local Fáilte Ireland team about what web skills you need to develop for your business or browse online at www.failteireland.ie/websupports.

New topics added to Web-Skills workshop series

The web moves faster than the speed of light and to make sure Irish tourism businesses can keep up, Fáilte Ireland has added a number of new workshops to our Web-Skills Workshop series. The new practical and interactive workshops are designed to help Irish tourism businesses keep up to

date with the business tools available in the online environment.

1. The Visual Web

This new workshop focuses on how you can use digital images and video to promote your business. You will learn how to select, source, use and upload images and video online.

2. The Mobile Web

Looks at the growing area of mobile applications "apps" and how they can be used to promote your business and engage with customers.

3. Web Internationalisation

Helping you sell your business to overseas customers through your

website. This workshop looks at the ins & outs of localising your website to our key overseas markets (Germany, France, UK & USA).

Find out more on www.failteireland.ie/websupports or by contacting your local Fáilte Ireland team.

OPINION: What does the future hold for Irish restaurants?

Paul Cadden, the owner of Saba restaurant in Dublin and outgoing President of the Restaurant Association of Ireland gives us his take.

THE IRISH RESTAURANT industry is an important economic player generating an estimated €2 billion for the economy each year and employing one in every four people in the tourism industry. Times recently have been tough for our members, with one restaurant closing every day in 2010, and 80% of those remaining open trading at a loss.

After reading those statistics, some might say that I started my presidency at a difficult time, and economically they would be correct. However, as I became president, a sense of renewed energy and enthusiasm was generated within the RAI (thanks in part to the arrival of a new CEO), one which has certainly benefited the organisation.

It has been a busy two years – the RAI Council and the team have worked hard, and achieved a lot for our members. For example; we have negotiated deals for savings in areas of energy, insurance and credit card costs, and developed a new consumer website *wheretoeat.ie* where Irish restaurants can mar-

ket themselves online. Although times have been tough, with many restaurants closing, our doors have remained open, and the Association strong.

Of course an organisation is only as strong as its members, and we have worked hard to grow membership - in 2010 we gained three members for every one member lost.

One of the achievements I am most proud of is that the restaurant industry is now, at a time of great change in Ireland, very much seated at the table, as opposed to being on the menu. One of my key objectives was to raise the profile of the industry and ensure that our voice was heard. I think that we have come a long way in this regard. We have worked closely with the key stakeholders and through our reinvented awards process we have raised the profile of restaurants and the RAI to new heights.

With visitors spending €2 out of every €5 on food it's clear that tourism growth must be a priority, as it will maintain and create much needed jobs. I am inspired by

the many restaurateurs, who have continued to adapt their businesses to the changing environment. We have a passionate industry with great optimism and therefore it will continue to succeed.

The RAI are now lending their voice in shaping the way food is being developed in Ireland through the Fáilte Ireland's food strategy. We are a food island, a country rich in natural resources and the implementation plan will highlight local delicacies and nuances of regionality. This is the USP for Irish restaurants and we must harness its potential to help local farmers and artisan producers and ensure it is promoted on the global stage.

But as I leave the presidency, the industry still faces challenges. People have less disposable income, making it increasingly difficult to encourage people to eat out. The industry itself suffers from a plethora of stealth taxes from crippling local authority rates and water charges to sunshine tax (having chairs outside). We are also burdened with a myriad of regulations.

I believe we need to encourage

and educate our new Government to make it easier to do business in this country. We need more flexibility to make the sector competitive. There is no doubt that Sunday premiums and the unjust and outdated JLC system must be abolished.

Challenges will always exist in any industry, even for us, one of the largest employers in tourism. For the restaurant sector to survive, governing bodies will need to start thinking creatively and address these issues in new ways.

At the same time the RAI will continue to fight for these changes, and for all other challenges facing Irish restaurants. Every restaurateur must become involved with the RAI, so that our efforts can be united. And while I may be stepping down as president, I am confident that the RAI is in great hands as Brian Fallon takes the reins as president for the next two years.

Good Service – Good Sales

IN THE current climate any enterprise putting money into developing their business could be viewed as a big risk taker. Fitzgerald's Vienna Woods Hotel was viewed as just that when they decided to add a new 90 seater bistro, *Mabel Crawford's*, to the hotel in the middle of the current downturn.

Michael Magner, General Manager of the hotel, talks to *Tourism Matters* about why they decided to redevelop, and what support they received along the way.

Here in Vienna Woods we are always eager to improve our product and continually grow, and one of the biggest initiatives the hotel has undertaken in the past four years was to establish Mabel Crawford's a new 90 seater bistro.

Our aim with this development was to offer visitors, from both home and abroad, modern Irish and European cuisine in a unique and original setting, at an affordable price.

We wanted the bistro to have a wide appeal so that guests, locals, couples and families would come and eat here.

One element we wanted to get right straight away was to provide friendly and professional service – and to make sure we got that right from the start, through our local Fáilte Ireland team, we enrolled in Fáilte Ireland's Service to Sales programme.

The programme was the perfect vehicle for the hotel at this time as it prepared the service staff for the opening. With a new product or service it was essential to hit the ground running. For Mabel Crawford's this meant having a service etiquette and standard that not only met and exceeded customers' expectations, but also did so consistently.

From a financial point of view after looking at the customer experience Service to Sales also focuses on up-selling, and in general developing the mind-set of service staff in the area of sales.

We looked at what dishes are the quickest to prepare, dishes with the best margins, how to recommend wines, which in turn led to further wine training for staff. We created a reduced "express" style lunch menu to deliver lunch meals in less than 10 minutes.

These developments came as a result of Service to Sales and our staff began listening to the customers, making it easy for us to identify that our dinner menu was not appropriate for our lunch trade.

Service to Sales was not the only initiative we undertook to get Mabel Crawford's off to a flying start but it certainly helped to ensure we had the essentials right before we opened the doors.

When it comes to measuring our success the proof really is in the pudding.

Since opening, Mabel's has developed a great name for itself, and created much discussion in the area. The hotel has seen its food revenue grow from day one, and a lot of the



Michael Magner, General Manager of Fitzgerald's Vienna Woods Hotel alongside the new Mabel Crawford's Bistro.

We have all heard phrases like "everyone in a business is a sales person." The other side of this coin is that customer service can be seen as the "new age marketing." This is particularly true in the Hotel & Catering industry, the people or staff a customer communicates with are every bit as much of the overall experience as the food, service, and décor.

To this extent Service to Sales helped us realise this, and we set off to develop credibility and reputation through connecting with the customer through good service.

success for us is seen in getting the essentials right, and Service to Sales certainly helped us to do that.

We are now one year on and the bistro is going from strength to strength and while it hasn't been easy, I hope our dream of becoming recognised in Cork as one of the top restaurants to dine at is coming true.

Anyone interested in becoming involved in Service to Sales can contact their local Fáilte Ireland team. Details are available on www.failteireland.ie

Research Update

Policy and Futures Division

Tel: 01 8847205

e-mail: research.statistics@failteireland.ie

Visitor Attitudes

FÁILTE IRELAND has published its 2010 Visitor Attitudes Survey which, again, records very high levels of satisfaction among overseas holidaymakers to Ireland. Almost 5,000 overseas holidaymakers completed questionnaires between May and October 2010 and some of the highlights of the survey were as follows:

What Marks Out Ireland as a Holiday Destination?

Among the factors that are considered to set Ireland apart from other destinations, the beauty of the scenery and friendliness and hospitality of the Irish people dominate holidaymakers' perceptions.

Other distinguishing advantages spontaneously identified are our cultural and historical heritage, particularly significant for North American visitors. Unsurprisingly, ease of access features as a particular advantage for British holidaymakers. Nature and ecology and an unspoilt environment are noted as positive features of Ireland by German visitors. Irish pub culture remains on the radar particularly for both French and German visitors.

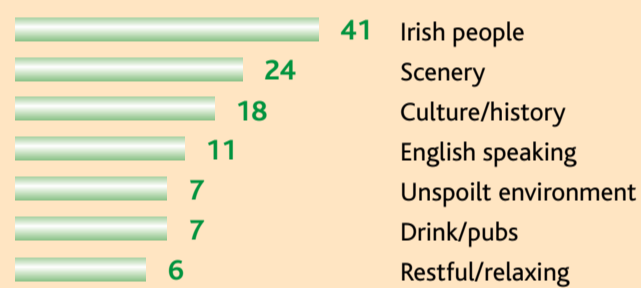
Friendliness and scenic attractions are identified as the most important aspects from a wide range of factors when considering the choice of Ireland as their holiday destination. Safety and security, plenty to do and see, an unspoilt environment, a range of natural attractions, and interesting history and culture also feature strongly and are mentioned by at least eight in every ten holidaymakers.

These comprise the fundamental influences in choosing Ireland, but there are some market divergences reflecting both the mindset and the practical requirements of particular nationalities. For

example, history and culture features strongly for North Americans (91%). Value for money (82%) and competitive air and sea fares (81%) are high up the agenda for British holidaymakers. An unspoilt environment (85%) and the range of natural attractions (82%) resonate with Mainland European visitors, particularly those from France and Germany.

IRELAND'S ADVANTAGES VIS-À-VIS OTHER DESTINATIONS

All Holidaymakers %



What Informed their Choice of Ireland?

Personal recommendation continues to be the key factor with one in two visitors overall (52%) saying this influenced their choice of Ireland. Almost equally important, the internet is mentioned by 48% of visitors as a factor in selecting Ireland. Guide books continue to play an important role in destination choice, mentioned by 28% overall and particularly North American visitors (31%). Irish Tourist Board literature maintains a steady per-

formance as a motivator (13%) while other brochures and promotional literature influenced one in five in choosing Ireland.

What Informed the Planning of their Irish Holiday?

The internet is now used by over two in every three (68%) in planning their holiday. Guide books are second to the internet, mentioned

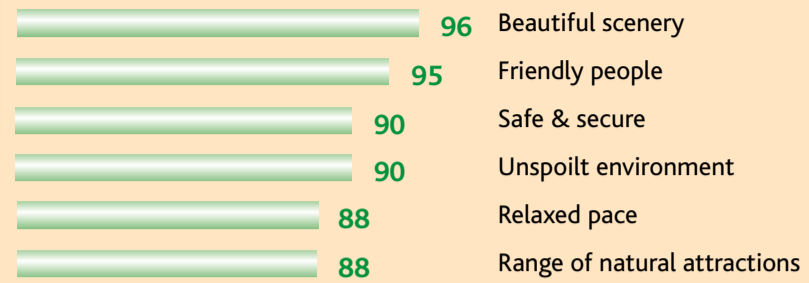
by 50% of all visitors and a more substantial 63% of North Americans. One in every two Mainland European visitors use guide books for planning their trip. Irish Tourist Board literature is used as a planning aid by 23% of holidaymakers and other brochures and promotional literature were used in planning by more than one in four (27%).

How Satisfied Were They With Their Holiday?

The vast majority of holidaymak-

WHAT EARNED THE HIGHEST SATISFACTION?

All Holidaymakers %



ers are satisfied with those features identified as the top ranking motivations for choosing to holiday here. Our beautiful scenery and the friendliness and hospitality of the Irish people receive a virtually unanimous vote of satisfaction. Other aspects achieving strong endorsement were the relaxed pace of life, unspoilt environment and the range of natural attractions. Likewise, there were few fears about safety and security with the vast majority satisfied on this score.

Nature, wildlife and flora have a particular resonance with Mainland European visitors, especially those from Germany (94%) and are also widely appreciated by North Americans. The high level of importance attached to history and culture by North Americans is clearly matched, with 95% satisfied with this aspect of their visit.

Ireland's Disadvantages as a Holiday Destination

It is particularly encouraging to see the level of spontaneous mention of the high cost of living in Ireland as a disadvantage decline from a high of 25% in 2009 to 15% in 2010. However, the cost of living in Ireland remains a disadvantage relative to other similar destinations.

While the extreme financial and economic turbulence internationally would have been a contributing factor in 2009 in deteriorating attitudes regarding value/cost of living, it does seem that the remedial action taken across various sectors of the industry has paid dividends for those who did visit. However, there is no room for complacency as value/cost of living undoubtedly will continue to be important in

the perception of the Irish tourism product into the future.

Accommodation Services

Holidaymakers were asked to rate their satisfaction with the quality, customer service and price of the accommodation services they had used during their holiday, using a five point rating scale ranging from 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied'.

Paid Serviced Accommodation

Top grade hotels and Irish Homes/Guesthouses achieve very high satisfaction ratings on quality and customer service, with around nine in every ten users either very satisfied or satisfied. Somewhat lower satisfaction ratings are recorded for medium/other grade hotels suggesting that though the majority are satisfied, standards may not always reach customer expectations. For each category of accommodation in the paid serviced sector, satisfaction with price is also generally positive, although lagging behind perceptions of quality and customer service. It is particularly gratifying, however, to see considerable improvement in satisfaction with price in 2010, particularly in the hotel sector, reflecting the concerted efforts of the sector to offer good value. Dissatisfaction with price in hotels was roughly halved. In other serviced accommodation, price was also more positively assessed in 2010.

Self-catering Accommodation

Rented self-catering accommodation earned high net satisfaction ratings on both quality (87%) and customer service (81%), with

a lower net satisfaction on price (71%). At least three in every four hostel users were satisfied with quality and customer service and seven in ten with the price they paid. Net satisfaction with quality in the caravan and camping sector was ahead of 2009, and customer satisfaction was also well rated. Price, however, was clearly an issue, with almost half satisfied and over one quarter dissatisfied, up on the level of dissatisfaction reported in 2009.

Would Ireland be Recommended?

A key indicator of the success of the holiday is whether Ireland would be recommended to others as a holiday destination. Continuing the trend seen in previous years, the reported propensity to definitely recommend Ireland is very high and has peaked at 88% in 2010, the highest level in the past five years. Most others would recommend Ireland, but with some caveats.

Would Visitors Come Back for Another Holiday?

Another measure of the success of the visit is the degree to which holidaymakers envisage returning for another visit. Over one in five (23%) anticipates coming back within the next year. Around half of overall visitors (52%) envisage a repeat visit in the next few years. Unsurprisingly, given their proximity and ethnic connections, an imminent return is much more likely to be envisaged by British visitors, with 20% suggesting that they would definitely be back later in 2010 and a slightly higher 27% anticipating a return visit in 2011.

Domestic Holidays in 2010

FÁILTE IRELAND has conducted quarterly surveys with Irish adults throughout 2010 about domestic holidays. Following are some of the key results to emerge from the research.

More than one-third of Irish adults (36%) took a domestic trip involving at least an overnight away from home during 2010, up from 28% in 2009, however the average number of trips taken last year dropped to 2 compared to 2.4 in 2009. Six in ten of the trips taken in 2010 were holiday trips. Three quarters of the holiday trips taken were of 1 to 3 nights in duration.

The internet was the most popular source of information, used by more than half of those taking a holiday when planning their trip. Word of mouth recommendations from family and

friends was the next most popular source.

Lead times continue to be short with the decision to take a short domestic break being taken up to two weeks in advance with the booking being made almost immediately. Bookings by telephone, while declining year on year, remain the most common, closely followed by internet bookings.

The Cork/Kerry region remains the most popular destination for domestic holidays in 2010, accounting for one in four short breaks. One in five visited the West of Ireland and more than

one in ten took their holidays in the South East and Dublin, respectively.

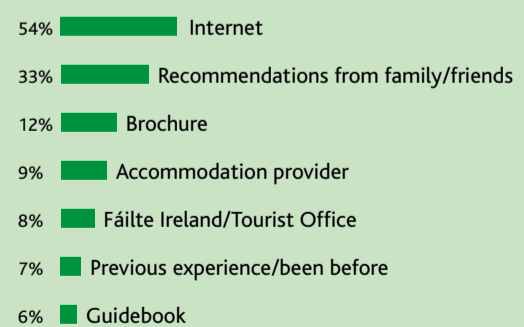
Hotels remain the most popular accommodation choice, used by two in three domestic holidaymakers during 2010, particularly among those taking short breaks. Own car is the most prevalent mode of transport, used by 85% of holidaymakers. The most popular activities engaged in while on a domestic holiday are visiting places of historical or cultural interest (34%), visits to national parks (18%) and visits to gardens (15%). Among the more active, one in five engaged in water-based activ-

ities and in hiking/cross-country walking, respectively. One in five also opted for a visit to a spa while on holiday.

Overall, 86% were satisfied with their domestic holiday (42% very satisfied and 44% fairly satisfied). More than half of all adults said that they were likely to take a short domestic holiday this year, while one in five said that they would likely take a longer domestic holiday. Two-thirds said that they would recommend a domestic holiday to family or friends.

In summary, the research indicates that more Irish adults took a domestic holiday in 2010 despite

SOURCES OF INFORMATION USED FOR PLANNING?



the economic crisis; however the average number of trips taken was down. Domestic holidaymakers are more likely to use the web to plan and book their trip and they enjoyed an array of activities; however the overall level of participation in activities decreased. The western seaboard remains the most popular destination

for domestic holidays and hotels remain the most popular accommodation. Holidaymakers were more likely in 2010 to be very satisfied overall with their domestic holiday.

INTERVIEW: Caroline Phelan

Caroline Phelan, runs CP Consulting & Travel Marketing – supporting Irish based companies to develop business in the French market. She talks to Laoise Bray about what Ireland has to offer the French market, how we measure up in the eyes of the French holidaymaker, and what Irish businesses can do to sell more effectively to the French.

BEING LOCATED in Paris has its distinct advantages as a Travel Marketing Consultant, and one advantage that Caroline Phelan has in leaps and bounds is the knowledge of what the French holidaymaker is looking for and more importantly for us, how their expectations stack up against what Ireland offers visitors.

Caroline has worked in a number of Ireland's key markets including Scotland and the UK, and is now based in France offering the French her expertise. She knows the French holidaymaker, and knows what it is they are looking for.

They're not short of holidays from work Caroline explains. The French get five weeks holidays from work every year – the most in the world! They also work a 35 hour week, and for those that don't, there's extra time off which is often used on Fridays or Mondays so that they can take weekend breaks. Children have a two week break from school every seven weeks, so working families can also organise holiday activities during these periods. So all in all, the French today have the opportunity to travel quite a lot – and they do. But what do they typically do during these holiday periods?

Phelan explains – "At least one of their holidays per year will be out-bound from France – they will go away for an average of 12 days – and this doesn't include city breaks. The rest of the holidays will mainly be taken in France, visiting family and friends, so for Ireland this 12 day break is the best window of opportunity."

What are they looking for?

In terms of what they look for when planning a holiday, Phelan sees it pretty simply – "They look for destinations that are easy to get to, good value for money, offer good food, are safe to travel to, have friendly people and offer them a unique authentic experience - much of this, Ireland has to offer."

So where does Ireland fit in terms of delivering these criteria?

Phelan explains – "French people are fond of the Irish people, and are attracted by the beautiful images of Ireland. It is often a destination on their wish list. But our biggest barrier to sales is the weather.

For those that wish to brave the weather, there is excellent access to Ireland from France. I believe that the main reason that the French have been such important clients to Ireland is due to access. In 1992, Ryanair opened the first of their international routes into Beauvais. Today we have charters into Shannon, regional Aer Lingus, Aer Arann and Air France routes, and when we compare air fares to what they were 20 years ago, they are now quite affordable. We also have direct ferry links for those that wish to bring their own car/caravan/coach/bikes etc.

For those travelling from Paris, which accounts for a third of the French market travelling to Ireland, Ireland is only an hour and 20 minutes away. People today do not want to waste time travelling long distances and changing planes within Europe so Ireland can be a popular option.

Phelan continues with some bad news - "On the ground, the French client finds the Irish product quite expensive. When compared with their own country or other competing destinations such as Spain, Germany & North Africa, food, drink and accommodation value for money is an issue as far as they are concerned.

On a personal note I think the authentic experience is something that we need to improve on. We are a friendly nation, but so are the populations of lots of other countries. We need to keep the charm."

Clients from France still expect thatched cottages around every corner or scenes from the "Quiet Man." As you can imagine, these expectations are not always met. With a virginia creeper, honey suckle, gravel instead of tarmac, a lot of much-needed charm can be added to the

exteriors of hotels, B&Bs and self catering accommodation quite easily, and it would be wonderful to see more effort in this area – inside too! We need to get away from the purpose-built blot on the landscape and give clients what they want."

How can Ireland build on this?

Packaging activities around accommodation products is a suggestion Phelan throws out – "Recently in France, friends of mine went on a short walking holiday. It was organised by five B&Bs or "Gites" as they are known as in France. Each day the family travelled from "Gite" to "Gite" on foot with donkeys that carried bags and children. The "Gites" provided a set menu for dinner and the magic "authentic" experience the French look for."

B&B Ireland have begun a listing of B&Bs offering activities in their areas – fishing, golfing, good food etc – this kind of grouping of products makes a holiday choice more attractive. "I think this area of categorisation is something Fáilte Ireland is working on with B&Bs already" Phelan says "and it's a wonderful idea – suggesting activities around visitors stay, offering amenities for these activities such as pack lunches and wet rooms for walking gear, for example, brings added value to visitors."

Finally, being a "green destination" we have also an eco-friendly image – if a product is eco-friendly in any way this should be highlighted.

How does Ireland compare to other destinations?

Phelan works closely with the Scottish and London tourism sectors and keeps an eye on competing destinations, such as the newer Eastern European destinations and other "grassy" destinations such as Canada and Norway.

"Thanks to transport, the world is a smaller place and we have quite a bit of competition. It is important for us to be aware of competing product and costs outside Ireland."

Scotland is seen as a more exclusive product compared to Ireland, London a shopping destination alongside the famous sites. Both are more expensive than Ireland, but London has fantastic access via EuroStar and Scotland very strong iconic images.

"I firmly believe that we have a fantastic destination with a huge number of advantages on our side to help improve sales again. We have come a great distance in the 20 years I have been in the industry. Perhaps with the boom we depended too much on the Irish holidaymaker. There is no reason that with some focused research and marketing, business to Ireland will not increase again from France."

So what can Irish trade operators do to keep the French on side?

The French tour operators selling packages in travel agencies tend to work with the Irish destination management companies mainly represented by the ITOA in Ireland. These companies in turn offer the Irish product to the French trade. So, it is therefore important that the Ireland product is represented by this link to sales in France.

When targeting the consumer directly through supplier websites, press or guide books, Phelan says it is important to think about having websites in French, designed to attract the French client and using good search engine optimisation in the French language.

Websites informing buyers on what can be done around their product also influences destination choice. Often clients don't know what can



Caroline Phelan

be done in a region, or how far they are from the nearest shop, restaurant, pub, site of interest, airport.

"When selling a product in Ireland you first of all have to sell the country, then the region, town, and lastly your product. The French are quite influenced by their peers on destination choice so giving our tourists a great time pays off."

Where do the opportunities lie for Ireland?

For any of Ireland's key markets, Phelan offers five top tips for anyone looking to generate overseas business – "I would recommend having a good hard look at the venue/product and highlight its advantages, potential and possibilities further. We need to become more focused.

Cost, of course is another major factor – so make sure your product offers good value for money.

Languages – again we come back to the point of making things easy – having a national language, be it French, German etc, will influence one product choice over another.

Wifi – the same goes for internet access, which is becoming increasingly important for visitors – having free internet in one hotel and a charge for it in another will influence product choice.

It's also important to keep abreast of what opportunities are available through Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland who work together to support Irish businesses to sell to overseas markets through In-Ireland promotions; trade and consumer promotional events; and through generating international publicity. These opportunities of collaboration are a valuable method of accessing any overseas client, so be sure you link in with them."

Caroline Phelan: The CV

CURRENT ROLE: Through CP Consulting & Travel Marketing Caroline has been promoting a broad range of tourist products in French speaking Europe for the past 13 years. Her clients include B&B Ireland, Visit London business unit, Visit Scotland business unit, Abbey Tours Ireland & Abbey Tours Scotland leisure market.

PREVIOUS ROLES: Dublin Tourism, Abbey Tours
BIRTH PLACE/HOME: Born in Dublin in 1969 and home in Paris since 1992

EDUCATION: BA in Visual Communication

FAMILY: Three busy boys and a French husband

HOBBIES: Gardening and walking

Ireland: The next stop for British tourists

A BUS promoting the destination of Kerry has returned triumphant from a tour of the UK where it was promoting the county, and Ireland, as a destination to some of Britain's busiest cities – London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds.

The tour, which was supported by Fáilte Ireland and a number of tourism organisations in the South West region, also took part in a number of trade shows while it was in the UK, with the overall response from our potential British visitors being

reported as positive.

Following a quick stop off at Meitheal, Ireland's largest travel trade show, the bus completed its marketing campaign with a trip around Ireland stopping in Belfast, Cork and Limerick before returning

to Kerry.

Speaking about the success of the trip, Tour Manager Thys Vogels stated – "We have reached a huge potential market directly through the trade events that we attended in Birmingham and London as well

as thousands of potential tourists who will strongly consider coming to Kerry for a short or long break this year."



Aoife Ryan and Rachel Gleasure with the Kerry Bus.