

# tourism matters



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## Economic factors pose challenges for tourism industry

**TOURISM enterprises are facing challenging circumstances as we reach the main tourist season with concerns about rising energy costs, uncertainties in both global and national economies and the effect of unfavourable exchange rates. Businesses contacted by Fáilte Ireland regarding their performance to date this year and prospects for the coming months are generally disappointed about business in the first five months of the year and are only marginally more optimistic about the season to come.**

A majority of hotels, guesthouses and hostels expect their overall peak season business to be either on a par or up on last year. Similar sentiments were expressed by coach operators, car rental companies, cruising operators, equestrian centres and visitor attractions. It should be noted, however, that across all sectors the majority expect their overseas business to be similar to last year's levels rather than up. The British market is reckoned to offer the best prospect for at least maintaining last year's level of business, notwithstanding the weakness of sterling against the euro, while there is some prospect for modest growth from mainland Europe. Enterprises remain very circumspect regarding any possibility of growth from the United States.

Apart from the economic and exchange rate difficulties affecting accommodation providers, rising costs and increased competition are other factors causing concern, as is the increasing pattern of late bookings. Exceptional fuel increases are another major concern for the industry.

After seven years of growth there are also concerns about an over-reliance on the domestic market with, for example, the hotel sector reporting domestic nights for the half year as more or less on a par with last year. The domestic market is expected to show some growth albeit at a lower level than experienced in recent years.

Despite the difficult circumstances there is still a lot to play for in 2008 and it is reasonable to aspire to levels of tourist arrivals at least close to last year's record levels. Continued investment in new and existing visitor attractions, activities and events will help to maintain Ireland's share of the overseas markets despite increasing competition. The ongoing implementation of the regional tourism development strategies with investment in regionally focused international and domestic marketing programmes will contribute towards achieving these targets.

In an effort to sustain vital domestic tourism business, this year's €3 million marketing campaign includes national advertising, public relations, the consumer website [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie), a re-designed *Discover Ireland 08* brochure, major stands at holiday fairs, and promotions such as SuperValu Getaway Breaks.

Again this year the advertising theme 'Right Here, Right Now' aims to create spontaneity and excitement around an Irish break. A highly catchy music track, called 'Highs & Lows', helps to convey a new and vibrant Ireland in television commercials running throughout the year.

In addition to the national brand television campaign, themed commercials have been produced to highlight what specific regions of the country have to offer while a series of press and radio advertisements promotes events and festivals around the country.

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### Minister launches public awareness campaign



The Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, Martin Cullen, TD, launched Fáilte Ireland's second Public Awareness Campaign on 22 May. The main objective of the campaign is to generate awareness among the wider public of the importance of tourism as a key indigenous industry within the Irish economy.

The four-week, billboard poster campaign features five posters placed on 200 sites nationwide.

Above: Minister Cullen launched the campaign at the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism in Kildare Street with the assistance of Gillian Bowler, Chairman of Fáilte Ireland, and passing tourists

Below: Two of the five public awareness posters



Irish and Proud of it

Irish Tourism - Everyone has a part to play



The Look of the Irish

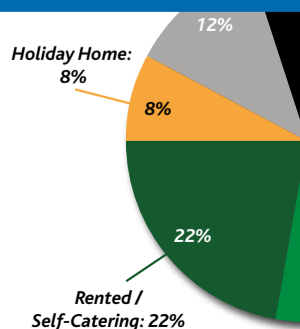
Irish Tourism - Everyone is part of the team

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# South West pilots adventure holiday experience

LOCAL tourism providers in Cork and Kerry have been working with Fáilte Ireland over the past 18 months or so to develop an adventure holiday experience in the South West region. Killarney and Bantry have been selected as the two hubs for the initial phase of this initiative, around which the adventure consumer offering will be based.

As part of the initiative, a promotional programme is being put in place to drive adventure business to the two areas in 2008. This includes a brochure for distribution at adventure shows at home and overseas and through direct mail, a dedicated section on the home holiday website [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie) including some priced adventure offers, as well as advertising in targeted media.

The project began with a series of consultative meetings with local industry, to agree a vision of what the ideal adventure experience in Cork and Kerry might look like, and a mechanism for developing this vision. Out of these meetings a development plan was produced, which was tested on a series of consumer focus groups in the UK and Ireland last year.

A cornerstone of the project is a series of 'adventure friendly' charters which operators must sign up to in order to be part of the initiative. Industry participants must also take part in adventure product training seminars with topics such as Customer Care, Marketing, and the Leave No Trace countryside code of ethics.

This project is one of four selected for piloting around the country to develop product offerings which will meet the changing needs of consumers. The other three pilots are Family Holidays in the South East; Cultural Activities in Inishbofin, Inishturk and Clare Island; and Food in the Lakelands and Inland Waterways.



At the Outdoors Show in the NEC Birmingham in March were (l. to r.): Marie Keane, Fáilte Ireland South West; Michael O'Sullivan, Killarney Chamber of Tourism & Commerce; and Kay Woods, Venture Ireland

## Fund launched to encourage innovation

FÁILTE Ireland has launched an Innovation Fund, the objective of which is to encourage innovation and stimulate investment across a range of new tourism products and services. Funding in the form of grant aid is available for feasibility studies and business plans.

Through this support, Fáilte Ireland aims to foster a culture of innovation and research in tourism that will support the development of new or varied concepts, products, services and business processes.

Fáilte Ireland will assist potential investors of new/innovative tourist projects in assessing the viability of such concepts in order to support growth and expansion in the tourism sector.

Proposals for studies are being actively sought from both the private and public / not for profit sectors. Grants of up to 50% of the cost of the study are available and proposals will be assessed on a continuing basis throughout the year.

A full set of operational guidelines is available from the Fáilte Ireland website at [www.failteireland.ie](http://www.failteireland.ie). These set out the aims, eligibility criteria, and proposal requirements along with levels of funding and contact details.

# New categorisation system for health and wellness sector rolled out

A NEW categorisation system for the health and wellness sector in Ireland has been launched by Fáilte Ireland. Seventy-two properties have been categorised under the new system which will help existing and prospective customers to better understand the variety of health and wellness offerings available to them. Ireland is the first country in Europe to launch such a complete categorisation.

The broad range of health and wellness retreats is defined under the following categories: hotel spas, destination spas, resort spas and specialised retreats. The aim is to develop a representative categorisation system which is meaningful to consumers, reflects the nuance of different supplier offerings and incorporates all elements of the

spa 'experience'. Using the system, spa-goers can now make informed choices on their break away and find the products that best suit their needs.

Paul Keeley, Director of Business Development and Investment, Fáilte Ireland, said: "I would like to acknowledge the huge investment by our private sector partners in

creating a world-class health and wellness product. Our collective efforts in creating this new categorisation system will enable consumers to make a more informed choice and allow us to better meet customer expectations.

"The increasing popularity of the health and wellness sector is now viewed as an important part of our tourism product. The explosion in the quality and quantity of spa offerings throughout Ireland has fuelled an increase in demand both domestically and internationally."

The new categorisation system has been developed by Fáilte Ireland, working in consultation with an industry steering group, on foot of extensive research on the health and wellness sector. Each

spa has been assigned to one of the categories above based on their facilities and the types of products they offer.

A new brochure and website have been developed to provide consumers with descriptions of the spa categories, information on the type of spa breaks available and the spa 'experience' including 'spa speak', along with a full listing of the health and wellness properties.

The brochure will be distributed throughout the domestic market as well as the UK, USA, Italy, Germany and France. Consumers can also find out about health and wellness breaks in Ireland by visiting [www.discoverireland.ie/wellness](http://www.discoverireland.ie/wellness).

## Themed looped walks developed in 18 counties

IN THE past two years, 78 looped walks have been developed throughout the country by Fáilte Ireland with the support of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The walks have been themed under three headings – heritage, nature, and mountain & coastal.

Phase three of the national looped walks initiative has been completed. There are now looped walks in 18 counties.

A number of walks have two or three loops from the trailhead to choose from. Each trailhead provides facilities such as car parks, map boards and picnic areas.

By the end of 2008, over 100 looped walks in 26 counties will be completed. Local community and walking groups have been supportive of the initiative as have the Irish Sports Council and Coillte.

The website [www.discoverireland.ie/walking](http://www.discoverireland.ie/walking) gives details of all looped walks including direc-

tions and downloadable maps for visitors to take with them. It also provides information on all walking operators and links to other walks available to visitors.

In conjunction with Coillte, a national trails day is planned for the autumn to highlight the abundance of walks available throughout the country.

Market research has shown that visitors are now seeking quality looped walks in areas of outstanding scenic beauty, off road and of 1.5 to 3 hours duration. Visitors also want to interact with local people and enjoy a relaxing, peaceful holiday in rural areas.

# Cruise hire operators attend eBusiness workshop

THE INLAND Cruising Strategy Implementation Group met on board the MV Shannon Princess in April to review progress in the implementation of the inland cruising market development plan 2007-2010.

The plan was launched last year by Fáilte Ireland with the close support and cooperation of Waterways Ireland, the Irish Boat Rental Association, local tourism bodies and the industry in its broadest sense.

As one of many development projects being conducted with the cruise hire sector, an eBusiness workshop was held in the Radisson SAS Hotel, Athlone, on 22 April. The aim of the workshop was to provide participants with information about online marketing and provide tips on how small businesses can maximise return on their websites.

The course facilitator, Karen Henry, covered a wide range of topics including online booking, search engine optimisation, online marketing and Web 2.0 applications.

The work with the inland cruising sector forms part of a broader lakelands and inland waterways initiative launched in 2007 which aims to promote and develop water and land-based activities from Belleek in Co. Fermanagh to Co. Limerick. Fáilte Ireland and Waterways Ireland are spearheading a €2 million promotional campaign which aims to significantly boost visitor numbers to the lakelands regions over the next three years.

The campaign involves cross-border, inter-agency partnerships between Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Shannon Development and local authorities from Lough Erne to the Shannon basin.



An eBusiness workshop for the cruise hire sector was held in the Radisson SAS Hotel, Athlone, on 22 April. Left to right are: Jocelyn Hanns, Carrickcraft; Angus Levie, Shannon Castle Line; and Siobhán Reynolds, Fáilte Ireland

## Connemara campaign to boost holiday visits to the West

**AN INTERNATIONAL and domestic marketing campaign to promote Connemara as a tourist destination is underway. Fáilte Ireland is spearheading a three-year marketing drive which has the support of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Tourism Ireland and tourism interests in Connemara.**

The objective is to maximise the potential of Connemara to help deliver the Fáilte Ireland West targets to grow holiday visitors to the west by 30 per cent and tourism earnings to €980 million in the three-year period to 2010.

The campaign budget in 2008 is €250,000. It is hoped that a similar sum will be available in each of the following two years. The Connemara campaign is additional to Fáilte Ireland's main marketing campaign for the west which also incorporates aspects of Connemara.

### The 2008 Connemara campaign

A new brand identity for Connemara has been rolled

out. The Connemara brand will play a significant role in Fáilte Ireland West's aim to position the west of Ireland as a haven for outdoor enthusiasts. There will be a strong focus on the outdoors and, in particular, on the outdoor events taking place in the west in 2008.

Outdoor events in Connemara include the Fáilte Ireland Connemara Marathon (April), the Leenane Walking Festival (May) and the Gael Force three-day adventure race (September). A Clifden Cycle race on the new cycling hubs is planned for 2009.

A dedicated Connemara brochure has been published in French and English language editions.

In April a new website [www.discoverireland.ie/connemara](http://www.discoverireland.ie/connemara) went live. It highlights the diverse range of things to do with a strong focus on accommodation offers. Also in April a domestic radio campaign was supported with advertorials in national dailies.

Mainland Europe is an increasingly important source of visitors for the west of Ireland. This year Tourism Ireland is spending €100,000 in France and a similar sum in Italy on regional advertising for the Ireland West region. Connemara is being highlighted in the print campaign which runs from mid-March to June and ties in



Ambassador Anne Anderson hosted a reception in the Embassy of Ireland, Paris (22 April) on the occasion of the première of the French film *2 jours à tuer* which was filmed on location in Connemara and part-sponsored by Fáilte Ireland.

Left to right are: John Coyle, Renvyle House Hotel; John Concannon, Fáilte Ireland; Ambassador Anderson; and Patrick O'Flaherty, Ballynahinch Castle Hotel

with the Ireland tv campaign.

Major promotions highlighting Connemara include Salon Tourissima in Lille (February/March) and Salon du Tourisme in Lyon (March).

Connemara was a location for the French film production *2 jours à tuer* – part-sponsored by Fáilte Ireland – which premiered in Paris in April prior to general cinema release. A promotional event for Connemara was organised in Paris to coincide with the release.

Fáilte Ireland, in conjunction with Tourism Ireland,

operates a year-round programme of media visits. It is expected that up to 100 international journalists will visit Connemara this year as part of this publicity programme.

Ciara O'Mahony, Regional Development Tourism Officer, Fáilte Ireland, says that over the years various areas within Connemara have been promoted by local marketing groups. "Now these groups are supporting this unified approach to marketing the region and contributing financially to the campaign."

## Meitheal attracts over 200 tour operators



Dublin's Citywest Hotel was the venue in May for Meitheal – the Irish Tourism Trade Fair, organised by Fáilte Ireland in conjunction with Tourism Ireland. The event attracted over 200 overseas operators and over 300 Irish producers.

Meitheal 2008 is Ireland's largest tourism trade fair. It is expected that up to €20 million in business will be generated by the event.

At Meitheal 2008 are (l. to r.): Lorraine Ailis, Tower Hotel Group; Donal Hughes, 32CC – Irish Coaches; Shaun Quinn, Fáilte Ireland; Hilary Finlay, Ireland's Blue Book; Paul O'Toole, Tourism Ireland; and Paul O'Neill, CIE Tours

## New angling guides to reel in tourists

**NEW PROMOTIONAL guides to angling in Ireland have been published by Fáilte Ireland as part of the implementation of the strategy for Irish angling tourism. They will be distributed through Tourism Ireland offices.**

The three guides to pike, coarse and sea angling were launched at the Go Fishing Show, NEC Birmingham, in March. Two new game angling guides to sea trout/salmon and brown trout fishing will be published in July.

Fáilte Ireland and the Central and Regional Fisheries Boards led the development of the strategy for tourism angling which was produced by Genesis Strategic Management Consultants. A summary of the study is available on the website [www.failteireland.ie](http://www.failteireland.ie)

The study states that 'the potential for growth appears significant – angling in Ireland is well regarded and effective in meeting the needs of identifiable tourist segments'.

A total of 106,000 overseas visitors participated in angling in 2006 and spent an estimated €90.4 million. The target set out in the strategy is to grow the number of visitors to 131,000 and the revenue to €105 million by 2010.

Other marketing activities in 2008 include angling promotions in the UK, France and the Netherlands, and a significant programme of overseas journalist visits from major angling publications.

Under the National Development Plan 2007-2013, funding is being provided to angling through the Infrastructure Fund. In 2007, over 40 angling projects with associated grants of around €2 million were approved for funding.

## Carlingford & the Cooley Peninsula wins European Union award

**CARLINGFORD and the Cooley Peninsula have been awarded the title of European Destinations of Excellence – Tourism & Intangible Heritage 2008, in a competition funded and organised by Fáilte Ireland with support from the European Union.**

The competition received entries from areas that have implemented marketing initiatives to preserve local, natural and cultural heritage, while also ensuring the area's social, cultural and environmental sustainability. Carlingford and the Cooley Peninsula faced top competition from the other four finalists – Youghal Co. Cork, Ballyhoura Co. Limerick, and Listowel and Milltown in Co. Kerry.

"With the area's natural resources, a full calendar of events and a strong multidisciplinary tourism association, Carlingford and the Cooley Peninsula were worthy winners of this year's competition" said Sheena Doyle, Marketing Co-ordinator, Fáilte Ireland.

The area hosts a range of events throughout the year focusing on their intangible heritage from the 'Birds on the Bay' and a 'Traditional Irish Winter School' in February, to the Táin Walking Festival in March and the Oyster Festival in September. In addition, following in the steps of Setanta and reflecting its Celtic heritage, the Poc Fada is hosted annually on the mountains and attracts national competitors.

"This award is recognition of the commitment and hard work undertaken by the local community over many years in promoting the area and welcoming visitors. It represents a wonderful opportunity to showcase the Carlingford/Cooley Peninsula area to a wider overseas audience," said Kevin Kidney, General Manager, Fáilte Ireland East & Midlands.

The aim of this European Destinations of Excellence Competition is to highlight the value, diversity and shared characteristics of European tourist destinations, and to promote destinations where the economic growth objective is pursued in such a way as to ensure the social, cultural and environmental sustainability of tourism.

The adjudicators were very impressed with the variety of products and the high standards and commitment of the local groups. Each group recognised their destination's needs and demonstrated awareness for ongoing improvement of their tourism experience.

## Assistance Service helps 574 tourists

**THE IRISH Tourist Assistance Service (ITAS) has released its annual statistics of tourist crime for 2007. Most common crimes against tourists were theft from the person, theft from cars and burglaries.**

ITAS received 315 incidents of tourist crime and traumatic incidents involving 574 tourists. The main crime against tourists was theft from person at 50%, followed by theft from cars and burglaries at 17 cases. 77% of theft from car cases relate to thefts from hired cars.

Dublin Garda stations (74%) continue to refer the majority of the cases to ITAS followed by Garda stations in Galway, Cork, Kerry and Clare.

There were 20 cases of violent crimes against tourists referred in 2007 compared with 14 cases in 2006.

Crimes tended to occur when tourists were sightseeing, shopping and generally relaxing in

restaurants and cafés. Referrals to ITAS indicate that tourists are more likely to be victims of crime between 2-6pm and be females aged between 17-24yrs.

ITAS is a free nationwide service offering support and assistance to tourists who are victimised while visiting Ireland. It is open seven days a week and can be contacted on 01 478 5295. Opening hours: Monday – Saturday, 10am-6pm; Sundays and Bank Holidays, 12-6pm.

Sponsors of ITAS include Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime (through Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform), Fáilte Ireland, Dublin City Council, Irish Hotels Federation, and Vintners Federation of Ireland.

# Practical business

**Senior managers are choosing a management development programme which delivers the best in learning but at a pace which suits their busy lives. John Brown reports**

**SIGNIFICANT benefits, both business and personal, are reported by senior managers in the tourism and hospitality industry who have graduated from the six-month, flexible Management Development Programme (MDP), designed by Fáilte Ireland and delivered in association with Cornell University.**

For busy managers, a commitment of 15 days over six months to a series of two-day meetings, residential workshops and an international site visit is very realistic. Back at base, additional time is needed throughout the programme for web-based learning, reflective learning and work-based projects.

The Management Development Programme focuses on five key areas: management, strategy & marketing, operations, finance and human resources. Participants work on current business challenges through discussion and testing the application of learning back at work.

John Brennan, General Manager of the Park Hotel Kenmare, graduated from the programme in 2006. He does not have an academic background and found the whole experience 'wonderful'.

"It is a very comprehensive programme executed by experts in their field. Each element was most informative and allowed for much interaction with the class," he says.

A more recent graduate is Alison Redmond, Operations Manager of Faithlegg Estate, Co Waterford. She says it was great to be involved: "There are not a lot of programmes that provide training for senior management. This one gets the balance right: combining learning and new friendships is always a winner!"

Since completing the programme, Alison Redmond has taken a fresh look at Faithlegg's sales and marketing plan. "We redefined our target markets, looked at our unique selling points and defined our real competitors.

"Human resource management is constantly changing in line with current legislation. I felt the HR module was great

in bringing us up to speed with current legislation and practices," she says.

The programme offers the opportunity to network. Kevin Moriarty, Fáilte Ireland's Head of Enterprise and Management Support, says that the residential workshops are designed to encourage networking which brings huge benefits to participants.

"Both personal and business friendships have formed and solutions to business problems have been found in discussions which often go well into the night," he says.

The opportunity to network was welcomed by John Brennan: "The camaraderie that built up within the group has remained and many times I have contacted someone from the course to bounce a question off."

The highlight of the programme for many participants is the module in Cornell University, New York. Kevin Moriarty says that the partnership with Cornell provides a tremendous experience for participants. The university, which is ranked 10th best in the world, is very strong in its range and delivery of Continuing Professional Development programmes.

"The team of professors provides a weekend of top-class programmes including strategy & marketing, e-business and innovation," he says.

Alison Redmond says that it was a unique experience to be able to visit Cornell University and participate in lectures. "The best practice site visits in New York also proved very interesting. I may even have taken some quirky ideas home with me!"

This was the most important part of the programme for John Brennan: "The willingness of the tutors in Cornell to

engage with the class and the openness of their teaching style was refreshing. They have a fountain of knowledge – oozing to share – and if the student is willing to learn it is a great opportunity."

An interesting development of the programme has been an active alumni, an exclusive club of MDP graduates. This year, for example, there has been a best practice site visit to Mal Maison in Liverpool and a food and wine experience in Beaune, and a presentation by Google.

"From the very first programme we could see that participants wanted to keep in touch. We took that idea, together with the many requests for further information on specific topics, and developed the alumni," says Kevin Moriarty.

Alison Redmond is a member of the MDP alumni. She recently took part in the visit to Beaune in France. "There are many benefits including adding to my network of friends and colleagues."

The fourth annual MDP concluded in April. Has the programme achieved the goals which were set for it? Kevin Moriarty believes that all the objectives set in 2004 have been met and much more.

"The objectives were to enhance the capability of industry to manage more effectively the major changes of the day and those coming down the line, to increase productivity and restore competitiveness.

"Evaluation of each programme points to the achievement of these goals as well as the direct impact on business performance," he says.

Planning for the 2008/09 programme, which commences in October, is underway. The Fáilte Ireland team is always looking for new ideas and new practices to bring into the programme.

"While the programme will continue to be based around the five core modules, it is constantly evolving to keep up to date with issues in the industry. We are always inviting new presenters on to the programme to ensure that the topics covered reflect the latest industry thinking," says Kevin Moriarty.

Senior managers – owners, directors and general managers – within the industry who would like to know more about the MDP or book a place on the 2008/09 programme should contact Mary Hall, MDP programme coordinator, at [mary.hall@failteireland.ie](mailto:mary.hall@failteireland.ie)



At the Management Development Programme in April are (l to r): Chris Brayden, Ballyma Executive Education, Cornell; Suzanne Gilhooley, The D Hotel, Drogheda; Aidan Pender, Director, and Sarah Buchanan, The Stone



Also in Trinity College for the Management Development Programme in April are (l to r): Helen Devlin, Premier Inn; Claire Maynard, Tower Hotel Tallaght; Kevin Moriarty, Head of Enterprise and Management Support, Fáilte Ireland; Declan Meagher, Carlton Dublin Airport; and Brian McDevlin, The Stone

## Cross-border company promotes unique area

**A €2 MILLION fund is being used to promote the tourist attractions of the cross-border counties of Cavan, Leitrim, Fermanagh, Sligo and Roscommon under the brand name Bréifne.**

Bréifne is more than the brand name for an area of Ireland with unique landscapes and a rich culture and heritage. It is also a company established in 2004 and funded by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), the four county councils in the South, the District Council of Fermanagh, the Geological Survey of Ireland and the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland.

The Chairman of the Bréifne board of directors is Vincent Reynolds, Chief Executive of Cavan County Enterprise Board. The company's executive team of three is headed up by Project Director Margaret McEvoy. Fáilte Ireland is represented on the board of directors by Special Projects Officer Geraldine Jeffers.

The original aim of Bréifne was to change the negative profile of the region due to its border location, to develop the tourism potential of the region, and to undertake a marketing programme to increase visits to the region.

Today, the specific objectives are

- to expand the UNESCO approved geopark throughout a wider area of Bréifne (presently in place only for the Marble Arch caves and part of Cuilcagh Mountain Park). If successful, this would result in the first trans-national geopark in the world.

- to continue to undertake promotional and marketing campaigns in Ireland, the UK and in niche markets further afield

- to provide support and a development framework where the activities of local tourism initiatives can be coordinated, improved and deployed to maximum benefit.

### Marketing and other activities

The available funding has been spent on:

- the research, design and printing of a 200-page, full-colour travel guide to the area. The Bréifne guide book is free of charge and is available from tourist information offices in the area or on request at [info@breifne.ie](mailto:info@breifne.ie)

- the production of a 26-minute broadcast quality documentary on Bréifne in interactive DVD format. The DVD is distributed with the guide book

- the creation of a 1,200-page website [www.breifne.ie](http://www.breifne.ie). The site details everything the visitor needs to know and more

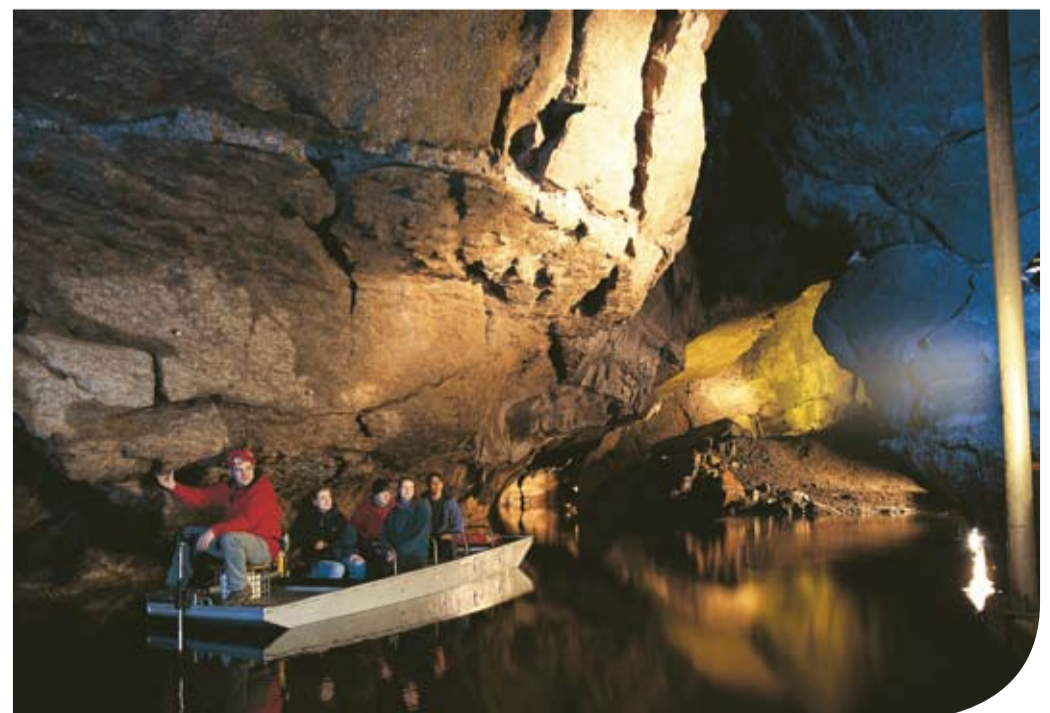
- a suite of gateway signs placed throughout the region

- a two-year marketing campaign

- the preparation of an application to UNESCO to have the Marble Arch Caves European Geopark extended into west Fermanagh and West Cavan.

Vincent Reynolds, Chairman of Bréifne, says that the landscapes of Bréifne are a key resource in the region and offer real opportunities for developing environmentally sensitive tourism products and services.

"Bréifne is helping to grow an enduring tourism sector. The project has developed strong links with the local tourism trade and community groups. Joint advertising programmes have been undertaken, and the professional development of people in tourism through training has been supported," he adds.



The amazing effects of rainwater on the porous limestone in parts of Bréifne has created an underground world

# Business solutions



Home certification ceremony in Trinity College Dublin. Participants include: Declan Meagher, Director, Nuremore Hotel, Carrickmacross; Elaine Nolan, Director – Policy & Industry Development, Fáilte Ireland; and Tom Kline, Director, The House Restaurant, Blackrock, Co Louth



Graduates of the Management Development Programme at the certification evening in Trinity College are (l. to r.): Declan Meagher, Carlton Dublin Airport Hotel; John Varley, Director, Carlton Hotel Group; James O'Brien, Carlton Milrace Hotel, Bunclody; and Lynda Foley, Carlton Atlantic Coast Hotel, Westport



Management Development Programme awards ceremony are: Declan Meagher, Director, Dublin Airport; Gráinne McKeown, Bewleys Newlands Hotel, Galway; and Angela Canny, Guinness Store House. Other attendees include: Paula Asple, Enterprise & Management Support, Fáilte Ireland; James O'Brien, Carlton Milrace Hotel; Mary Hall, Fáilte Ireland; Matt Muller, Abbey Hotel, Nenagh; and Angela Canny, Guinness Storehouse



Attending the Management Development Programme module in Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, are front row (l. to r.): Rory Fitzpatrick, Quality Hotel, Wexford; Samantha Fitzgibbon, Meyrick Hotel, Galway; Professor Cathy Enz, Cornell University; and Michael Walsh, Seven Oaks Hotel, Carlow. Back row (l. to r.): Sarah Buchanan, The Stonehouse Restaurant, Blackrock, Co. Louth; James O'Brien, Carlton Milrace Hotel; Mary Hall, Fáilte Ireland; Matt Muller, Abbey Hotel, Nenagh; and Angela Canny, Guinness Storehouse

## Industry supports publicity drive

**A KEY element of the worldwide marketing drive to promote Ireland as a tourist destination is the publicity of our attractions in the broadcast and print media. And thanks to the generous support of over 300 home-based industry partners, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland were able to host 1,350 international media visits in 2007.**

A total of 4,273 articles and broadcasts in international media generated an equivalent advertising value in excess of €132 million.

Highlights of the 2007 publicity programme included:

- Being selected as one of five countries for the week-long, daily segment *Where in the world is Matt Lauer* in NBC's news programme *Today*. Matt Lauer's reports included features on Irish fashion, food, mysticism, and music with live performances from Trad on the Prom and the Lennon Quartet.

- Dublin and Belfast were profiled on CTV's *Canada AM* – Canada's number one national morning show which attracts 1.7 million viewers.

- Ireland again featured on Channel 4's *Richard and Judy Show*.

- On the Discovery Channel, Tricon Films' new travel series highlighted the beauty spots of Clare, Monaghan and Dublin.

- On the print side, the *Sunday Times* travel supplement featured a Rob Ryan report on horse riding in Kerry and coach touring.

### 2008 publicity highlights

Recent and upcoming highlights in 2008 include:

- Gordon Ramsay's *F Word* set in the wilds of County Clare (4.5 million viewers) aired on Channel 4 in May.

- April saw the launch of *Discover Ireland's Wonderful West* campaign in key overseas markets. As part of the marketing programme, New York-based television producer Mike Mathis was commissioned to produce a half-hour programme on the attractions of the western seaboard for world-wide distribution in September.

- May saw New Zealand's national tv channel TVNZ in Ireland. Its *Breakfast* show was broadcast to an audience of 1.3 million and focused on Ireland's rich living heritage.

- June sees the arrival of Belgium's largest travel tv programme *Vlaanderen Vakantieland*. Its 15-minute programme will profile the best of our upcoming young Irish bands and musicians.

- On the print side, the January issue of *Holiday Cottages* magazine featured a six-page spread on Wexford and Waterford.

### Partnership opportunities

Representatives of Good Food Ireland and the B&B, guesthouse, self-catering and small hotel sectors met Fáilte Ireland publicity and product adviser teams in April and May to showcase their products and identify partnership opportunities for media visits and promotions.



Helena Healy, Town & Country Homes Association, and Margaret Jeffares, Good Food Ireland, at the Fáilte Ireland meeting

## COMMENT

### After the boom

Ireland has enjoyed unprecedented economic growth and prosperity in this decade. Tourism has been a dynamic driver within this expansion, achieving sustained annual growth for seven consecutive years, breaking records in terms of visitor arrivals and revenue and now accounting for almost four per cent of the country's Gross National Product.

Achieving percentage growths on a constantly rising base becomes an increasingly difficult challenge and when a combination of varying negative influences emerges at the same time, that challenge becomes even more daunting.

Soaring oil prices are escalating the cost base of carriers and others in the industry, economic difficulties in key markets have created weaker currencies, turbulence in world financial markets has raised doubts in the minds of business and leisure travellers and low growth forecasts at home have had a similar influence on our domestic market.

Following a disappointing start to the current year, it is heartening to learn that Irish tourism operators are slightly more optimistic about prospects for the summer and autumn. A majority of hotels, guesthouses and hostels expect their peak season business to be either on a par or up on last year while coach operators, car rental companies, cruising operators, equestrian centres and visitor attractions expressed a similar view regarding their overseas business.

This guarded optimism reflects the major public and private investments which have been made in the Irish tourism product in recent years. More than €2.2 billion has been invested in new and refurbished hotels over the past five years while visitor attractions, railways, roads and airports have all been expanded and upgraded. The end result is that Ireland can now offer the visitor the most modern accommodation stock in Europe coupled with much enhanced access to the country's many and varied attractions.

Economic conditions in the markets at home and overseas have raised issues in the tourism sector about over-dependence on the domestic market and the need to grow overseas business. While the reliance on the Irish market is understandable, it presents an inherent downside risk if the market itself slows down. While there are no immediate signs of a sharp downturn, it is likely that the broader economic climate will have knock-on effects into people's travel choices. Interestingly, there is no sign of any diminution in Irish residents travelling abroad. It is important, therefore, that enterprises now ensure that an equal focus is put on their efforts to target potential international visitors so that they may continue to grow more sustainable and profitable.

Fáilte Ireland is currently investing record sums in the development of the Irish tourism product, the upgrading of management and operational skills, the promotion of excellence at personnel and enterprise levels and the recruitment and training of people to fill the 6,000 jobs created by the industry every year.

As chill economic winds blow nationally and internationally, Irish tourism enterprises can be confident that they operate in a market which has shown remarkable buoyancy and are supported in terms of product and professional development and the marketing of Ireland both abroad and to its own people.

Shaun Quinn

Chief Executive – Fáilte Ireland

tourism  
matters

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# Developments in tourism training

**Aidan Pender outlines some changes that are coming down the track for education and training in the tourism industry**

**TOURISM is a skilled industry. Everyone working in the industry is in effect trading on a particular skill or "know-how" that they possess. As we know, in terms of its global positioning, Irish tourism as a whole does not tend to trade in the low value/high volume market, and is more typically understood to represent a premium product in the international market place. That said, this premium product depends, to a very considerable extent, on the professional skills of those delivering services to the visitor.**

In order to build these skills, and support their further development, Fáilte Ireland funds a range of craft education and training activities across the national network of Institutes of Technology (IOTs). In

order to ensure that these services remain relevant to the needs of both learners and the industry, some changes in how education and training are provided through the IOTs will be introduced over the next twelve months.

These changes primarily represent a shift in emphasis, although in a number of respects they herald a significant departure from previous practice. Some of the more notable developments include:

Fáilte Ireland will favour and support programmes of education and training that are work-based. This development reflects an "earn & learn" approach, which is increasingly emerging as the preferred learning style of young people. It is also of course fully consistent with a practical and applied approach to skills development. Under this

revised model approximately 70% of learning will be work-based, and 30% will take place in a full-time college learning environment.

Colleges are being prompted to take a lead role in relation to course promotion and accreditation, as well as to student recruitment and placement. Fáilte Ireland will support the IOTs in this respect, but will focus primarily on a more strategic and developmental role in supporting the industry at national level, in accordance with its statutory responsibility.

Fáilte Ireland will fund activities relating to research on skills needs, education techniques and practices (including an enhanced e-learning capability), continuing professional development for lecturers and trainers, and measures designed to enhance industry liaison with

education providers. There will also be an increased emphasis on the development of locally and regionally relevant programmes.

Fáilte Ireland will consolidate its funding and support for craft based programmes accredited at Level 4 to Level 7 of the National Framework of Qualifications. Continuing skills development and "progression pathways" through this framework will be a focus of particular support.

When fully rolled out, these measures should serve to support the continuing process of appropriate skills development in Irish tourism. Further information on the details behind these developments is available from Mary Owens at [mary.owens@failteireland.ie](mailto:mary.owens@failteireland.ie) ■

## IN BRIEF

### Learning Networks wins award

TOURISM Learning Networks, a Fáilte Ireland funded initiative to develop business skills, has been awarded a Taoiseach's Public Service Award.

The awards are presented to organisations that provide the best examples of excellence and innovation across the public service.

### Tourism signposting guide published

A GUIDE to signposting for the tourism trade has been published by Fáilte Ireland. The purpose of the leaflet is to explain the workings of the tourist signage system in Ireland, what the different signs look like and who is eligible for signage.

### People



PASCHAL MOONEY, journalist and broadcaster, has been appointed Chairman of the North West Regional Tourism Development Board.

Mr Mooney has had a life-long commitment to the development of tourism, both nationally and, particularly, in the North West.

### Recipe competition winner

LIZ MOORE, Belle Isle School of Cookery, is the winner in the Lakelands & Inland Waterways Recipe Competition, developed by Fáilte Ireland.

The competition is part of the Lakeland and Inland Waterways initiative designed to develop and market tourism along the waterways of the inland counties of Ireland.

### Ireland of the Welcomes sold

FÁILTE Ireland has sold the *Ireland of the Welcomes* magazine to Harmonia Ltd. The sale of the magazine is part of the Authority's strategy to focus all available resources on its core development remit.

## Focus on customer service skills



Fáilte Ireland's Customer Service Programme 2008 was completed at the end of June. Close to 2,000 front line employees in the hotel industry attended the one-day programme held in 104 hotels in 18 counties.

The objective of the programme is to develop and support existing customer service skills to allow employees engage with customers in a more professional, friendly and knowledgeable manner.

At the Customer Service Programme day in the Limerick Marriott Hotel are (L to r.): Sinéad Walsh, Restaurant Skills Instructor, Limerick Training Centre; Jarmila Spisiakova and Thomas Hegarty, Limerick Marriott Hotel

## eBusiness support offered to tourism enterprises

**FÁILTE Ireland has launched a funded eBusiness support initiative which will enable tourism business operators to identify their web development needs and provide them with direct support and on-site assistance.**

Responding to the issues raised in ITIC's recent report *Tourism SMEs and the Web*, Fáilte Ireland has developed an eBusiness strategy. This strategy has been designed to encourage small and medium-sized tourism businesses to be more efficient in their use of the web as a valuable business tool.

Fáilte Ireland has selected a panel of independent eBusiness consultants to work directly with tourism businesses in developing their eBusiness strategy and capabilities.

The eBusiness support is provided in three phases: WEB-CHECK involves a tailored review conducted initially on the telephone but followed by an on-site consultations; WEB-BUILD comprises a defined package of mentoring and specialist on-site support, and WEB-SKILLS support training focuses on developing capabilities to enhance the business profile and techniques to optimise on-line sales.

Participation is on a first come, first served basis. To register your details please e-mail: [webdev-project.registration@failteireland.ie](mailto:webdev-project.registration@failteireland.ie)

## Twenty improve their management skills

**TWENTY participants recently completed Fáilte Ireland's new Management Skills Programme for deputy managers and heads of department. The next programme will commence in October.**

The programme involves five two-day residential workshops over a seven-month period. The module topics are:

- Managing People Effectively
- Managing Personal and Professional Development
- Benchmarking
- Managing a Customer-focused and Dynamic Environment
- Managing for Financial Effectiveness.

Participants undertake various projects to maximise learning opportunities, beginning with one entitled 'Bridging the gap between knowing and doing'.

The course includes two e-learning elements: eHarvard's 'Leading & Motivation' and eCornell's 'Secrets of Phenomenal Customer Service'.

Advantages of residential courses include the opportunity to network and to extend discussions on learning over dinner and beyond.

On successful completion of the programme and presentation of a work-based project, participants receive a Fáilte Ireland certificate.

For more information and course bookings, please contact Mary Hall, Professional Development Advisor. Tel: 01 8847756. E-mail: [mary.hall@failteireland.ie](mailto:mary.hall@failteireland.ie)

## Report provides examples of good environmental practice

**FÁILTE Ireland has published a Review of Good Environmental Policy and Practice in the tourism sector. The review was undertaken in response to an ever-widening application of environmental legislation and policies to a wide variety of tourism businesses. The aim of the report was to establish a baseline of environmental practice within this important sector of the Irish economy.**

Results found that while there is a considerable amount of good environmental practice in the tourism industry, this is still at an early stage of development. The greatest progress has been made in the accommodation sector where significant cost savings can be achieved by tackling issues

such as waste and energy in hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs. However, there is still a good deal more to do in improving the overall environmental performance of the industry as a whole.

Paddy Mathews, Manager of Environment and Planning, Fáilte Ireland said: "The tourism industry can no longer afford to treat sustainability as a specialisation. It must become part of the way we do business every day. Integrating environmental policies into business practice is good not only for the environment but also for the bottom line of businesses. This report sets out a strategy that Fáilte Ireland will adopt to help tourism businesses become more sustainable through the introduction of good environmental practice."

Fourteen case studies showcasing practical examples of good environmental practice are also provided in the report.

A copy of the full report can be downloaded from the Fáilte Ireland website [www.failteireland.ie](http://www.failteireland.ie)

# Research Update

Research and Information Department  
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## Domestic tourism: decade of strong growth – so far

AS THE Irish and global economy enters a new and more challenging phase for tourism, it is worth reviewing the remarkable performance of domestic tourism since 2000. A detailed look at trends in domestic tourism in the last six or seven years suggests that some elements of domestic demands will be more resilient than others going forward.

### Impressive overall trends

Preliminary estimates suggest that Irish people made roughly 8 million trips within Ireland in 2007. This represents a 9% increase on the preceding year and an impressive 46% increase on domestic trips taken in 2000. While the 2007 increase in numbers is a notable rise, domestic trips have risen throughout the 2000-2007 period.

Domestic tourism revenue, meanwhile, has grown at an even faster pace, rising by 131% during the 2000-2007 period based on preliminary estimates for 2007. These estimates suggest that domestic tourism was worth more than € 1.6 billion last year, 17% up on 2006.

In order to eliminate the impact of inflation the domestic revenue figures can be converted to 2000 prices (see chart). Nevertheless strong growth is still apparent, with a real terms increase of 78% recorded for the 2000-2007 period and an increase of 17% for last year alone.

Unlike domestic tourist numbers, revenue figures did not grow continuously during the last eight years. Revenue dipped slightly in 2002, reflecting the relative slowdown in economic growth at that time. The 2002 phenomenon of rising trip numbers and falling expenditure might give an indication of how Irish consumers will react to the current slowdown, though economic conditions are a good deal more serious on this occasion.

### Short trips - the main driver of growth

While estimates for individual types of domestic trip are not yet available for 2007, clear trends are apparent in the 2000-2006 figures. Overall

holiday trips rose by 52%, while non-holiday trips rose by a more modest 18% during this period. The bulk of these non-holiday trips were visits to friends and relatives, which grew by a quarter during this time.

Given the robust economic growth during this period it is no surprise that business trips rose by 37%. On the other hand, the numbers traveling for "other" reasons fell by 23%. The most noteworthy change, however, was the rise in the number of short breaks, which rose from just over a million trips in 2000 to some 2.7 million trips in 2006. This represents a phenomenal 161% increase in trips taken.

Fáilte Ireland research suggests that much of this growth can be attributed to an increase in the frequency of domestic holidays taken rather than a rise in the number of people taking short breaks. For instance, between 2004 and 2006, the proportion of people taking three or more short breaks more than doubled, with the average number trips taken rising from 1.5 to 2 trips per annum.

The research also indicated that families with children are especially attracted to domestic holidays, with travel in Ireland being viewed as more convenient. To a lesser extent Irish short breaks were also popular with so-called empty nesters and younger single people travelling in groups or as couples, though the latter demographic group were also more likely to take overseas short breaks.

The trend in taking domestic long holidays is markedly different for the 2000-2007 period. After falling from 1.5 million trips in 2000 to 1.1 million trips in 2001, the number of trips taken has remained largely static at

between 1 and 1.1 million trips. It seems therefore that there is a dedicated cohort of Irish consumers who will always take a long holiday at home. It seems that families with older children are most likely to take long holidays at home.

The considerations used to choose holiday locations are ease of access, dining, nightlife and scenery, all featuring prominently in consumers' favoured attributes for long and short holiday destinations. For longer holidays, people felt that the availability of activities for children and adolescents were especially important.

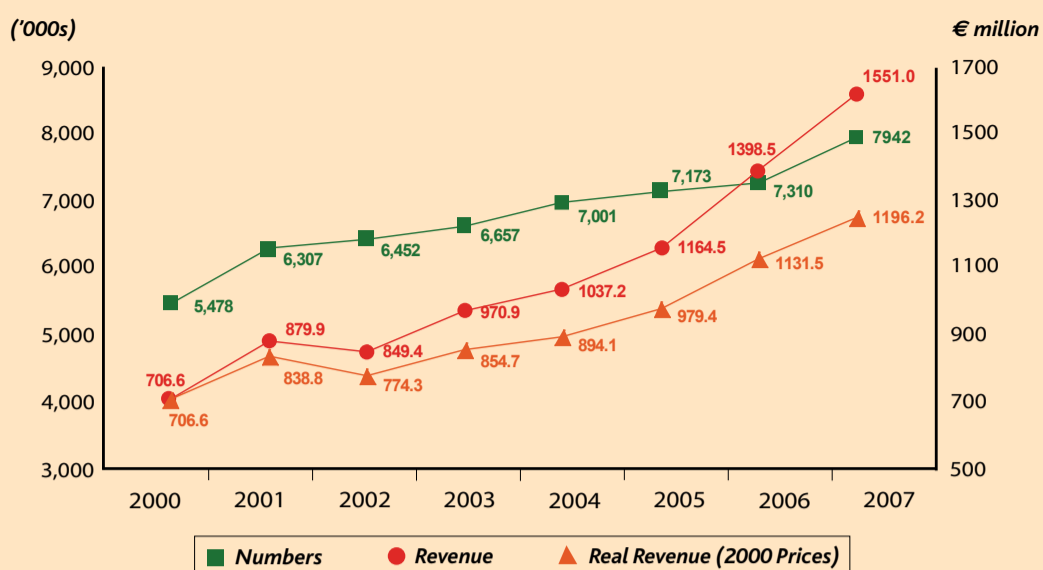
### Regions visited

With over a quarter of domestic tourists visiting the South West in 2006, it has been the most popular region for domestic holidays for the duration of the 2000-2006 period. Accounting for 19% and 18% of regions visited, the West and South-East were the next most popular regions visited for domestic holidays. While the South East's share dropped by three percentage points since 2000, the West's share rose slightly (up one point).

In light of the motivations of domestic holidaymakers (especially those on shortbreaks), it is no surprise that the three most popular regions are coastal areas close to the country's largest cities. In contrast the North West (distant from large urban areas in this jurisdiction) and the Midlands East (predominantly inland) had the lowest shares at 8% and 9% respectively.

The greatest increase in share was recorded by Dublin with its share rising by three percentage points to 10% during the 2000-2006 period. The Shannon region, meanwhile, saw

## Domestic tourism: numbers and revenue – 2000-2007



its share of regions visited fall back by five percentage points, also to 10% during the same period.

The distribution of holiday nights reveals some subtle differences from the share of visits figures, reflecting the variations in length of stay in the regions. For instance, Dublin has a lower share of holiday nights (6%) than its share of holiday visits (10%), due to a shorter length of stay. This is probably due to the fact that a high proportion of visits to Dublin are associated with sports and cultural events where the visitor only needs to stay for a single night.

Conversely, the South West has a higher share of nights (31%) than of share of visits (26%), probably reflecting the fact that visits to this region are more likely to be purely for a holiday and therefore of longer duration. To a lesser extent the same is true for the South East and Shannon regions.

### Accommodation used

The 2000-2006 period also saw considerable change in the types of accommodation favoured by Irish people on home holidays, as the country's new-found prosperity altered people's domestic holiday options. One example of this is the growth in popularity of holiday homes. As more people were able to afford to buy holiday homes, so their share of accommodation used for domestic holidays almost doubled, rising from 8% to 15% between 2000 and 2006. Holiday homes have proved especially popular with high income families with children who like the idea of having their own "home from home" within a 2-3 hour drive from their busy urban lives.

Of course, during the property boom a holiday home may also have been seen as an investment. With

higher interest rates and a less benign property market, holiday homes may not seem such an attractive proposition in the future. Given the growth in popularity of holiday homes, it's not surprising perhaps to see that share of self-catering accommodation has fallen, down three percentage points to 19% between 2000 and 2006. Similarly the share of caravan and camping also dropped, down four points to 11%.

Guesthouses and B&Bs, however, lost the most share, dropping from 12% of accommodation used in 2000 to 6% in 2006. It seems that this sector has also suffered as a consequence of changing consumer needs. In this instance, the research suggests that consumers are increasingly willing to pay more in order to avail of the facilities in hotels. As a result, the share of accommodation used accounted for by hotels has risen from 27% to 32%.

## Tourism Barometer highlights limited prospects

THE *Tourism Barometer Survey*, conducted on behalf of Fáilte Ireland among more than 900 enterprises across all sectors of the tourism industry during June, highlights a number of concerns regarding the prospects for tourism in 2008.

The optimism expressed in a similar survey in December last year has been undermined by concerns regarding the global and national economies and, in particular, the declining value of both the dollar and sterling against the euro and the erosion of consumer confidence both at home and abroad. Industry concerns are exacerbated by the fact that markets are increasingly late booking and value driven.

### Performance in the first five months

Respondents to the survey were asked about performance during the period from January to the June public holiday. It is difficult to gauge the impact of the early Easter on the first half of the year. However, the industry was clearly unhappy about the timing and, in particular, the fallow period that followed in April. This may well have influenced response with regard to the level of performance to date. The opportunity to combine the St Patrick's and Easter breaks may have encouraged Irish people to travel abroad rather than to take a break in Ireland. CSO figures for March show that trips abroad by Irish residents increased by 14% when compared to March 2007.

For almost all sectors, performance during the first five months of the year was down on balance when compared to the same period in 2007. All accommodation sectors report overall business down on balance for the year to date with only domestic nights in hotels registering an increase. While overseas business is down for all accommodation sectors due to a weak US market performance, a majority of guesthouses and hostels report their other overseas and domestic nights as more or less on a par with last year. Self-catering operators also report little change in their Ireland market business to date.

Domestic business in hotels, and particularly weekend breaks, has contributed significantly to overall growth

in recent years, particularly in the off-peak months, so the current response represents a slowdown in 2008. Regional performance indicators for the paid serviced accommodation sector suggest that all regions have experienced a downturn in overall business to date and it has been felt most acutely in the South West, Shannon and the South East.

### Prospects for the season

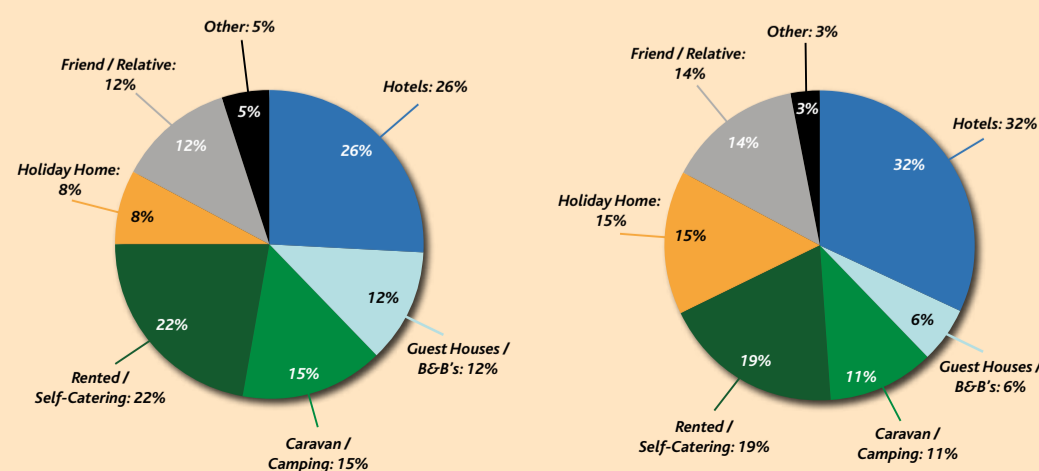
Some accommodation sectors are somewhat more optimistic regarding the prospects for overall business over the summer months. Hotels, guesthouses and hostels expect overall business to be at least on a par with last year when compared to the same period in 2007. However, the levels of optimism would be less than those expressed at the same time last year in respect of last summer. Self-catering and B&Bs expect their peak season business to be down significantly with only the domestic market offering any prospect for growth.

Accommodation providers expressed particular concern regarding North American business, while hotels and guesthouses expect to at least hold last year's levels of British and Mainland European business. Hotels expect their domestic business will be up on last year during the summer months while the remaining accommodation sectors, other than B&Bs, expect the domestic market to perform similar to last year.

Cruising operators and equestrian centres expect their overseas business to be up on last year. However, angling accommodation providers and golf courses forecast overseas business will be down on balance. Car hire and coach operators and retail outlets predict that the downturn in business levels on balance will continue through the season with many struggling to maintain 2007 numbers, again reflecting particular concerns regarding the short term prospects from North America.

All of the above represents a very circumspect view of the prospects for the coming months among the Irish industry, primarily borne out of concerns regarding unfavourable exchange rates, rising input costs and global and national economic uncertainty. In an increasingly competitive environment, concerns were also expressed regarding the perceived expensiveness of Ireland as a holiday destination and the pressures generated by increased local competition in Ireland. Any negative reaction to the bad weather experienced last summer is also of concern.

## Accommodation used by domestic tourists – 2000 and 2006



# INTERVIEW: David McConn

**City Sightseeing and Gray Line open-top buses carried 300,000 passengers in 2007. General Manager David McConn talks to John Brown about competing with Dublin Bus through innovation and team building**

**SIGHTSEEING** tourists in Dublin benefit from the intense competition for their business between Dublin Bus and The Dualway Group which operates the global sightseeing brands City Sightseeing and Gray Line. Competition has raised the standard of customer service and improved the frequency of tours and on-board facilities.

The public and private sector transport companies have an almost equal share of the open-top bus sightseeing business in the capital. Over half of Dualway's fleet of 60 buses is dedicated to the Dublin sightseeing service.

The Dualway Group competes with Dublin Bus through innovation in the service it offers to passengers and by its 120 staff delivering the company service promise – 'We care how you get there by going that extra mile'.

David McConn, General Manager of the Dualway Group, says that the excellent service provided by staff has been validated by Ireland's Best Optimus award. Dualway is the only transport and sightseeing company in Ireland to hold the award.

This is the fifth year that the organisation has participated in the service excellence programme operated by Fáilte Ireland and audited independently.

"Optimus is vitally important to our organisation. When setting and implementing standards, it is great to have the backing of Fáilte Ireland," says McConn and adds: "Many changes in our operations are the result of our involvement in the programme. It has encouraged feedback and suggestions from staff. All are involved and bring what they learn into their everyday work environment."

McConn plans to seek the prestigious Optimus Award of Excellence. He expects the organisation will be ready for independent audit by the Excellence Ireland Quality Association later this year or early in 2009.

### Commentary in seven languages

The Dualway Group was awarded the Dublin Tourism Business Award for its pioneering multilingual Dublin City tour. This features commentary in seven languages, including the addition of Irish in May 2008.

The multilingual buses also have a kids' commentary which is popular with 4 to 14 year olds. School holiday periods see a surge in the number of children taking the tour.

Passengers with impaired hearing may view the English commentary on screens that are fitted in the newer multilingual buses. These buses also offer wheelchair access.

### Wide ranging services

The Dualway Group – now in its 30th year – is based in Rathcoole, County Dublin. Its range of services lives up to its slogan 'A transport solution for every occasion'. The services include Dublin and Kilkenny open-top sightseeing tours; five one-day tours of Wicklow (2), Newgrange, Malahide & Howth, and the National Stud & Japanese Gardens; scheduled bus services on the Newcastle/

Rathcoole - Tallaght and Rathcoole – Dublin City routes; and coaches for hire for every occasion.

"We have recently joined forces with Railtours Ireland to provide one and two-day tours to further flung locations on Ireland's south and west coasts, offering one-day tours to Galway/Aran and two/three-day tours to the Ring of Kerry. Jim Deegan runs a great operation in Railtours and we are proud to come on board with him," says McConn.

Dualway is runner up in The Fleet Coach & Bus Coach Operator of the Year Award 2008. McConn says that achieving this recognition is only possible through the hard work of loyal colleagues.

As part of the Group's five-year plan, a human resource manager was appointed this year.

"We are striving to achieve 'preferred employer' status in our industry. A major challenge for us is the recruitment and retention of drivers. This is an industry-wide problem. Good human resource management is essential," says McConn.

### Tourist season prospects

Despite the weakening dollar and sterling, Dualway has set a 5% growth target for its city sightseeing tours in 2008. "Business was up a little in the first quarter but fell in April. We



David McConn, General Manager, The Dualway Group

have seen a decline in US customers but the UK market is still strong. We are cautiously optimistic that we can achieve our target."

Dualway is doing its bit for the environment. Last year saw the addition of two new 'green' vehicles – Euro 4 compliant. McConn says that their target is to have half the fleet with low emission engines by 2010.

On the 10th of July, for the third consecutive year, the City Sightseeing team in Dublin will help raise funds for the children's charity Barretstown Camp. All the takings on that day will be donated as part of the annual Board a Bus for Barretstown fundraiser day. A similar fundraiser will be organised by the team in Kilkenny.

"We hope that local people will take the tours to learn a little more about their city and at the same time support a worthy cause," says McConn

and adds "Our aim in Dublin is to raise €14,000 which would sponsor four children at the camp."

David McConn is a member of the executive committee of the Coach Tourism and Transport Council of Ireland which is the representative body for independent coach operators. He looks forward to playing an increasingly impor-

tant role in the organisation. "The key issues this year are the retention of the diesel fuel rebate, the lack of funding for private sector companies, inconsistency of standards in the private sector, the recruitment and retention of drivers, and the lack of an integrated transport ticket system in Dublin," he says.

## David McConn: The CV

**JOB:**  
General Manager,  
The Dualway Group

**PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENTS:**  
Transport Manager, Guide  
Friday Ireland Ltd

**BIRTH PLACE:**  
Dublin

**EDUCATION:**  
IT Tallaght, Degree in Business  
Management & Tourism

**FAMILY:**  
Fiancé Ciara

**HOBBIES:**  
GAA football and travel

# New self-catering classification system developed

**A NEW classification system for individual self-catering properties has been developed by Fáilte Ireland in close consultation with industry groups. It features star-rating classification and online application and assessment.**

Shaun Quinn, Chief Executive of Fáilte Ireland, said: "We believe we have jointly developed a robust system of classification to cater for the needs of today's consumer and have dedicated a priority marketing fund for this sector. The new classification process introduces a more streamlined and consistent approach for the approval and marketing of individual self-catering properties and will facilitate Fáilte Ireland to focus on supporting the sector through marketing efforts and product development."

Properties which enter the scheme will be eligible to use the term 'Approved to Fáilte Ireland Standards' and will continue to have access to www.discover-

ireland.ie and the beneficial marketing opportunities this site affords, particularly at regional level. TAMS (Tourism Accommodation Management Services) will be the body responsible for inspecting and approving properties under the scheme.

Owners of individual self-catering properties were invited by Fáilte Ireland to attend a half-day workshop to familiarise themselves with the new arrangements.

A total of 29 workshops were held in 19 venues throughout the country between 25 April and 9 June.

The workshops were provided by Fáilte Ireland free of charge and in partnership with representative bodies such as the Irish Self Catering Federation, Donegal Self Catering Association and Irish Farmhouse Holidays.

The objectives of the workshops were to explain the benefits of the scheme, introduce the updated approval requirements, clarify the new online approval/renewal process (including pricing and payment options) and provide networking opportunities for the sector.



At the Hilton Hotel Kilmainham for the launch of the new classification system for individual self-catering properties are (l to r): Mary O'Halloran, Fáilte Ireland South East; Aidan Pender, Director – Policy & Industry Development, Fáilte Ireland; Bernadette Freyne, Chairperson, Irish Farmhouse Holidays; Helen Cousins, Chairperson, Irish Self Catering Federation; and Dolores McGee, Secretary, Donegal Self Catering Association