

# tourism matters

## Overseas tourists key to recovery

**AS THE most difficult tourist season of recent times draws to a close, there is both relief and apprehension in the air. There is relief insofar as the vast majority of our tourism enterprises have managed to sustain their business through a harsh 2010 season – though not without pain. At the same time, there is understandably apprehension about the season ahead, given the continuing flow of negative economic comment and the pressures now confronting our own economy. Yet, there are straws of recovery in the wind which offer the prospect of the beginnings of a turnaround in our fortunes.**

Globally, tourism is recovering. However, the pace of this recovery varies tremendously across the world. Not surprisingly, emerging destinations to the east are experiencing the fastest rebound. Europe, on the other hand, as a mature destination, is experiencing slow recovery and even here the picture varies greatly between countries. At one end, there is Germany turning the corner in pole position, at the other are countries like our own with contracting economies. In between, there are key markets such as Britain, with their own set of economic challenges.

Facing the prospect of slow market recovery, the challenge facing Irish tourism is not merely to grow in line with the market but to perform above the average and begin to regain market share. From where we sit this is a daunting prospect, but certainly not an impossible task.

Irish tourism and the wider Irish economy are becoming more competitive. Our costs have come down and the better value we are offering is beginning to change

visitor perceptions for the better. Our own surveys of visitors from the 2010 season support that view. Clearly more progress is required and the 4-year National Recovery Plan offers the prospect of further competitive gains in the area of labour costs and Local Authority rates and charges. In parallel, our suite of business supports will continue to expand to offer more businesses more advice and guidance to navigate these choppy waters.

Looking at our top five markets there are opportunities, although exploiting them will take hard graft. The home market, probably the most important market for many businesses, will come under pressure generally as household incomes tighten. One area of opportunity lies in winning more share from the out-bound market should more Irish consider holidaying at home. Offering good value packages will be more important than ever. Mindful of this we will continue to invest heavily in this market in 2011.

However, for many businesses the real game will be off shore.

Developing more business in overseas markets is not just a good strategy - it's becoming also the only show in town when faced with an at best static home market. There are undoubted opportunities in Continental Europe, particularly Germany. The US market is recovering. Even in Britain where our performance has been poor this year, there are opportunities, particularly around London and the Southeast, where prospects are much stronger than in the North.

There has been much comment in the business media recently about Ireland being an "open economy".

The upside of this is that we trade extensively in international markets and so we are equipped to escape some of the effects of soft demand at home. Like other sectors of the economy, tourism needs to 'get with the programme' and look to our international markets.

In an effort to tap these international opportunities, we have put in place a new Sales Connect initiative designed to help groups of businesses around the country, interested in growing overseas custom, to exploit opportunities which undoubtedly exist.

From a national perspective

then, tourism has a significant role to play in our economic recovery. This can only be realised by developing more in-bound business and thereby generate much needed foreign earnings and sustain jobs. Now, more than ever before we need to pull together with that common purpose; local businesses large and small, trade associations, representative bodies and tourism agencies. Relative to most sectors, tourism has done well from the budget in terms of protecting the overseas marketing drive and investing in the longer-term appeal of our product. The rest is down to

Team Tourism.

We are cautiously optimistic for the season ahead and we genuinely believe that, given the capability and capacity of the industry to deliver - with the support of Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland, we can now turn this corner.

On behalf of my colleagues in Fáilte Ireland may I wish you a peaceful Christmas and better fortune in 2011. We look forward to working with you and supporting you in the year ahead.

**Shaun Quinn**

Chief Executive – Fáilte Ireland



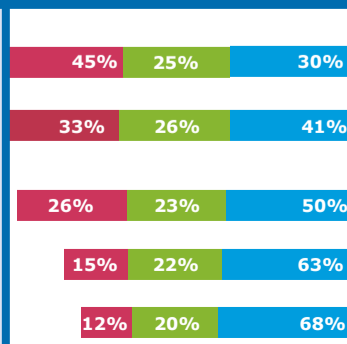
Fáilte Ireland hosted a Selling Ireland Overseas workshop at The Convention Centre Dublin on 1 November (see report page 2). Left to right are: Áine Melvin, Ashford Castle; Sinéad Heneghan, The Shelbourne Dublin; Shaun Quinn, Chief Executive, Fáilte Ireland; and Sabine Sheehan, The Old Jameson Distillery, Dublin

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# Workshop focuses on selling Ireland overseas

**IN A BID to provide tourism firms with practical supports to generate more overseas business, Fáilte Ireland hosted a dedicated workshop on selling Ireland overseas at The Convention Centre Dublin on 1 November. The workshop featured key players from each of Ireland's key source markets, tour operators, and Tourism Ireland, each providing Irish firms with an inside track to achieving more sales abroad.**

Speaking at the workshop, Shaun Quinn, Chief Executive, Fáilte Ireland, said: "There is little doubt that tourism can play an important role in our economic recovery. However, central to playing our part will be our ability to lessen our recent high dependence on local demand at home and instead gain a greater appreciation of our key overseas markets and how to tap into the potential they offer in terms of generating foreign earnings and sustaining jobs around the country.

"We believe our key client

companies around the country are up to the challenge and our workshop is a practical response to a very strong industry demand for insights and advice on selling to the variety of overseas markets we need to pitch to. In essence, what does today's overseas visitor want and how do we guarantee it? Our workshop sets out to answer that question and to show Irish tourism businesses how they can successfully sell to international markets with confidence."

Topics discussed included the challenges and opportunities of a

changed travel world; sales insights from the UK; the view from North America; selling to France; the German market; how to access overseas markets; and top tips on selling your business.

Attendees got the opportunity to hear about the range of business supports available to them locally from Fáilte Ireland to ensure they are fully equipped to take advantage of emerging market opportunities and of the various promotional platforms available from Tourism Ireland's global presence.

The event is the latest element of Fáilte Ireland's comprehensive package of supports to help the tourism industry trade out of the downturn. Whether it is the power of internet marketing, advice on selling local events, or the need to cut costs, Fáilte Ireland this year has invested over €11 million in the form of direct supports and advice for tourism enterprises nationally.



At the Selling Ireland Overseas workshop at The Convention Centre Dublin on 1 November were (l. to r.): Paul Keeley, Director - Enterprise Development, Fáilte Ireland; Margaret Ryan, Margaret Ryan Marketing; Caroline Phelan, CP Consulting & Travel Marketing; and Ruth Andrews, Incoming Tour Operators Association

## Dublin offers range of activities and good value to home holidaymakers

**THE WIDE range of activities available to visitors to Dublin were highlighted in a home holiday advertising campaign funded by Fáilte Ireland, in conjunction with Dublin Tourism, the Irish Hotels Federation and Dublin City BID (Business Improvement District).**

This national radio and newspaper promotional campaign, to encourage people from around the country to come and visit Dublin, ran throughout August and September. The campaign focused on three target markets, in particular, families, young couples

and the over 55s.

The campaign, which complemented the larger *Discover Ireland* campaign, presented family activities such as Imaginosity, Viking Splash Tours, and the recently launched Big Wheel at the O2. Young couples were

targeted through promotional activity focusing on the range of entertainment available including the Grand Canal Theatre, the many good value restaurants and the range of high quality retail outlets. The over 55s campaign promoted the museums, galleries and key places of interest across the city.

Kevin Moriarty, Fáilte Ireland's Head of Operations in Dublin, said: "The aim of this campaign was to entice potential visitors, who before may not have considered Dublin as a holiday location, to reconsider. The developments across the

national road network, along with the increased value throughout the industry, mean that Dublin has never been closer or such good value. What is on offer in Dublin today reflects a great opportunity for people all around the country to come to their capital city and have an enjoyable break.

"We have received excellent feedback about the Discover Dublin Campaign which we hope helped to put Dublin firmly in the mindset of those potential visitors who are continuing to plan weekends away and short breaks."

## Culture and heritage can deliver tourism growth

**THE ARTS Council and Fáilte Ireland hosted a cultural tourism seminar in Farnleigh on 18 November designed to give almost 100 arts organisations from around the country practical insights into the tourism industry and the tools needed to attract visitors.**

Culture and heritage is a key driver for Irish tourism, contributing an estimated €2 billion to the Irish economy last year, with research showing that cultural visitors spend almost twice as much as city-break visitors. Furthermore, overseas visitors experience high levels of satisfaction with what Ireland has to offer, with almost four out of every five overseas visitors citing "interesting history/culture" as a

motivation for choosing Ireland.

Orla Carroll, Head of Leisure Tourism, Insights and Innovation, Fáilte Ireland, said: "We believe that our culture and heritage can drive further growth and development within the tourism industry and can present a truly unique source of comparative advantage with the arts sector adding an invaluable layer to Ireland's cultural offering."

## Trade welcomes North American agents



Sixty-five top US and Canadian travel agents met more than 150 members of the Irish tourism trade at Dromoland Castle in September to discuss business opportunities for the 2011 season. The agents represented high-end travel groups such as Virtuoso, Ensemble, Signature and American Express. The one-day North American Expo provided valuable business and networking opportunities for the Irish trade at a fraction of the cost of an individual sales trip. More than 4,000 business appointments took place over the course of the day. The visitors also took time to explore the regions of Ireland in pre- and post-familiarisation tours organised by Fáilte Ireland.

Left to right are: Derry Cronin, Specialised Travel Services - New York office; Mark Nolan, Dromoland Castle; Gillian Binchy, Trade Engagement Manager, Fáilte Ireland; Ronda Fitzpatrick, Sanborns Travel Services, USA; and Catherine Reilly, Brendan Tours

## Local tourism businesses back Wexford campaign

**THE LARGEST ever home holiday campaign for Wexford took place from early July to the end of August. National radio and newspaper advertising highlighted what there is to do in Wexford, promoting the idea that 'the best family holidays are built on Wexford sand'.**

The €160,000 campaign was funded by Fáilte Ireland, Wexford County Council and 22 local tourism businesses. It complemented the larger *Discover Ireland* campaign launched by Fáilte Ireland earlier this year.

Gary Breen, Fáilte Ireland's Head of Operations in the South East said: "This was a coordinated, impactful marketing campaign and is a perfect example of the benefits of local tourism interests working together for the greater good."

One of those involved, Colm Neville of the Riverside Hotel in Enniscorthy, said: "Tourism is important to the local Wexford economy, and Wexford, in turn, is a unique part of Irish tourism.

For that reason, I am very pleased to be part of the significant level of support for this campaign from the local industry - a level which is unprecedented, with businesses from across Wexford contributing."

The campaign featured national radio and press advertising with a particular emphasis on Dublin. Advertising, which was supported by dedicated Wexford advertorials, appeared in the national weekend press including *The Sunday Independent* and *Sunday World*. Broadcast advertising involved national and regional radio including Today FM, 2FM; 98 FM, Spin 103.8 FM; FM 104; and Q102FM.

## Strong policies and programmes can accelerate return to growth

OPENING Fáilte Ireland's National Tourism Conference 2011, "Moving towards Recovery", in The Convention Centre Dublin in November, the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, Mary Hanafin, TD, emphasised the importance of tourism in national economic recovery.

"Tourism is a vitally important industry and creates opportunities for employment and economic activity throughout the country. Those who are involved in the tourism industry are resilient, having come through many challenges in recent decades and the tourism offering that we are continuing to invest in will help keep attracting new and repeat tourists to our shores.

"We are at a critical moment in our economic history and the onus is on us to put in place a credible path to recovery through

improving competitiveness and addressing our cost base. It is essential that we continue with strong policies and programmes which can accelerate the return to growth in Irish tourism as part of an overall export-led recovery in the Irish economy," said Minister Hanafin.

Addressing delegates, Redmond O'Donoghue, Chairman of Fáilte Ireland, emphasised the conference theme: "When we consider the challenging economic environment that we are facing into right now,

it is important to remember that recovery is achievable. In particular we need to recognise that important sectors of our economy, such as tourism, have the potential of moving towards growth and expansion in the medium term. Economic conditions in our source markets are improving, and there are good reasons to expect a bounce in international demand next year. With the right attitude and skills, tourism has a vital role to play in this country's recovery."



At Fáilte Ireland's National Tourism Conference 2011, 'Moving Towards Recovery', in The Convention Centre Dublin, were (l. to r.): Neil Oliver, author and broadcaster, and AA Gill, restaurant critic and writer, both speakers; Mary Hanafin, TD, Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport; Redmond O'Donoghue, Chairman, Fáilte Ireland; and Professor Andrew Frew, eTourism Specialist, speaker

## Golf club standards receive recognition



Thirty golf clubs were accredited under Fáilte Ireland's National Standards Framework for Golf Clubs at an awards ceremony in Dublin in September. This brings to 62 the number of clubs to hold this accreditation. The new standards were developed in conjunction with the Golf Quality Assurance Working Group as part of the Golf Forum's role in developing golf in Ireland.

The first of their kind in Ireland, the standards offer golf clubs a number of distinct advantages including free listings & increased promotion on the domestic and international *Discover Ireland* websites as well as access to key Fáilte Ireland business supports.

At the awards ceremony in Fáilte Ireland, Amiens Street, Dublin, were (l. to r.): Rory Harman, Black Bush Golf Club, Co. Meath; Julia O'Donoghue, Killarney Golf Club, Kerry; Tony Lenehan, Head of Food, Hospitality and Standards, Fáilte Ireland; Angela Sterling, Edmondstown Golf Club, Dublin; and Ray Ryan and Liam Scally, Tullamore Golf Club

## Adventure and activity operators focus on 2011

A NATIONAL Adventure and Activity Forum, hosted by Fáilte Ireland, has been attended by 150 of Ireland's top adventure and activity operators. They met in Killarney, 3-4 November, for a series of workshops and seminars centred on providing the best possible advice and tips on trading in 2011.

Keynote speaker, Charley Boorman – adventurer, travel writer and entertainer – said that there is a thirst for adventure, and people in the holiday and tourism industry need to tap into this to fulfil that need.

"An adventure can start here in Ireland, and this country can meet this growing need for 'difference' and for change. I'm sure the innovative people in this amazing country can come up with some fantastic adventure prospects for 2011 and onward," he said.

There are many factors currently pointing to the strength of the adventure and activity sector:

- The adventure tourism market has enjoyed increased visitor numbers and revenue in recent years with almost a million overseas visitors taking part in active pursuits (such as walking, cycling, water-based activities) while in Ireland in 2008
- The sector generates revenue of approximately €1.1 billion (€700 million spent by overseas visitors and €400 million by domestic holiday makers) annually
- A recent study in the UK shows that the adventure and activity tourism sector is set to grow by 24% by 2013.

## B&B quality assurance symbol rolls out nationwide

NEW B&B signage is being rolled out as part of a strategy to revitalise the Irish home bed and breakfast sector. The strategy comprises a new brand *An Irish Home B&B - Get Closer*, supported by a classification and categorisation system, and an operator training and support programme.

The new strategy is the result of the work of the B&B Implementation Group, chaired by Mairéad Lavery and comprising members of the B&B representative bodies, marketing groups and independent representatives, which with Fáilte Ireland developed a *Framework for Action for the Irish Home Bed & Breakfast Sector*.

The B&B brand and classification system is

supported with a newly designed logo and signage. The promotion of the B&B sector has been fully integrated into the high profile *Discover Ireland* national and international campaigns.

Since February, more than 1400 B&B operators have attended Fáilte Ireland information workshops, group meetings and individual support clinics which were held in locations throughout the

country. A helpline was also available for operators to get advice on individual issues.

As *Tourism Matters* goes to press, about 700 of the country's 2,300 approved B&Bs have already been classified under the new system as three, four or five-star accommodation. They will be issued with their new sign, notified of the extensive marketing and promotion campaigns to support the classification and categorisation system, and given the opportunity to avail of a wide range of training programmes and business supports.

Tony Lenehan, Head of Food, Hospitality & Standards, Fáilte Ireland, says: "Fáilte Ireland is committed to recognising and

improving quality and business performance within the B&B sector for both the consumer and the operator. In a competitive environment, it is now more important than ever that the Irish Home B&B in Ireland is repositioned, to distinguish and strengthen the uniqueness of what it has to offer."

Fáilte Ireland has developed a new approach to signage, which offers each business a range of quality sign options to promote their business. The new signs include the trademark protected Quality Assurance Symbol, which will provide an extra level of assurance to both domestic and international visitors and ultimately enhance the overall tourism experience.



The new double-sided projecting quality assurance sign

# 'Meet in Ireland 2010' attracts 120 major international buyers

THE OFFICIAL opening of The Convention Centre Dublin (The CCD) on 7 September saw the arrival of 120 top buyers from across the globe for a seven-day programme organised by the Business Tourism Unit in Fáilte Ireland in conjunction with industry partners. It was a great opportunity to showcase Ireland and its facilities to international decision-makers in the lucrative meetings, incentives, conferences and events sector.

The main focus of 'Meet in Ireland 2010' was a business tourism workshop at the convention centre, opened by the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, Mary Hanafin, TD, on 8 September, where members of the Irish trade were given the opportunity to network and do business with the international buyers.

A series of pre- and post-familiarisation trips was organised for the buyers to experience various venues and facilities available throughout Ireland.

Visits were made to Kilkenny, Galway, Cork, Kerry and the Shannon region. From high speed boat trips at Crosshaven to being entertained by the Bunratty Folk singers in Adare Manor, the international buyers were wowed at every step of their journey.

In Dublin, they visited Citywest Convention Centre, the Old Jameson Distillery, the RDS and Aviva Stadium. In a 'Meet the City' programme they had the opportunity to visit additional hotels and unique venues with meeting facilities as well as exploring the city on foot.

The final networking event began with a reception in Trinity College Dublin, including a viewing of the Book of Kells, and concluded with a gala banquet in the Mansion House.

Keith McCormack, Head of Business Tourism at Fáilte Ireland, believes that 'Meet in Ireland

2010' put Ireland squarely on the map for business tourism and will also help reap significant economic benefits in the years to come.

"The opening of The Convention Centre Dublin provided us with a unique opportunity to showcase Ireland's business tourism product, both new and existing, and a range of entertainment and activity options that the buyers can then sell on to their clients. We hope to see many more conferences and events brought to Ireland as a result of this initiative."

In 2009, Fáilte Ireland directly supported a total of 122 international conferences attracting more than 57,000 delegates and generating estimated revenue of €85 million. So far in 2010, the number of conferences supported is 144, with more than 63,000 delegates and estimated revenue of €95 million. Keith McCormack says: "The increase this year in supported conferences highlights the concerted effort by Fáilte Ireland to back this market sector."



On the familiarisation trip to Galway, the international buyers visited Glenlo Abbey Hotel and the Orient Express



Also at the Meet in Ireland 2010 workshop were (l. to r.): Deirdre O'Brien, Carton House, Co. O'Malley, The Heritage Golf & Spa Resort, Co Laois; Gretchen Ridgeway, Barberstown Castle, Co. Huggard, The Burlington Hotel, Dublin; Cailin Keaney, Aviva Stadium, Dublin; and Gemma Nolan, Physicians of Ireland, Dublin

# South Kerry operators work to make their business greener

A PROMOTIONAL brochure, entitled 'The Greener side of the Ring of Kerry', has been published by Fáilte Ireland and is now available in tourist offices around the country and to download at [www.discoverireland.ie/green](http://www.discoverireland.ie/green)

In the summer, more than 50 South Kerry tourism businesses became the first cluster of businesses in Ireland to be certified under the Green Tourism Business Scheme at an awards ceremony in Killarney. The recipients have been working both individually and as a network to make their businesses greener since December 2009, and were recognised for their commitment to an environmental approach to management.

Fáilte Ireland will spend the coming months working with the businesses in South Kerry on promoting themselves as 'green'

businesses in the domestic and international markets. As a first step the promotional brochure was formally launched in Kerry in October.

The Green Tourism Business awards were presented by environmentalist, architect and TV presenter, Duncan Stewart, who stressed the importance of businesses participating in such schemes: "Visitors to Ireland are increasingly aware of environmental issues and will be impressed when visiting South Kerry with the way in which our natural environment is being protected and cherished,

and they in turn will spread the message abroad."

The participating businesses are located around the Ring of Kerry and include accommodation providers, activity providers, restaurants, bars and outdoor visitor attractions.

International research shows that environmental considerations are increasingly becoming a factor for tourists. Research carried out by Fáilte Ireland has identified a need for an eco-certification scheme for all sectors of the tourism industry in order to meet the growing demand for 'green' businesses from our visitors.

Mary Stack, Environment Officer, Fáilte Ireland, says: "The Ring of Kerry is one of Ireland's most scenic and unspoilt touring routes. So, it's really little wonder that a growing number of tourism



More than 50 South Kerry businesses received awards under the Green Tourism Business Scheme businesses are taking steps to conserve and care for these most precious resources.

"These businesses have taken steps from reducing their energy and water consumption

to improving their waste management and sourcing fresh seasonal produce from local suppliers. All of these measures help ensure that they carefully manage our natural environment

without compromising on the high quality experience that is delivered to visitors."

For further details contact Mary Stack on 01 8847201 or e-mail [mary.stack@failteireland.ie](mailto:mary.stack@failteireland.ie)



ts unique Pullman Restaurant aboard



The official opening of The Convention Centre Dublin by An Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, TD, on 7 September saw the arrival in Ireland of 120 top business tourism buyers from across the globe. At the official opening were (l. to r.): An Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, TD; Dermot Dwyer, Executive Chairman, The Convention Centre Dublin; Mary Hanafin, TD, Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport; and Redmond O'Donoghue, Chairman, Fáilte Ireland



Kildare; Grainne Kildare; Richard Royal College of



Evelyn O'Sullivan, Cork Convention Centre, and Hal McElroy, General Manager, Trident Hotel, Kinsale, at the Meet in Ireland 2010 workshop in The Convention Centre Dublin



Bono, courtesy of MACNAS, entertained the international buyers during their visit to the Citywest Convention Centre

## Visitors enjoy iWalk guides to Cork City

CORK CITY Council and Fáilte Ireland have joined forces to produce two downloadable iWalks, allowing visitors to discover the local secrets and colourful history of Ireland's often claimed 'Real Capital'. Visitors to Cork can now discover the island city at their own pace, by simply downloading the audio files to their iPod or iPhone. By following the colourful map, their chosen iWalk accompanies them on a fascinating journey, taking in some of Cork's most iconic cultural and heritage attractions.

Fiona Buckley, Head of Operations for Fáilte Ireland in the South West, believes the iWalk is a positive addition to the tourist experience: "The modern visitor expects a much more interactive experience when they come to Ireland, now more than ever before. As a national tourism development authority, Fáilte Ireland is keen that any new technology be exploited to the maximum in order to allow tourists to have a fully hands on experience when they visit us.

"These iWalks are an innovative way of exploring the cultural and heritage attractions and amenities in Cork City. It makes it easier for our visitors to learn about the

city and further compounds the reason why Cork was voted by both the Lonely Planet and Yahoo China as one of the top ten cities to visit in 2010," she says.

The 'Flavours of Cork' iWalk is designed to give the visitor a general introduction to the identity of this diverse city, focusing on living and contemporary culture, while 'Creative Cork' is an introduction to the city's architecture, public sculpture, festivals and thriving theatre and arts scene. Both iWalks are brought vividly to life, interspersed with poetry and music as well as a few entertaining stories about Cork's local characters, of which there are many.



Siobhán Barrett-Doherty (right), The Station House Hotel, Letterkenny, discusses the merits of Donegal with Isabelle Cresson, Cresson Voyages, France, at the European Coach Operators Workshop

## Waterford hosts European coach operators workshop

ALMOST 30 European coach tour operators were in Waterford on 5 October to meet more than 70 members of the Irish tourism trade. The workshop event, organised by Fáilte Ireland, took place in the Tower Hotel and provided valuable business and networking opportunities for the Irish trade at a fraction of the cost of an individual sales trip. Over 2,000 business appointments took place over the course of the day.

The European buyers also took time to explore the region in a pre-workshop familiarisation tour taking in counties Waterford, Wexford and Kilkenny.

Gary Breen, Head of Operations, Fáilte Ireland in the South East, said: "We are delighted to welcome this group of coach tour buyers to Waterford as they deliver significant amounts of

business to Ireland and their presence here is testament to the strong appeal of our accommodation sector and the variety and attractiveness of the holiday activities on offer. It is imperative that there is a strong message overseas that Ireland offers a high quality experience, excellent accommodation choice and great value for money."

## Opportunity knocks for historic towns

**MANY** of Ireland's historic towns have not yet realised their full tourism potential. To address this, a set of practical guidelines has been published by Fáilte Ireland to aid local authorities and other interested groups who want to improve the tourism potential of their towns.

Ireland's historic towns are of huge interest to our overseas culture and heritage seekers who contribute 54% to total overseas tourism revenue. In general, visitors to historic towns are over 45 years old and are predominantly from the middle to upper socio-economic groups. They typically spend 11.5 nights in Ireland which is longer than the average stay of 8 days for all overseas visitors. This is an attractive demographic with economic potential that historic towns may not always be aware of.

To inform these guidelines, Fáilte Ireland conducted research to identify what visitors

like and dislike about Irish historic towns. The survey found visitors were particularly impressed with the character of town centres, attractions such as castles, the surrounding scenery, quality of accommodation, pubs and the local welcome. What rated least favourably with our visitors was the lack of outdoor markets, quality of public toilets and absence of daytime entertainment.

Based on the survey findings and international best practice, the guidelines contain a range of tips and advice to help towns to develop a high quality experience for tourists. The guidelines and the case studies can be simply drawn upon for ideas and inspiration or can be used in a more systematic way as a manual to help develop and market an historic town. Photographs and captions have been used extensively to graphically illustrate points making it user friendly.

The publication *Historic Towns in Ireland: Maximising your Tourism Potential* is available on request from Mary King at [mary.king@failteireland.ie](mailto:mary.king@failteireland.ie) or to download on [www.failteireland.ie](http://www.failteireland.ie)



Listowel Fleadh Cheoil: A well organised and fun festival with an appealing programme is a proven means of driving new business into a town

**tourism matters**

**Fáilte Ireland**  
National Tourism Development Authority

Fáilte Ireland  
88-95 Amiens Street  
Dublin 1

[www.failteireland.ie](http://www.failteireland.ie)

Editor: John Brown, Tel: 01 8847252  
e-mail: [john.brown@failteireland.ie](mailto:john.brown@failteireland.ie)

Editorial/Distribution Assistant:  
Letty Cronin, Tel: 01 8847265  
e-mail: [letty.cronin@failteireland.ie](mailto:letty.cronin@failteireland.ie)

# Tourism potential of natural heritage

*The tourism industry needs to be more aware of the opportunities to integrate our natural heritage into tourism offerings, writes Freya Watson*



Freya Watson, Manager - Heritage Planning, Fáilte Ireland

**HOW DO we make more of our natural heritage – our wildlife, landscape, flora and waters – for visitors? This is a key question for Irish tourism but one which many have shied away from because of the implications.**

Perhaps one of the reasons why we find it difficult to incorporate it more fully into mainstream tourism is that it is so vast and diverse – Blue Flag beaches, highest sea cliffs in Europe, whale watching, edible seaweeds, peatlands, Karst landscape, red squirrels. Or perhaps we have become nervous of all the EU designations and associated conservation requirements that indicate how special our environment is – SACs, Geopark, National Parks. Or maybe we

just don't realise how special our natural heritage is, and, therefore, fail to see its value for visitors as well as for ourselves?

Overseas visitors have always been, and still are, greatly motivated to come to Ireland by our scenery and landscape, and all that encompasses. They come looking for an opportunity to get away from daily stresses, to recharge, to reconnect with loved ones and themselves. Our natural environment offers the opportunity

to do all of this. But we still struggle to make it accessible, physically, emotionally and intellectually, to those who might benefit from it. And, in return, Ireland misses an opportunity to encourage greater respect for her biodiversity and landscape, her uniqueness.

One of the ambitious objectives set by Fáilte Ireland's Leisure Insights and Innovation team is to bring natural heritage more to the forefront through tourism in a manner which encourages

awareness and sustainability. This means looking across the spectrum of tourism activities and channels to provide both visitors and industry with opportunities to integrate our natural heritage into tourism offerings.

Some of our tourism activities are clearly more aligned with this objective than others. Walking and cycling, for example, offer perfect opportunities to introduce visitors at first-hand to Irish nature. But how many of our visitors don't walk or cycle while they are here? How many still tour the country by car, looking through the window without much direct experience? This is difficult to quantify, but in a modern society, where we are increasingly losing touch with nature, visitors (many of whom come from urban backgrounds) don't always know how to interact with nature. It needs to be made easy for them – which is where

Ireland's famous creativity and knack for innovation needs to be harnessed.

Part of Fáilte Ireland's programme of work in this area, starting in November, is to run an awareness programme for the tourism industry introducing them to the 'key stories' in Irish natural heritage, explaining guidelines for sustainable interaction with the environment, and providing support materials which can be shared with colleagues and visitors. The awareness programme will initially consist of a series of one-day workshops run regionally, and a resource kit.

The workshops will be advertised shortly, but more information on this programme or on natural heritage and ecotourism developments in general, are available from Fáilte Ireland by contacting me at [freya.watson@faiiteireland.ie](mailto:freya.watson@faiiteireland.ie)



At the launch of three new looped walking routes for Carlingford, Co Louth, were (l. to r.): Cllr. Peter Savage; Michael Curran, Louth County Council; Mary Hanafin, TD, Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport; and Kevin Kidney, Fáilte Ireland

## Carlingford gets new looped walks

**THREE NEW** looped walking routes for Carlingford, Co Louth, were launched in November by Mary Hanafin, TD, Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport. They were developed with support from Fáilte Ireland and Louth County Council and were announced in conjunction with a new Walkers Welcome initiative.

These new initiatives, together, aim to make Carlingford and the Cooley Peninsula a destination of choice for walkers from both home and abroad. The new looped walking routes, Common's Loop, Slieve Foye Loop and Barnave Loop, are located in Carlingford and the Cooley Peninsula and offer walkers the opportunity to enjoy the spectacular surroundings and natural beauty of Carlingford.

Also announced at the launch was the expansion of Fáilte Ireland's Walkers Welcome initiative to the Carlingford and the Cooley Peninsula. This initiative aims to raise the standard of service that walkers can expect from their walking holiday in Ireland. Twenty local tourism businesses have already signed up to the Walkers Welcome in Carlingford and the Cooley Peninsula.

## Dublin area commis chefs develop their skills

**COMMIS CHEFS** from hotels, restaurants and gastro pubs in the Dublin area recently completed a culinary craft workshop, running one day a week for six weeks, at the Fáilte Ireland Dublin Training Centre.

The programme is tailored to meet a request from industry for help in up-skilling commis chefs to chef de partie standard.

Over the six weeks, the workshops focused on Larder /Lamb, Beef, Pork, Fish, Poultry, Game, and Offal, as well as Jams, Chutneys, Pickles and Relishes; Breakfasts, Allergens, Sauces; Menu Planning, Costing and Administration.

Following excellent feedback from the pilot series which ran in the summer, a third programme is planned for January, 2011.

The workshops are currently free and participants

receive a Fáilte Ireland certificate on successful completion of the programme.

Peter Stocksborough, Client Services Manager, Dublin Training Centre, says it has never been more important for tourism businesses to focus on ensuring their current staff are highly skilled and are being utilised to realise their full potential.

"We offer a number of intensive practical workshops delivered either in our Dublin Training Centre or in-company which cover a range of core craft skills, service techniques, product knowledge and team motivation in the areas of culinary skills, food and beverage service and customer service."

A brochure, entitled *Operational & Practical Support* which sets out the range of training and support opportunities provided by the Dublin Training Centre

is now available. Please contact Louise Syms for a copy or to register your interest in the Culinary Craft Workshop series. Tel: 01 8847851 or [louise.syms@faiiteireland.ie](mailto:louise.syms@faiiteireland.ie)



## Summer events prove a midlands magnet

**A PROGRAMME** of exhibitions, walking tours and entertainment has increased the number of local and foreign visitors to the Mullingar Discover Ireland Centre on Market Square this summer.

Local historian Ruth Illingworth has given visitors to the centre a short introduction to the history of Mullingar prior to leading a series of walking tours of the town. She also conducted a Joe Dolan walking tour which gave visitors an insight into Joe's life and home town.

Entertainment on Market Square included performances of Irish traditional music by the local branch of Comhaltas.

In the Centre, a series of displays and exhibitions featured the work of local artists and craft producers. Other promotions included a kayak display courtesy of Outdoor Sports, Mullingar.

Senior Travel Advisor Caroline Cole says that all the events have generated an excellent response from callers to the Centre and the local tourism trade.

"Some people who called to the office early in the day stayed longer in Mullingar to attend a walking tour or to listen to Irish music. The displays and exhibitions are creating links with the local community and trade, who are welcome to use the facility," she says.

## IN BRIEF

### New Authority Members

THE MINISTER for Tourism, Culture and Sport, Mary Hanafin, TD, has made the following appointments to the National Tourism Development Authority (Fáilte Ireland): Marguerite Howley, Proprietor, Castlemurray House Hotel & Restaurant, St John's Point, Dunkineely, Co Donegal; Dr Mary Coveney, Head of Health and Safety, Security and Environment, Dublin Airport Authority; and Kevin Dundon, Chef/Proprietor, Dunbrody Country House, Hotel & Restaurant, Co Wexford.

### 12,000 free rail tickets issued



MORE than 12,000 tickets for free rail travel have been issued to older tourists in the Golden Trekker scheme which was launched in March. Overseas visitors aged 66 or over can benefit from unlimited travel on main line, DART and commuter trains in the scheme.

The Golden Trekker tickets take the form of a four-day or a sequence of four-day tickets depending on the length of stay. Each four-day Trekker ticket is worth €100.

### Big audience for 'Tracks and Trails'

AN AVERAGE of 200,000 people tuned in each week to the five-part television series 'Tracks and Trails' on RTE 1 in July and August.

Supported by Fáilte Ireland, each programme in the series featured spectacular walks and cycle tracks in stunning locations across Ireland and was presented by a different celebrity guest each week.

### New standards assessor

TOURISM Standards Assessments (TSA) has been appointed by Fáilte Ireland to undertake a range of existing quality assurance assessments on behalf of the National Tourism Development Authority.

TSA will now assess, grade, categorise and renew a number of tourism services, including B&Bs, individual self-catering, golf courses, and spa and wellness.

# Research Update

Policy and Futures Division

Tel: 01 8847205

e-mail: research.statistics@failteireland.ie

## September survey reveals scale of trading difficulties

THE FÁILTE Ireland *Tourism Barometer Survey*\*, conducted in early September, shows that tourism enterprises across all sectors of the industry continue to face the most difficult and challenging trading conditions experienced in many years.

### Accommodation

International and domestic economic conditions continue to be challenging and all accommodation sectors, with the exception of caravan and camping, report overall bednight volumes to be down on balance compared to last year. A clear majority of guesthouses, B&Bs and hostels reported a fall in overall demand. Once again it appears that the B&Bs have been hit hardest with more than three in four operators in this sector reporting volumes to be down compared to last year.

It has been a good year to date for the caravan and camping sector with almost half of all owners stating that demand is up on last year. Although just over two fifths of all hotels reported a fall in demand, apart from caravan and camping, it is the sector least affected. A third of all hoteliers reported overall demand for bednights to be up, with another quarter stating that demand was similar to last year.

### Hotels

The downturn in bednight volumes in the hotel sector over the first eight months of the year can largely be attributed to falling demand in the overseas markets.

The volume of domestic bednights is relatively strong, almost half of hoteliers reported an increase in demand and further 24% cited bednights to be on a par with the same period last year. The consistent strength of the euro against sterling has contributed to the continuing underperformance of the British market with more than two

in five hoteliers citing a fall in demand compared to last year.

More than two thirds of all hoteliers reported average room yields to be down on the same period last year. However, this is an improvement from the 83% reported in June.

### Guesthouses and B&Bs

Where guesthouses are concerned, the weak performance of the overseas market has resulted in a poor season with approximately two-thirds of all proprietors citing a decrease in bookings. The majority of guesthouse owners also report the domestic and Northern Ireland markets to be down on the corresponding period in 2009.

The B&B sector is particularly affected by the fall in demand, with the downturn in bednight volumes largely being attributed to falling demand in the overseas market by eight in ten proprietors.

### Self-catering

The fall in overall bednights in the self-catering sector is again mainly due to the poor performance of the overseas market. Although, on balance, a majority of proprietors reported bednight volumes from the domestic market to be down, almost a third of all self-catering establishments stated that business generated from the domestic market was actually up on last year.

### Caravan and camping

Caravan and camping outperformed the other sectors mainly due to performance of the domestic market with more than two thirds of all proprietors

reporting a growth.

### Hostels

Hostels reported business to be down across all market areas. Although three-quarters reported a fall in overseas demand, more than half of all hostel owners stated that domestic demand was either on a par or up on last year.

### Ireland Market

Almost a half of all hoteliers have experienced increasing domestic demand compared to the same period last year and the evidence suggests that the upturn can be attributed to improved business across a number of key domestic market segments.

Weekend breaks, mid-week breaks and general leisure segments have performed better with more than a third of all hoteliers stating demand to be slightly, or significantly, up on last year. The business/corporate and special events markets are still struggling, almost half of all hoteliers stated that these segments were down slightly or down significantly on last year.

### Activity providers, attractions, retail, restaurants and transport

#### Activities

All activity providers have experienced a decline in overseas business compared to the same period last year. Almost nine-in-ten angling providers and three-quarters of all golf courses reported overseas business to be down. The picture is not much better for cruising and equestrian, approximately half of all providers

also reported overseas business to be down on last year.

### Visitor attractions, retailers, restaurants and language schools (EFL)

Visitor attractions and retailers have been hit particularly hard, more than 7 in 10 retailers and two-thirds of all attractions managers reported overseas business to be down this year compared to the same period last year. In relative terms the restaurants and language schools performed better, 7 in 10 of all language school managers and half of all restaurateurs cited overseas business levels to be up or on a par with last year.

### Car hire and coach operators

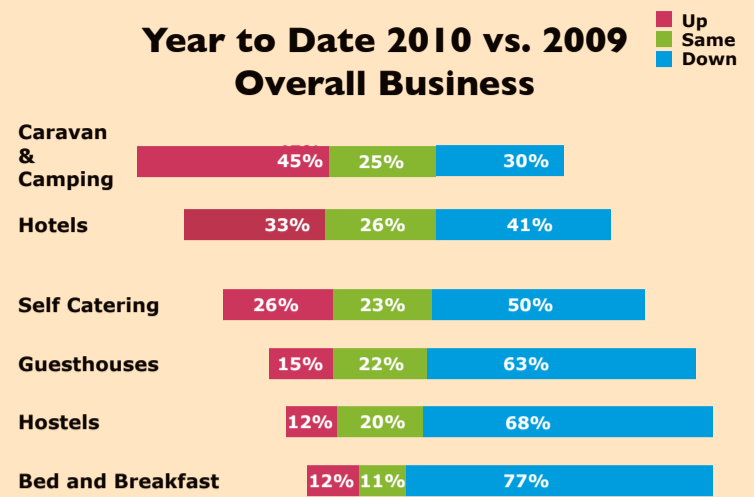
A challenging trading environment is particularly evident for car hire companies. Four-fifths of all car hire companies reported reduced levels of overseas tourism demand when compared to the same period last year. Relatively speaking the picture is more positive for coach operators, although half reported reduced levels of overseas demand to last year, almost a quarter cited increased levels of demand.

### Overseas Market Performance

The majority of hotel managers have on balance experienced deteriorating demand across all of their main overseas markets. Almost half of all hotel managers reported a drop in demand from the US market, while a similar proportion cited a softening demand from Britain.

Compared to the same period last year more than two-fifths of all guesthouses and half of all B&Bs reported a drop in demand

## Year to Date 2010 vs. 2009 Overall Business



Tourism Barometer Survey - September 2010

across all their main markets. The United States and Britain performed worst.

### Prospects

The majority of tourism proprietors have continuing concerns about their prospects for the remainder of the year.

The majority of all accommodation owners expect their overall volume of overseas bednights to decline in the coming months. Hostels and B&Bs are the most pessimistic. More than three-quarters of all B&B proprietors and approximately two-thirds of all hostel owners expect their overseas bednights to further decline in the coming months. Relatively speaking, hoteliers and the caravan and camping operators are least pessimistic, about half expect overseas demand to remain steady or increase.

Overall, activity product providers, with the exception of cruising, are also pessimistic regarding their overseas business prospects for the coming months. Almost 9 in 10 of all angling and more than 7 in 10 of all golf providers anticipate a decline in overseas demand. Negative sentiment is least evident in respect of cruising; only a third of operators surveyed anticipated a decrease in overseas demand compared to the corresponding period last year.

Negative sentiment is also evident amongst visitor attractions, retailers and coach operators with at least half anticipating a decline in overseas demand. Language schools are the most optimistic with more than half forecasting improved

levels of overseas demand over the coming months.

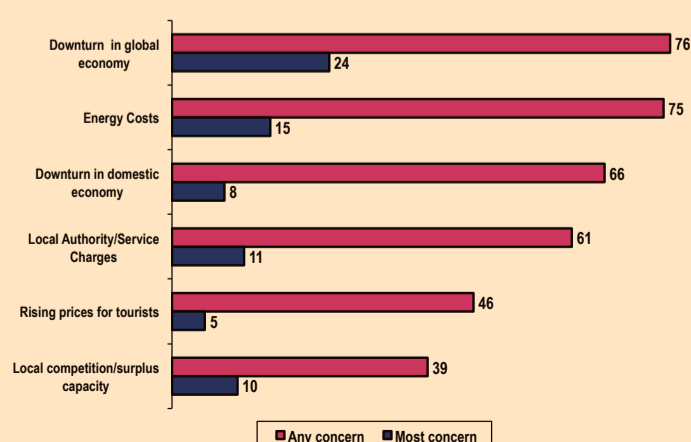
### Factors impacting on performance

Very difficult conditions still persist throughout the Irish economy and not surprisingly tourism enterprises in Ireland remain cautious. More than half of all respondents failed to identify any positive factors affecting their business. The increase in people holidaying at home and staying local, the good weather and repeat and return business were mentioned as positives, albeit by a minority.

Unsurprisingly the economic downturn has been the most frequently cited negative factor over the past two years and yet again it has been singled out as the main factor having impacted negatively on performance. Almost a fifth of all tourism operators mentioned the economic downturn or recession spontaneously. Operators also referred to problems competing with cheaply priced hotels and the problems associated with decreasing revenues coupled with increasing costs.

\*The *Tourism Barometer* is a state-of-the-season survey designed to obtain an insight into the performance of all sectors of the industry in Ireland for the year to date compared to the corresponding period in 2009, and to determine the industry's expectations for the remainder of the year. The results are based on a thousand interviews conducted during the first two weeks of September.

## Issues of Concern (%)



Tourism Barometer Survey - September 2010

## Economic downturns trouble majority of tourism businesses

THE GLOBAL and domestic economic downturns once again dominate the concerns of the overwhelming majority of tourism businesses. Energy costs were also cited as a pressing issue for three quarters of all operators.

Tourism operators were also asked to identify the issue of greatest concern. Almost a quarter of all proprietors across all tourism businesses highlighted the global economic downturn as the predominant concern.

Local authority service charges are a significant issue for accommodation providers. Labour costs are a major worry for restaurateurs, while car hire

operators stated that insurance costs were their single biggest concern.

### Employment

With the overall volume of bednights reported to be down from the same period last year many accommodation proprietors have reduced staffing levels. This reduction is most evident in respect of the hotel

sector where more than half of all hoteliers cited employment across all categories of staff to be down on the same period last year.

### Economic crisis in focus

More than half of all tourism businesses stated that the economic downturn will continue to impact negatively on the local tourism industry for the foreseeable future, while just over a fifth are of the opinion that the economic downturn will continue to impact negatively on the industry in the short-term.

# INTERVIEW: Geoff Fenlon

**Geoff Fenlon, General Manager of the UK's premier convention centre, The ICC Birmingham, and a member of the Optimus Approvals Board, talks to John Brown about the convention business and the benefits to businesses that commit to continuous improvement and superior performance**

Geoff Fenlon is no stranger to the Irish trade having hosted a Fáilte Ireland organised 'best practice benchmarking' study visit by Irish hospitality managers to the Edinburgh International Conference Centre in 2005. Indeed, as Business Excellence Director for the centre, he guided it to win the European Quality Award in 2003, to achieve accreditation to ISO 9001 and ISO 14001, and to become the highest-scoring Hospitality Assured organisation for five consecutive years to 2006.

He is currently applying the European Quality Award, now referred to as the EFQM Excellence Award, at The ICC Birmingham – the UK's premier convention centre, where he is General Manager.

Fenlon says it is not a short-term approach to the development of a service excellence culture. "It takes three to four years or longer to move through the different stages. The real benefits are gained by companies that embed the scheme and allow it to evolve within the organisation."

The ICC Birmingham was voted the UK's Best Conference Centre in 2007 and 2008, the Heart of England 2009 Best Conference Centre, and Best Business Tourism Business. Asked why it is so important to strive for this level of performance, Fenlon says that standards are critical. "It is a sales imperative and, ideally, the standard introduced should be easily recognisable to your clients. It can be ISO 9001, ISO 14001 or another standard but it should be internationally recognised."

For Fenlon, having a set of standardised requirements does not mean that you have achieved high standards. "It is vital that companies set down their own definition of quality and good level of service. For me this means the highest."

Having defined and introduced standards in both Edinburgh and

Birmingham convention centres, Fenlon says the process that was followed to attain them and maintain the level achieved leads to significant efficiencies, particularly when applied to the people in the front line delivering the service.

"You change the way you do business, you keep focused on the customer, and you challenge yourself. You ask yourself is this enabling me to run my business profitably, is it adding value to the customer. If the answer to any of these questions is no, you must ask yourself why am I doing this."

### Optimus hotels stand out

Fenlon was invited by Fáilte Ireland to join the Optimus Approvals Board in 2007. The independent Board acts as the guardian of the Optimus standard and verifies the assessment process.

A frequent visitor to Ireland, in particular Dublin, Fenlon says he stays in both Optimus and non-Optimus hotels. "You can tell the difference. There is a level of engagement with guests in Optimus hotels that is much higher than in others."

"Overall, I think Ireland has one of the highest standards of hospitality in Europe. It is consistently high. And, unlike the arrogance which I have experienced in some

countries, there is a willingness among staff in the Irish industry to say 'how can we do better.'"

### Consultant to The Convention Centre Dublin

A team from the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham, advises on the day-to-day operation of The Convention Centre Dublin. It has been hired by the Spencer Dock Convention Centre Dublin company which will run the centre for the next 25 years.

Fenlon acts as a consultant to the operational team in Dublin. He believes the centre will act as a lens to focus international delegates on the ever-increasing standards of hospitality in Ireland.

"The delegates will return home with positive thoughts of returning to Dublin for a city break or for a longer holiday in Ireland."

In a public-private partnership agreement, the State will pay an annual charge to the Spencer Dock Convention Centre Dublin company for 25 years. Not surprisingly, there is much interest in the potential return on this investment.

Fenlon says the presence of The ICC Birmingham boosts the economy of Birmingham by £100 million a year, while the centre in Edinburgh attracts visitors who spend £20 million a year in the city.



Geoff Fenlon, General Manager, The ICC Birmingham – the UK's premier convention centre, and a member of the Optimus Approvals Board

He says the Birmingham, Edinburgh and Dublin centres are all part of urban regeneration. "Their presence is not only good for existing local businesses but also encourages other businesses, large and small, to establish nearby."

"There is also a significant affect on employment both direct in the centres and in the outlying businesses that gather around."

Fenlon says The Convention Centre Dublin has significant advantage over many competing conference centres in Europe. International associations will give serious consideration to holding their conference in a city which is the capital of a country which has huge recognition among people all over the world.

He says the city centre location of the centre, close to the airport and sea port, is extremely valuable. Another great advantage is the culture of the city and country.

"The fun-loving culture, the arts and the fascinating architecture are all notable attractors," he says.

### Location should benefit Dublin convention centre

The Convention Centre Dublin has opened at a time when the key generating markets are experiencing economic difficulties. But Fenlon believes that the centre should hold

up well because of its location.

He says that international association conferences are normally subject to advance planning of between four and eight years. This should be helpful when considering present economic conditions. UK national associations will consider Dublin as a UK/Ireland location. "A UK association is unlikely to consider, for example, Paris but Dublin would definitely be in the frame."

Fenlon says that despite the recession, The ICC Birmingham has seen an increase in delegate numbers. He believes Dublin will do well too because of its geographical position which is easy to travel to.

When convention centres sprang up across Europe in the years after the Second World War, they were rarely expected to generate operating profits and survived on subsidies. But Fenlon says those days are long gone.

"All over Europe, centres are looking to operate profitably and many have truly moved into profit. This has been achieved through business efficiencies and exceeding the expectations of clients."

"This is where Optimus and other similar programmes come to the fore. They encourage people to look at their own operation in a different way and to see where improvements should be made to benefit the business."

## Geoff Fenlon: The CV

**CURRENT ROLES:**  
General Manager, The ICC Birmingham, Faculty member of the Association International des Palais de Congres Academy, Founding trustee of People 1st-a UK Sector Skills Council

**PREVIOUS ROLES:** Business Excellence Director, Edinburgh International Conference Centre.

**BIRTH PLACE/HOME:**  
Born - Wirral, Merseyside  
Home – Birmingham/ Dunfermline

**EDUCATION:**  
Edinburgh University, MBA

**FAMILY:**  
Married. Two children, age 16 & 18

**HOBBIES:**  
Hill Walking

## Solheim Cup to boost golf tourism

**ASTHE Europe victory in the Ryder Cup 2010 remains a pleasant memory, attention is shifting to the next golfing clash between the United States and Europe, the Solheim Cup to be played at Killeen Castle, Co Meath, 23 – 25 September 2011.**

European Captain for the event, Alison Nicholas, and Vice Captain Annika Sorenstam inspected the Jack Nicklaus Signature course at Killeen Castle in September, as part of their preparation and planning to bring back the Solheim Cup to Europe, after three consecutive defeats in this biennial battle.

The level of interest in ladies golf was evident at the AIB Ladies Irish Open in August at Killeen Castle when 35,000 spectators passed through the gates. They enjoyed outstanding golf from a field which included 17 of the 2009 Solheim

Cup players, 12 from Europe and five from the US. It was an exciting curtain raiser for next year's event which has a target of attracting between 80,000 and 100,000 spectators.

Both events and others are supported by Fáilte Ireland as part of its golf strategy to invest in major tournaments which attract visitors and international media coverage in Ireland's key golf markets.

The AIB Ladies Irish Open followed the hugely successful 3 Irish Open in Killarney, 28-31 July, also supported by Fáilte Ireland. This event attracted

81,000 spectators and huge media interest at home and overseas.

This year, Fáilte Ireland embarked upon a new approach to widen the appeal of the Irish Open and drive visitors to Kerry for the public holiday weekend. The annual Killarney Summerfest was moved forward to coincide with the Open and to provide added incentive for potential visitors. This strategy will also be used for the Solheim Cup next year which will offer not only great golf but entertainment and activities for visitors of all ages – making it the 'must see' event of the year.

In addition, Kerry tourism businesses committed to a Customer Care Charter, similar to that developed for the Volvo Ocean Race in Galway last year. The charter guaranteed a comfortable,

safe, informative and memorable experience as well as good value for money for all visitors during the event.



Christina Kim, member of the winning American Solheim Cup teams in 2005 and 2009, and George Hook, broadcaster and journalist, team up for the AIB Ladies Irish Open Pro Am at Killeen Castle in August  
Left: The Solheim Cup