



Tourism Matters

SEASONS GREETING TO ALL OUR READERS

DECEMBER 2013

Tourism sector has much to be confident about in 2014

NYE 2014 festival set for explosive ending to the Gathering



Shaun Quinn
CEO
Fáilte Ireland

AS 2013 winds down to a close, the tourism sector has much to be confident about. Indeed, as you can read inside, our own Fáilte Ireland surveys have recently shown that business sentiment in the sector at its highest since the downturn began (for more see pages 10 & 11).

This upbeat mood is certainly due to the increased numbers of international visitors which have boosted revenue and created jobs. Optimism in the sector has also been strengthened by the Government decision in Budget 2014 to retain the lowered VAT rate for the hospitality sector. And, of course, The Gathering has played its part in buoying up the industry and driving greater business to our shores.

As Chairman of the Gathering, I am particularly pleased that the initiative has delivered in the manner we always imagined it would when we first began to develop the concept. I would like to thank all our industry partners, the thousands of community groups and our colleagues in Tourism Ireland who joined us in this enterprise and whose involvement helped ensure its success (see p8 for more on The Gathering).

It would be very tempting, at the end of such a busy year for tourism, for all of us to sit back and simply count our literal or metaphorical takings. However, we need to guard against complacency and assuming that a beneficial rising tide in many of our overseas markets will simply carry us back to the same levels we enjoyed through the boom. In fact, just as this industry had to fight for survival over the last five years or so, we need to energetically chase growth now to build on the momentum of The Gathering.

And we know where that growth will come from. With the domestic market at a standstill, the best prospects for near-term growth in visitors and revenue lies in our traditional overseas markets, particularly Europe and the United States. If we are to maintain momentum, we need to tap into all the potential growth which exists in these markets.

How can we do that?



Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Leo Varadkar and Lord Mayor of Dublin, Oisín Quinn announce the line-up for the ultimate gathering – NYE Dublin which opens on the 29 December.

Well, for one, we need to break through the international clutter and chatter and stand out as a destination. This means to offer propositions of authenticity, singularity and scale to international travellers. In Fáilte Ireland, we are beginning to develop these with the first example – The Wild Atlantic Way – ready to roll out in early 2014 and proving attractive to overseas travel agents already (see p4 for more details). As we enter 2014 we are developing similar large scale concepts to drive tourism growth in the rest of the country.

To build on this year's momentum, we will also need to be more effective in targeting those markets with the best possible prospects of growth as well using the most up-to-date and effective channels to do so. We need to move away from a broad-brush pitch to travellers and target those various categories of visitors that are most likely to actually answer Ireland's call. Already, working with Tourism Ireland and our industry partners, we have identified where these are in Great Britain with similar work well advanced on other markets (see p3 for a good example of such targeting by 'Dublin Now' for Dublin festivals).

Developing a good product and identifying your customer is only half of the equation. We also need to close the sale and, in this day and age, that includes mastering the most up to date digital channels. There is no getting away from it, the internet has fundamentally changed tourism – in many

ways more than many other sectors - and completely revolutionised the way that we need to interact with potential customers. Crucially, if the tourism industry is to fully exploit the potential of digital marketing, we need to realise that the emphasis needs to be on content as opposed to platforms. In other words, it will not be about the number of clicks on a tourist board website or Facebook page but rather the mass mobilisation of the whole industry online pushing and promoting attractive multimedia images and messages with a persuasive and cohesive pitch to come visit (see pgs 6&7 for more on tourism and social media).

So, The Gathering has helped give us the kick-start we needed but the hard work needs to continue if we are to maintain momentum. And, if that were not enough, we also need to maintain the mixture of good value and quality we managed to retain during the downturn.

When the Minister for Transport Tourism and Sport, Leo Varadkar, invited me to speak at his recent launch of the review of tourism policy, I took the opportunity to set out what I saw as the four key pillars for future growth in the sector: developing greater international demand; delivering more compelling consumer experiences; getting the most out of digital media; and continuing to provide authentic experiences at competitive prices.

If we focus on these core areas, I believe we can maintain and build on our Gathering bounce.



The ultimate Gathering for 2013

NYE 2014 is set to become the ultimate Gathering for 2013 as iconic ska band Madness headline what promises to be the biggest New Year's event to hit Ireland.

This year's NYE Festival will be the official closing event for The Gathering Ireland 2013 and has been extended to four days, opening on 29th December with the Gathering at Leopardstown and featuring a Love Dublin day as well as festival favourites The Procession of Light and Countdown Concert on the 31st December, followed by a Big Brunch on 1st January.

Shaun Quinn, Chief Executive of Fáilte Ireland said: "We opened an exciting year of gatherings with NYE Dublin and we are delighted to close this wonderful year of Gathering celebrations with '3 NYE Dublin' – the Ultimate Gathering. We are working with our tourism partners to enhance this year's festival for overseas visitors. We look forward to a bigger and better festival than ever and one which will secure Dublin's position as a top global destination for New Year's."

Last year's event saw crowds of over 50,000 on the streets of Dublin and contributed to Dublin's nomination as one of the Lonely Planet's Top 5 New Year's Eve Destinations in the world.

The NYE Dublin Festival is a joint initiative by Fáilte Ireland and Dublin City Council and is produced and promoted by Davis Events. The festival was established in 2011 to drive tourism to Dublin over the New Year's period, establishing Dublin as a top destination for New Year's Eve.

For information see :
www.visitdublin.com/NYE

New Authority Members

FÁILTE IRELAND has welcomed four new members onto its Authority recently.



MARY ROSE STAFFORD

is currently Manager of the Irish Academy of Hospitality and Tourism in Tralee Institute of Technology. Former Head of the Hotel, Culinary & Tourism Department at the Institute of Technology, Tralee, Mary Rose has worked for over fifteen years in international hotel management, in Ireland, London and New York, and has over ten years' experience in hospitality and tourism education.



PROFESSOR JIM DEEGAN

is Head of the Department of Economics and Director National Centre for Tourism Policy Studies (NCTPS), at the University of Limerick. Jim has also worked as part of Fáilte Ireland's Business Tourism Forum.



MARGARET RYAN

is Director of Margaret Ryan Marketing based in Dublin. She operates as an independent tourism consultant and is active in enterprise supports, sales and marketing in the tourism industry.



BRIDGET HALLIGAN NEVILLE

is based in County Wexford and has a background in the hotel industry. Most recently she has been working in a family hotel enterprise.

Minister Varadkar starts Tourism Policy Review

THE MINISTER for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Leo Varadkar TD, signalled at the start of 2013 that he intended to commence a review of tourism policy earlier this year.

The purpose of this review is to develop a policy statement, setting out the allocation and deployment of future resources for tourism which will maximise the return from tourism in the long term.

The national tourism development authority, Fáilte Ireland took part in announcing the review, which was welcomed by the Irish Tourist Industry Confederation and attended by over 90 individuals from representative bodies, key stakeholders and academia.

Commencing the process last September the Minister published a consultation document which raised a series of questions regarding policy priorities on which stakeholders and members of the public were invited to submit comments and responses by 22nd November 2013. The issues and questions in the consultation document covered tourism marketing, tourism product development, human resource / training / innovation / enterprise support and implementation frameworks.

As well as inviting interested parties and stakeholders to comment on the paper, Ministers are also engaging directly with stakeholders at national and regional levels to hear their views.



Fáilte Ireland CEO, Shaun Quinn, outlines four key areas for strategy focus

Once collated all responses to the consultation exercise will feed into the final policy review and statement.

Following completion of the policy review, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, along with industry and the agencies, will bring together a working group of key stakeholders to identify a series of priority actions in a strategy to support the development of tourism in the lines set out in the policy statement. As in previous strategies, these are likely to be addressed to a range of public sector actors as well as the

tourism agencies and the tourism and related enterprise sectors. It is envisaged that this work will complete towards the end of 2014.

Fáilte Ireland CEO, Shaun Quinn spoke at the review and emphasised what the national tourism development authority sees as four key areas for strategic focus for tourism; developing international demand; delivering more compelling consumer experiences; optimising digital media to attract more visitors; and continuing to provide authentic experiences at competitive prices.

Tourism Towns Winner Announced

KILKENNY HAS been announced as the second winner of Fáilte Ireland's National Tourism Towns Award.

Kilkenny was chosen from a shortlist of ten top tourism towns and has received an award of €5,000 which will go towards developing the town's tourism potential. The remaining nine finalists received highly commended certificates and an award of €1,000 to support their tourism development.

Kilkenny was also awarded with a special certificate for the best large town and Mulranny was announced as best small town. Each of which received an award of €5,000 toward tourism development in their towns.

Now in its second year the Tourism Towns Award was designed by Fáilte Ireland to promote those Irish towns and villages which are working hardest to enhance their appeal to tourists visiting their local area.

This new award is run alongside the National Tidy Towns Competition and 45 towns out of the top 150 Tidy Towns in last year's competition applied to take part in the competition.

Following a shortlisting, the top ten towns were visited by a panel of independent assessors, as well as a team of 'secret shoppers', who measured the town's tourism performance and the level of welcome to visitors.



Kilkenny Castle. Kilkenny has been announced as the winner of Fáilte Ireland's National Tourism Towns Award.

The winner, Kilkenny, was recognised for the preservation of so many of its historical buildings while at the same time undertaking an impressive regeneration programme, as instanced at the Alms House Tourist Information Office, Rothe House and Garden, Kilkenny Castle and Craft Centre.

The sense of place in Kilkenny was described by adjudicators as 'very obvious to the visitor' and the long history and artistic contribution of Kilkenny was well presented. The adjudicators were also impressed by the number of local groups working together to increase and improve tourism in the area and the access and tourism offering available to the visitor.

Dublin Festivals Target “Social Energisers”

New pilot project ‘Dublin Now’ to help grow visitor numbers

OUR NEW pilot project, Dublin Now, has been working with a number of festivals and events in Dublin to help them shape their programmes so that they can grow visitor numbers by including new contemporary elements that will attract the young adventurous social energiser segment.

The Dublin Now project aims to reposition Dublin as a destination that will grow Dublin’s visitor base by attracting young, fun-loving urban adventurers (otherwise known as social energisers) from Great Britain, a segment identified as offering Ireland good potential for growth.

The project with the support of the businesses taking part in the pilot project, has been working alongside a number of upcoming events including the Bram Stoker Festival, Dublin Web Summit 2013 and the New Year’s Eve festival, to develop a series of new elements aimed at specifically attracting this valuable segment to Dublin for these events.

The recent Bram Stoker festival, which is now in its second year, included new elements such as a pop up cinema in Christ Church Cathedral showing the Addams Family, Bram’s Banquet in ChristChurch Crypt, a live art exhibition in Body Tonic’s Beatyard and a tailor made walking tour by Le Cool Dublin.

As part of Dublin Web Summit 2013 delegates were able to enjoy morning sightjogging tours around the city taking in the sights including Trinity College, the Science Gallery and the Jennie Johnston Famine Ship. Each evening of the conference, with the support of Trinity College and the IDA, high impart light projections could also be seen on the façade of Trinity creating a real buzz and sense of occasion in the city which used hashtags #LoveDublin and



The Dublin Festival Season section of the Visit Dublin website.

#WhyIreland creating an Irish digital footprint and encouraging those who came from overseas to return to Ireland again.

The Dublin Now project are also developing a series of new contemporary online content promoting the ‘Dublin Now’ experiences. All of this new content has been placed right at the heart of where they search for information...online.

This new content, which is available on the Visit Dublin website (visitdublin.com) includes infographics, videos, and attractively designed articles on these upcoming Dublin events and really focuses on presenting ‘Dublin Now’ experiences in a current and innovative way.

Videos on Dublin’s music and fashion scenes, interesting depictions of Bram Stoker’s Blood lines, Dublin in a day itineraries and a guide to the eight types of Web Summit Nerds are just some examples of this new content.

Speaking about Dublin Now, Project Head Kevin Moriarty emphasised –

“Social energisers are looking for extraordinary experiences that they cannot find elsewhere and that is why we are working with these events to further augment their already attractive programmes. We also know that social energisers get their travel inspiration online so while it’s important to get the offering right, it is vital that we have the right type of content, which is attractive, current and sharable and available across as many platforms as possible.

“This newly developed inspirational content is already gaining traction and is being shared by all the right influencers across websites and social media which reinforces the importance of using current trends to attract visitors. We are encouraged by the results so far and look forward to creating and sharing even more of this content over the coming months.”

You can find and share more of this great content at:
www.visitdublin.com/DublinFestalseason

It’s European Gold for the Great Western Greenway

THE GREAT Western Greenway was awarded first prize in the Exemplary Initiatives category at the 6th European Greenways Awards Ceremony in Portugal earlier this year beating off stiff competition from Murcia, Spain (2nd) and the Two Tunnels Greenway, UK (3rd).

Organised by the European Greenways Association, the awards promote examples of best practice in greenway development across Europe. The awards ceremony took place as part of an international Greenway conference “Greenways and Sustainable Tourism”.

The Great Western Greenway (Westport-Newport-Mulranny-Achill) is a traffic-free cycling and walking facility that primarily follows the line of the old Great Western Railway, which closed in 1937. The route is perfect for sightseeing - offering gentle gradients and some of the most idyllic scenery in the west of Ireland. It forms part of the National Cycle Network and it is the longest off road cycling experience in the country.

Over 192,000 trips were recorded along the route from the beginning of 2013 up to the end of October. The busiest day to date was Saturday 3rd August, clocking up 1,015 people. 2013 now looks set to surpass the 177,000 users that visited in 2012 with current projections at 200,000 visitors. In 2011, 144,000 visitors



Proudly displaying their award are (l-r) Padraig Phiblin, Mayo County Council, Brian Quinn, Fáilte Ireland, Minister of State for Tourism and Sport, Michael Ring T.D. & Anna Connor, Mayo County Council

cycled or walked along the Greenway.

Fiona Monaghan, Head of Operations for Fáilte Ireland in the West, believes the Greenway is a great example of how tourism can regenerate a local economy.

“The Greenway is a classic example of taking an underused local asset, looking at it in a new

way and exploiting its full potential for the betterment of the local community and economy.

“Being recognised at such a high level internationally is a much deserved achievement for this project which brought together not just the local and national agencies but many people from across the community.”

Merrion Square Chosen as European Innovation Example

FÁILTE IRELAND’S Merrion Square project has been chosen as one of twenty cases of innovation and best practice by the European Commission in a new report – ‘Enhancing the Competitiveness of Tourism in the EU’.

The report contains 20 examples of tourism projects across Europe that have utilised best practice when implementing tourism projects that have led to increasing the competitiveness of the tourism industry across Europe.



Merrion Square, Dublin City Centre

Each of the 20 cases broadly illustrates one of four major themes; extending the season and diversifying the supply of tourist services; training, skills development and building capacity; developing the use of ICT; marketing and promotion.

The Merrion Square project was chosen under the marketing and promotion theme as an example of a tourism project which used innovation to improve the basic market proposition and exploit new marketing tools.

According to the report the project aimed to stimulate innovation in the nature of its offer by working with a broadly-based set of stakeholders in a structured program designed to generate and test new ideas. By highlighting these examples of how policy can be put into action the report aims to support other countries and cities across Europe to develop similar approaches.

Speaking about the project Mary King of Fáilte Ireland’s Research team explained –

“We are delighted to have been chosen as one of only 20 case studies highlighted in this report. Not only does it illustrate the success of the project, it also points to the fact that innovation is an extremely important aspect to increasing competitiveness in tourism.

“The Commission particularly referenced the project’s marketing strategy emphasising how the innovation process adopted by the project generated its own publicity which resulted in extensive media coverage and cost-effective use of social media. We were delighted to be able to facilitate the process and hope to replicate this success in future projects.”

A full copy of the report can be found at: www.ec.europa.eu

Wild Atlantic Way on track for 2014

Wild Atlantic Way will promote stunning coastal environment

SET TO BE the longest defined coastal touring route in the world the Wild Atlantic Way will promote the stunning coastal environment and natural landscape along the 2,500km of the route. Signposting of the route has already begun to ensure that visitors coming from March 2014 can navigate their way along the route with ease.

With the co-operation and assistance from the National Roads Authority, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the ten Local Authorities along the route approximately 4,000 signs will be erected along the national and regional roads covering the Wild Atlantic Way.

Designed to integrate into the existing road signage more than 800 signs have already been erected including signage along the Dingle Peninsula and in South Mayo. North Donegal, West Cork and South Kerry are scheduled to be signposted in the next phase with the remainder of the signage planned to be in place by March 2014.



WILD ATLANTIC WAY SLÍ FHIÁIN AN ATLANTAIGH

SELLING THE WILD ATLANTIC EXPERIENCES

A total of 516 attractions and 1,573 activities exist along the route, each of which offer their own unique experience of life on the edge of the Wild Atlantic. A number of sales support tools were developed to promote these experiences to international Tour operators, including on and offline manuals, a bank of Wild Atlantic Way video, imagery and branding supports including a customisable widget link that can be localised and used on websites by trade and industry partners.

The new Wild Atlantic Way Trade Manual is designed as a handbook for group tour operators and showcases attractions, OPW sites and

activities which cater for groups. The Wild Atlantic Way Secrets Manual has been created for tour operators who cater for fully independent travellers and smaller groups. In a world where consumers are fervently seeking authentic experiences, offering a selection of 'hidden gems' that are lesser known and tucked away on the Wild Atlantic Way is proving very popular with international operators.

Aside from using key international events such as our Destination Ireland workshops and international travel conferences such as TBEX to promote the new route, the Wild Atlantic Way has also been showcased at international trade events such as the World Travel Market London, IFTM Top Resa, Paris, Flavours of Ireland, London, and Jump into Ireland, USA. A sales mission to

Germany took place during the year with similar events scheduled in South Africa and the Nordic Islands over the coming months as well as the US and GB. As part of the new Fáilte Ireland strategy a new programme team has been established to maximise the potential for the Wild Atlantic Way.

Speaking about these promotional initiatives, Tracey Coughlan, Manager, Experience Development Fáilte Ireland, stated

'The Wild Atlantic Way is an exciting concept that can capture the hearts and minds of consumers by the sheer vibrancy and diversity of unique tourism experiences on offer along the route. The response to the Wild Atlantic Way from international tour operators and media, the ITOA members and the Irish industry has been incredibly positive and the potential for significant growth in visitor numbers is therefore very exciting.'

Under the new Fáilte Ireland strategy a dedicated Wild Atlantic Way team is being put in place to oversee the implementation of this exciting tourism project. One of the first actions of this new team will be the roll out of a series of trade briefings between now and the end of the year.

For further information and details on the next stages of the project see:
www.failteireland.ie/waw

Food Ambassadors go Wild in Norway

EIGHT NEW food champions who joined Fáilte Ireland's Food Tourism Network Development programme this year travelled to Norway in September on a benchmarking trip that brought them across some of the country's best established driving routes.

The Food Ambassador Programme is all about identifying food champions in Ireland and gaining international insights into how we develop and promote Irish Food.

Each of the new champions are located on the Wild Atlantic Way and were chosen for their resounding passion and belief in Irish food as well as their commitment to actively influence the future of Irish cuisine and food tourism in their region.

When opened early next year the Wild Atlantic Way will be Ireland's first long-distance touring route, stretching along the coast from Donegal to West Cork so this trip was a perfect learning journey for them to undertake particularly since a new Taste of Norway is currently being developed on the visited driving routes.

While in Norway the group met with close to 20 different businesses ranging from producers, visitor centres and chefs to hoteliers and business owners who shared their experiences of developing Norway's food tourism sector and how they plan to use the driving route to attract more visitors to their businesses.

Speaking about the trip, Food Tourism Manager, Helen McDaid emphasised –

"Among the key learnings gleaned from the benchmarking trip was the importance of just telling the food story of your business or area. It doesn't have to be perfect and it doesn't have to be complex. The simplest stories are often most effective and compelling, particularly where a



Food Champions experience traditional clip fish processing at Dybvik Clipfish Factory near Alesund, Norway

sense of pride in our food heritage and traditions is tangible.

"The importance of collaboration and co-operation was another strong theme throughout the trip and the idea of working with other communities along the Wild Atlantic Way to complement and promote each other really rang true with the champions."

WHO ARE THE FOOD CHAMPIONS?

- Deborah Evers, Burren Kitchen Garden
- Hugh O'Donnell, Kitty Kellys & Hughies Bar
- Zach Gallagher, Irishfoodguide.ie
- Benoit Lorge, Kenmare Confectionary Producer
- Martin Bealin, The Global Village
- Mary McGettigan, Taste of Donegal Food Festival
- Ross Quinn, Vasco Restaurant
- Jacinta Dalton, Co-founder of the Foodie Forum

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE FOOD CHAMPIONS?

The food champions from 2012 and 2013 have just recently met to bring together and share their knowledge along with their ideas and plans for 2014 and discuss how they can work together to further develop Ireland's food tourism reputation.

For further information go to:
www.failteireland.ie/food

Namibia prelude to 2014 Global Adventure Conference

Ireland's adventure offering showcased to 650 adventure seekers in Namibia ahead of the 2014 Adventure Conference in Killarney

IN ADVANCE of hosting the Adventure Travel Trade Association's (ATTA) Global Conference in Killarney next year members of our new Brand Experience and Wild Atlantic Way teams, along with six members of Ireland's adventure tourism sector, travelled to Namibia to represent Irish adventure and all that it can offer to the 2013 ATTA International Conference which took place Windhoek and Swakopmund, Namibia.

According to our estimates overseas visitors engaging in activity tourism were worth €773m to the economy last year. The sector is considered a high-yield segment with the average activity-seeker spending 40% more than the average holidaymaker.

Over the course of the six day event the team had the opportunity to generate further international awareness of 'Brand Ireland' to 650 international delegates attending the event while simultaneously networking and gathering insights on the needs of potential consumers and competitors.



(l-r) Ethna Murphy, Fáilte Ireland, Casey Hanisko, Chris Doyle, Shannon Stowell, ATTA and Josephine O'Driscoll, Fáilte Ireland

As many as 20 one-to-one business meetings were scheduled with key buyers from across the globe allowing the travelling team to pitch Ireland as an adventure destination generating business for Ireland for 2014 and beyond.

The conference concluded with an Irish themed evening where the 650 delegates received an invitation from Fáilte Ireland CEO Shaun Quinn, to come to Ireland and learn more about the outstanding Irish Adventure experience, and hear more about The Wild Atlantic Way while enjoying an evening of Irish food and entertainment.

Speaking about the conference Fáilte Ireland, Ethna Murphy said:

"Adventure tourism is growing at an exorbitant rate and showing no signs of stopping. Hosting the ATTA International conference next

year will not only deliver €1million directly to the destination it will also allow us to showcase Ireland's adventure offering to some of the world's most prestigious media, bloggers and buyers especially those from our key north American market."

"By attending the Namibia conference this year we not only strengthened ties with many of these buyers and media, we can begin selling Ireland and use the networking opportunities and meetings to deliver more visitors to Ireland. We hope that concluding the conference with an Irish themed evening which highlighted one of our newest and largest projects, The Wild Atlantic Way, truly drove the message home that Ireland is indeed a unique and exciting adventurous destination."

Shannon Stowell – 2013 Adventure Tourism Forum

As the Adventure Travel Trade Association's (ATTA) International Summit prepares to come to Ireland next year *Tourism Matters* caught up with ATTA CEO Shannon Stowell to find out why Ireland was chosen and why adventure tourism is so important.



TM: Why does adventure tourism matter so much?

SS: We know globally that tourism at large is growing at 4.7%. Compare this to a market study with the George Washington University which states that adventure tourism is now growing at a rate of 65%. This growth is one of the reasons why adventure tourism is so important. Of course because it focuses on more sustainable activities, this also makes it critically important.

A lot of mass tourism interests are starting to pull adventure into their tourism strategies and campaigns, a lot of destinations are marketing themselves using adventure imagery. Why are they doing this? Well, it is because the consumer is looking for unique opportunities and transformational experiences which adventure tourism provides.

TM: So what are they looking for?

SS: Most people are not going to bungee jump, skydive or wrestle grizzly bears; they are

more interested in mainstream activities such as hiking, cycling and angling. In fact, the majority of adventure undertaken by guided travellers is soft adventure as opposed to the extreme aspirational activities used to sell the concept of adventure tourism so a lot of the revenue in the adventure industry comes from this side of the sector and that's where the whole industry, whether you are a restaurant, hotel or activity provider, you have the opportunity to connect with adventure operators.

TM: Tell us a bit about the summit?

SS: The summit next year will be our 11th summit and what it does is connect the adventure travel industry worldwide and give the delegates an opportunity to meet their colleagues, share best practices, meet buyers and sellers and talk to the best media to tell their stories.

TM: Why was Ireland chosen to host the 2014 ATTA Summit?

There are a lot of factors why Ireland was chosen to host next year's summit.

Ireland is reshaping and refreshing its brand and we saw the opportunity to be a part of that. The fact that Ireland's resources, nature and human capital fit with the ATTA's three pillars – nature, culture and physical activity, is also huge. Ireland offers something that no one else in the world can offer – unique adventure opportunities that no one else can match.

The readiness and uniqueness of the resources Ireland has to offer was also a contributing factor. The Wild Atlantic Way is so compelling and it really matches what consumers are looking for today. Consumers are looking for an incredible amount of customisation, they want to experience something 'their way' and The Wild Atlantic Way offers just that – a unique experience that has so many different options – it's a great example of innovation and it's going to be really compelling for the adventure tourist.

Killarney itself is situated in one of Ireland's many adventure spots and this is what we view as the ideal destination. Our team have spent a lot of time in Ireland, and they have fallen in love with the people and the incredible offering along with a proven spirit of collaboration is what draws the ATTA to Ireland.

Three important things we look for in a host destination is: Is it safe and welcoming? Is there adventure? Are they ready? Ireland scored incredibly well in all three of these areas.

For more information on Shannon go to: www.adventuretravel.biz

What are adventure seekers looking for?

APPROXIMATELY 919,000 activity tourists visited our shores in 2012 with almost half coming from Europe (45%), one third (32%) came from Britain, 19% from North America and 4% from other areas.

Activity or adventure tourism is growing fast and in order to keep Ireland ahead of the curve we have undertaken some new research which examines key activities in Ireland illustrating where the future potential lies in this fast-growing tourism demographic for Ireland as a destination.

After analysing the views of 15,000 overseas and domestic holidaymakers across Ireland the research tells us that the activity visitor not only tended to stay in Ireland for almost nine days (longer than the average tourist who stays about a week) but that hiking, angling, cycling, equestrian and water-based activities were the most popular pursuits engaged in while in the country. Dublin and its surrounds along with Galway, Mayo, Kerry, Cork and West Clare were particularly popular with those on a more leisure break.

The survey throws up many insights into where the potential lies and for what products. For example, did you know? –

WATERSPORTS

- Highest potential lies in the German market followed by Britain and France.
- Strong competition from warm weather countries France, Spain and Italy

WALKING

- Offers the highest potential of all the products for both domestic and overseas markets
- Walkers tend to be male and of all ages

CYCLING

- Great potential with the German market due to its high proportion of people who cycle abroad
- Potential for cycling is higher, across all markets, for those living in the urban areas, particularly the capital cities

SAILING

- Greatest potential exists in the French and domestic markets
- Stiff competition from Spain in particular

HORSE-RIDING

- British and domestic markets offer highest potential with 2.5 million people available to be targeted

ANGLING

- Highest core market potential exists in the German, British and French markets of almost 6.2 million people
- Angling most popular in the Dublin and Munster regions

You can view all the detailed studies on the individual activities at: www.failteireland.ie/adventure

TBEX - The Travel Blogger Exchange

One of the world's largest gatherings of travel and tourism bloggers, TBEX Europe 2013, took place in Dublin in October

TBEX, THE Travel Bloggers Exchange, is the world's largest conference and networking event for online travel journalists and travel industry companies.

The conference brought over 600 delegates from across the globe to Dublin providing the Irish tourism industry with an excellent opportunity to promote Ireland and engage with the world's most influential travel bloggers and leading digital content creators.

Hosting the conference also allowed Ireland to engage with those attending the conference and create a major impression to tens of millions of online followers as the TBEX delegates explored Ireland and shared their experiences with the world.

“TBEX is the kind of conference every destination wants to host”

Over 141 million impressions have been recorded on twitter and to date and 185 blog posts have been published online with a total reach of almost 1,000,000 readers.

Maximising the opportunity to encourage the visiting bloggers to share their experience of Ireland with their many followers a number of press trips were designed by our Trade Engagement Team which promised lots of photo opportunities and great story ideas.

These action packed trips focused on showcasing some of Ireland's iconic experiences including the Medieval South East, the Wild Atlantic Way, and Limerick City of Culture.

On return to Dublin the bloggers also had the chance to take part in almost 100 Dublin experiences before we opened the conference with an unforgettable welcome evening in the Guinness Storehouse.

Fáilte Ireland's Director of Marketing, John Concannon, welcomed the bloggers to the conference emphasising –

“TBEX is the kind of conference every destination wants to host; we had a captive audience of hundreds of the world's top tourism bloggers giving us the potential to make a massive digital footprint across social media channels.

“The future of travel and tourism is increasingly digital and the voice of bloggers is becoming more and more influential in helping travellers to decide which destinations to choose. It is now wonderful to see that the hard work that went into making Ireland a spectacular host destination translated into hundreds of positive blog posts and reviews which will be influencing the travel decisions of the masses over the coming months.”



CAPTIVE AUDIENCE: Austin Matta, USA, gets a taste of Medieval Kilkenny



TBEX bloggers document a cooking demonstration at Dunbrody House



The bloggers visit Bunratty Castle



Bram Stoker also made an appearance at TBEX this year as the 2013 Bram Stoker Festival, which takes the legacy of Dublin horror novelist Bram Stoker and his gothic novel 'Dracula' as inspiration, delighted delegates on the second day of the conference.



Enjoying real Irish Ice cream in Dingle.



TBEX delegates enjoy Irish food at the Fáilte Weclome night in the Guinness Storehouse

Tips for Engaging with Travel Bloggers



Ian Cleary

THE EUROPEAN travel bloggers conference was in Dublin recently and travel bloggers are becoming more influential within the travel industry.

Here are six tips for engaging with travel bloggers:

1 BE SELECTIVE

You can't engage with every travel blogger and a lot of travel bloggers do not have a lot of influence. So, you need to do your research.

Find out, is it likely that this blogger will travel to Ireland? Do they get high traffic on their website and is their site highly ranked? This can be easily done. Check their website on www.semrush.com and www.opensiteexplorer.com and/or www.compete.com.

Find out, do they have large followings on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and other social platforms.

Is there a lot of engagement on their site? Like, Shares and Comments?

If they don't have large traffic or followers, they could be influential in other ways. For example, do they write for large travel websites?

Research is essential and you have to be selective about who you focus on. Once you get to know the bloggers, who is most suited to your needs will become apparent.

2 RESPECT WHAT THEY DO

Bloggers are becoming more influential and are getting more respect. But they are used to people not really understanding or respecting what they do. Treat them with respect and they will give you more attention.

3 BUILD A RELATIONSHIP FIRST BEFORE ASKING FOR ANYTHING

Your biggest mistake will be emailing them and asking them to write about your business without having any relationship with them.

Start engaging with them, comment on their blogs, talk to them on twitter. Build up that relationship first.

Try to help them in any way you can and they will want to help you back.

4 INTERACT REGULARLY WITH YOUR LIST

When you've identified the list of people that you want to engage with make sure you interact with them regularly to build up that relationship.

One way of making sure this happens is to separate them from other followers/fans. For example on Twitter create a twitter list with these key influencers. On Hootsuite create a column based on this list so you can clearly see the tweets just from the key influential travel bloggers you are tracking.

5 GIVE THEM A GOOD REASON TO COME OVER TO IRELAND

When you do find really influential bloggers group together with other tourism businesses and create an experience for them that will entice them to Ireland.

They don't come to Ireland to stay in a hotel or do an activity. They want an experience. They will take pictures, write stories and tell all their friends.

Travel bloggers are a relatively small community so a lot know each other. If you convince some influential bloggers other bloggers will come to.

6 TALK TO THEM!

You need to understand travel bloggers. What they want, what they like and don't like. Find travel bloggers, talk to them, get to know them.

Travel bloggers are a rapidly growing community that are becoming more and more influential. A lot may never have large influential blogs but they may write for much bigger travel blogs to fund their travels.

Now is the time to start to get to know them. They will only grow in force going forward!

BIO: Ian Cleary is founder of RazorCoast and Razorsocial and provides consultancy and training in Digital Marketing. Ian is also an award winning blogger and speaks internationally on social media with a particular emphasis on social media tools. Ian spoke this year at the global and European travel bloggers conference.

You can also hear what Colm Hanratty, Content and Social Media Manager for Hostel World had to share about building relationships with bloggers by watching our recent webinars on www.youtube.com/failteirelandtv

What are the trends in social media?



A FÁILTE Ireland study (2012) into the use of new technology by tourists in Ireland has found that the use of mobile devices is expected to surpass traditional computer internet use by 2014.

In this digital age of the internet, iPads, Xboxes and smartphones; the modern traveller is hands-on and wants to actively engage with their environment. They want to learn more and do more in the places they visit and will use their smartphone to do this.

The research also illustrates that close to

55% of tourists who own smartphones or other related mobile devices use their device while travelling in Ireland and 31% booked an element of their trip using their mobile devices.

According to Travel Daily News (2012), TripAdvisor has become so intrinsic in travellers' planning processes that 53% of people surveyed claimed that they would not book a hotel if it had no reviews on a site. The vast majority agreed that TripAdvisor reviews helped them feel more confident in their booking decisions (87%), and that they considered

reviews on the site to be accurate (98%).

Consumers trust opinions from other users far more than they trust any other form of marketing message.

This can be seen as an enormous 96% of businesses in the travel industry reported that online reviews are fundamental for generating bookings, and 84% are concerned that negative reviews may affect their reputation and impact their business. There is an on-going trend for users to actively produce and engage with travel-related feedback.

According to the TripAdvisor Global Report, 2013, nearly 37% of users surveyed had added comments about their trips to their social media feeds, and 34% had written an online review of a travel product, service, or destination. Online travel reviews are an influential part of many people's decision-making process, especially Europeans, 51% of whom say reading online reviews has the biggest impact on their planning decisions, a factor of greater importance even than price and location (TripAdvisor Global Report, 2013).

The Gathering – What's Next?

The Gathering has been a people's project, driven at a grass-roots level

WHEN FÁILTE Ireland launched The Gathering almost a year ago, we always knew it would be ambitious and the initial reactions to the new national initiative were varied. Many were hopeful but some were sceptical. Now, as it draws to a close, the picture is much clearer and it is evident that the Gathering has been a great success.

Building on strong community networks and harnessing a broad global network, the Irish people responded to the opportunity and invited friends, families and visitors to gather in Ireland throughout 2013.

Gathering Chairman, Shaun Quinn, points out: "The Gathering has truly been a people's project, driven at a grass-roots level throughout Ireland. Almost 5,000 individual Gathering events were run right across Ireland, organised and supported by almost 100,000 local volunteers – with each of those gatherings making a unique contribution to the local economy by drawing on personal and community links with families and communities around the world".

The success of the Gathering is reflected in the growth we have seen in overseas visits to Ireland this year. For the first seven months of the year, overseas visitor numbers are up 6.4% with visitors from some countries, including the key US market, up almost 20%. This impressive growth in visitor numbers has, in turn, helped boost local economies and communities across the country.

Shaun Quinn adds – "This success could never have happened without people power and I personally would like to thank all the thousands of volunteers involved for their efforts as well as commend the commitment of all those communities and organisations across the country who stood up to the plate".

As we move beyond 2013 and look to the future of Irish tourism, it is clear that The Gathering will have left a valuable legacy. The thousands of collaborative projects and events



Riverdance The Gathering World Record Dublin

that were held have resulted in a thriving network that can continue to drive tourism at community level.

Thanks to the Gathering initiative, Ireland will now enjoy an improved events schedule at national and local level, offering overseas visitors meaningful reasons to visit our country.

Fáilte Ireland is currently examining how best to further develop this local engagement and is committed to establishing a structure, with local authorities, in 2014 to sustain Ireland's 'community tourism', the enormous potential of which has been showcased in this Gathering year.

Many Gathering events were one-off, organised as unique and special to 2013. However, a number of Gathering events and festivals have the potential to be run again next year.

That said the Gathering is by no means over. Even this month, Gatherings continue to be held across the country, particularly as Christ-

mas comes close. The Gathering will officially sign off with a spectacular, four-day New Year's Eve festival in Dublin, 'NYE Dublin 2014 – The Ultimate Gathering.'

Shaun Quinn concludes: "When we in Fáilte Ireland first had this project on the drawing board almost three years ago, we knew it had great potential but I believe that it has passed the expectations of even the most hardened of tourism-watchers. And as we move into 2014 I believe that the spirit of the Gathering initiative will continue to thrive and prosper long after this year of The Gathering is over. Within towns, villages and parishes across the country, thousands of organic local connections and networks have developed and they will be the real legacy of The Gathering".

Find out what's still to come at:
www.thegatheringireland.com



Fáilte Ireland's John Concannon and Shaun Quinn with Gathering Project Director, Jim Miley.

2013 The year of The Gathering...

5,000

More than 5,000 gatherings large and small

100,000

Almost 100,000 local volunteers

The Gathering Ireland

1,176

Past and Present Roses at the Rose of Tralee Gathering

1,693

Riverdancers from 43 countries

5,600

Overseas participants in the St. Patrick's Day Parade

Ref: Ipsos MRBI Survey 2013

What people think so far...

71%

The Gathering has brought communities together

74%

Successful in attracting tourists

77%

The Gathering has been 'a source of civic pride' in their community

64%

It has 'enhanced Ireland's reputation overseas'

3 in 4 A 'worthwhile investment' for tourism, say 3 in 4

Ref: Ipsos MRBI Survey 2013

Autumn Sales Blitz for Ireland

Ireland's key markets were targeted at annual Destination Ireland Workshops

Members of the tourism industry from across Ireland undertook a targeted 2014 sales drive this autumn as our annual series of custom-made Destination Ireland Workshops took place across September and October.

A total of over 7,600 one-to-one meetings took place across these four workshops which allowed 300 Irish tourism operators to pitch directly to 120 of the cream of the global travel industry teeing up business for the 2014 season.

Ireland's key markets were targeted across these workshops including UK-based agents promoting holidays to potential visitors in Russia, South America, the Middle East, North American agents selling to the United States and Canada,

British Coach tour operators and the new and developing markets that focus on emerging tourism destinations such as China and the Middle East.

Aside from these Destination Ireland workshops, two other additional sales workshops took place this autumn. One focussing on attracting adventure visitors, which took place at the annual Adventure Conference and hosted 1,600 meetings with overseas operators, and the other enticing golf operators to send more visitors to our golf and links courses.

Director of Market Development, John Concannon, with Fáilte Ireland stressed the importance of hosting events like these and the benefits for the Irish trade involved.

"The Destination Ireland workshops are always a busy time for members of our tourism industry with a wealth of opportunities flowing from these workshop events. The 120 visiting agents are hand-chosen because they have

the capacity to deliver significant amounts of visitors to Ireland and their willingness to come is testimony to our enduring strong appeal as a destination and the variety and attractiveness of the Irish holiday."

"The 120 visiting agents are hand chosen because they have the capacity to deliver significant amounts of visitors to Ireland"

Maximising on the opportunity presented by hosting these overseas agents Fáilte Ireland also organised a series of tailor-made tours for

the visiting travel agents ensuring they had the opportunity to experience Ireland and what it truly has to offer. This year, the visiting agents had the chance to enjoy, amongst other places, the new Wild Atlantic Way as well as counties Waterford, Carlow, Kilkenny, Cork, Kerry, Clare, Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow. These trips were just some of the overseas itineraries designed by Fáilte Ireland this year for overseas agents and visiting media.

John Concannon continued,

"Trips such as these provide a great opportunity for overseas operators to experience first-hand the full-on Ireland experience and can play a key role in closing the deal and persuading these agents to choose Ireland as a holiday destination for their customers

Details of all promotional opportunities can be found at www.promotionsireland.ie



A real Bódhrán Experience at Tradfest 2013



Visiting Tour Operators enjoy chocolate making in the South West



Swiss on a Grand Tour of Discovery of Boyne Valley's Rich Heritage



Festival Season in Dublin would not be the same without a trip to the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre



Creetings from the Wild Atlantic Way. Tour operators get to grips with our newest coastal touring route

VAT Reduction Measure Set to Continue

FOLLOWING BUDGET 2014 the tourism industry appears set to continue to reap the benefits of the VAT stimulus highlighting that the initiative not only worked to boost the tourism industry but the effects to the wider economy, including increased revenue and job creation, appear to have been recognised.

Qualifying these claims is our recent report into the impact of the reduced rate of VAT entitled – ‘An Analysis of the Impact of the VAT Reduction on Irish Tourism & Tourism Development’ – which was published earlier this year.

The report, which carried out an analysis of the reduced rate of VAT for the hospitality sector in 2011, shows that the measure has contributed to an increase of 10,000 jobs among other benefits.

The report found a number of very positive developments from the VAT reduction for the tourism sector including:

- Since the VAT cut, employment in the targeted sectors increased by approximately 10,000 with direct tourism employment up by more than 7,000;
- Price pass through of the rate reduction to consumers is evident across nearly every category;
- Renewed growth in overseas tourism numbers and earnings;
- Increased activity levels apparent across the industry; and
- Improved value for money perception across all visitors.

The jobs created by the measure equates to a benefit to the Exchequer of circa €55 million between additional income tax and social welfare savings and these employment gains follow very significant decreases prior to the commencement of the reduction. Fáilte Ireland estimates that the Exchequer's tax take on the growth in spending by overseas visitors in 2012 was worth €40 million.

Additionally, the tax foregone through the implementation of the rate reduction is below initial estimates. For the first 12 months of the measure, there was a net reduction in VAT receipts for the 9% categories of €88 million. The report also shows that there has been a stabilisation of VAT receipts since September 2012.

The VAT reduction was part of a suite of measures to support tourism which were introduced in the Government's Jobs Initiative (2011). Then, a new, temporarily reduced rate of VAT (9%) was introduced for tourism related goods and services. The Minister for Finance introduced the VAT rate reduction in July 2011 explicitly in order to boost tourism and stimulate employment in the sector.

Read the full report at:
www.failteireland.ie/research-insights

Business Sentiment at a

BUSINESS SENTIMENT within the tourism industry has increased significantly this year with strong feeling that the market has really turned the corner and the future is looking more positive. These are the headline findings coming from the September 2013 Fáilte Ireland Tourism Barometer.

The survey of over 750 different tourism businesses carried out throughout September and before the recent budget announcements, shows business sentiment at a height not seen since the boom years.

The September 2013 report provides a realistic snapshot of where the industry is at and shows us that the tourism tide is very much on the turn.

Encouragingly there has been growth across all the sectors – accommodation, attractions, and restaurants – as well as feedback that the overseas market is performing well for tourism businesses – in particular North America.

VISITOR NUMBERS UP

Two in three (65%) of serviced accommodation operators reported increased visitor numbers and encouragingly for the first time since the start of the financial crisis, all three serviced accommodation sectors report that visitor numbers are significantly up – hotels (68%), guesthouses (58%) and B&Bs (46%).

These findings are clear evidence the Gath-

“There has been a significant uplift in overseas business in 2013. North America was significantly better and saw double-digit growth.”

ering, as well as recent Government initiatives such as the 9% VAT rate which has recently been retained, have helped to provide the industry with a well needed jump-start.

BUSINESS SENTIMENT

This sentiment appears to be echoed across the many sectors of the tourism industry who point to the good weather throughout the summer and the Gathering as having positive impacts on performance this year.

In particular the findings note the Gathering bounce has been enjoyed across the country with all regions performing well and hotels benefitting the most (with almost six out of ten all around the country citing the Gathering as a factor for increased business).

The summer months saw an increase in bookings as the warm weather encouraged business and optimism began to rise. That opti-

mism has leaked into September as business remains up on 2013.

The good weather also meant visitors were happier and left with a higher satisfaction level than in previous years. And while fuel and energy costs remain a high concern for most businesses, the summer sun saw some relief as heating and electricity bills were reduced.

SMALLER SECTORS ALSO PERFORMING WELL

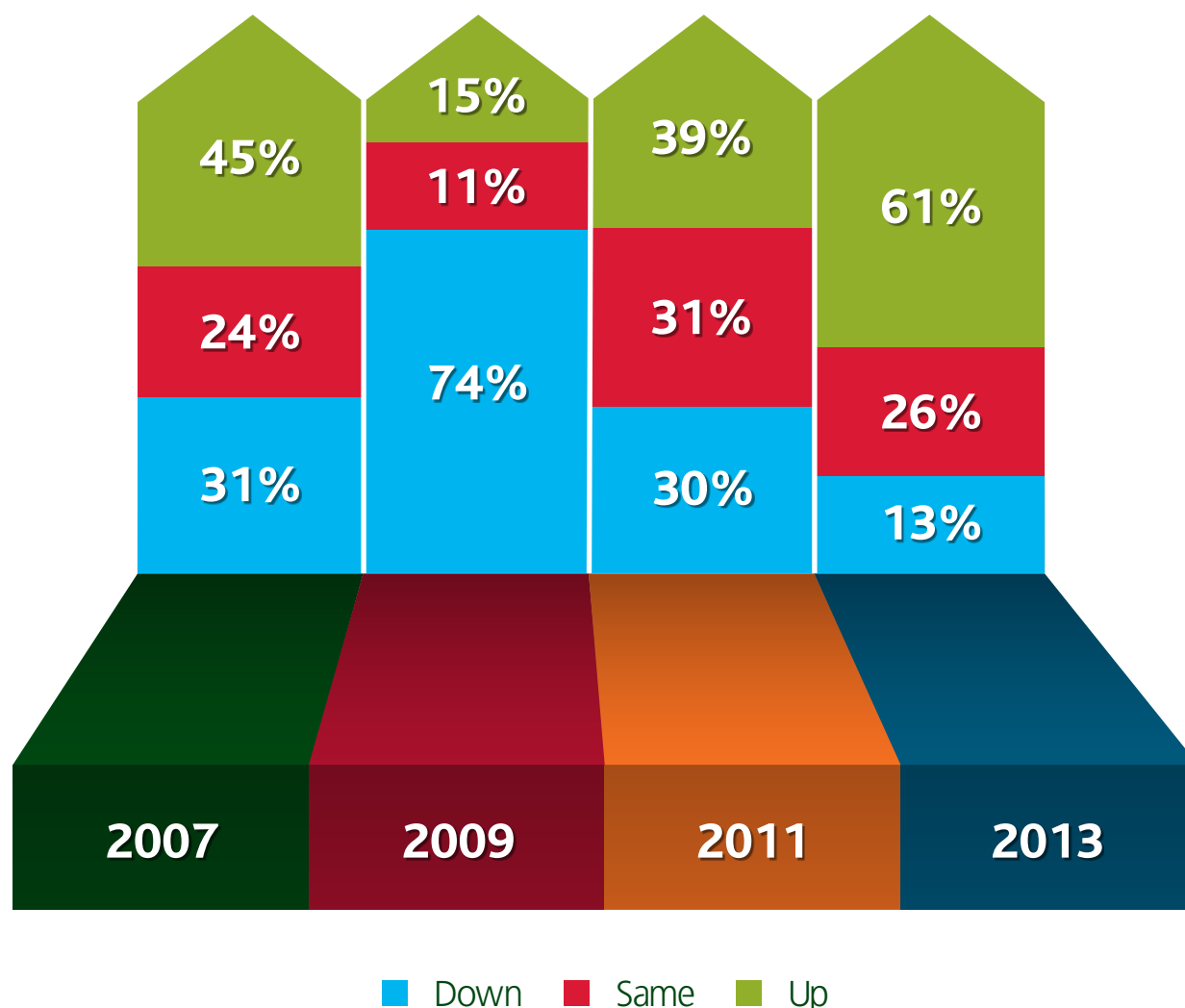
Hostels, golf clubs and caravan and campsites are also enjoying a successful year. Caravan & campsites have benefited significantly from the fine weather, with two in three (67%) reporting increased visitor levels, and all (100%) respondents in the sector stating the weather as a positive factor.

LAST MINUTE BOOKINGS CONTINUE

The trend for visitors to book a trip last minute continues this year making projections difficult for some companies as advance bookings diminish. One operator predicted a substantial loss in July, but came out of the month significantly up.

Last minute bookings can also cause problems with availability – especially in the tourist hotspots like Dublin and for large groups or corporate events.

Business Sentiment Index (% of businesses)



height not seen since boom years

NORTH AMERICAN MARKET CONTINUES TO RISE

Last year also saw an increase in visitors from the North American market – a trend that has continued this year. Some businesses believe that an increase in flights surrounding the marketing of The Gathering has also contributed to this.

Even those that rely on the domestic market have seen a slight increase in the North American market. Other countries that have seen an increase this year include Great Britain, Holland, Germany and France.

'QUIETLY POSITIVE' ABOUT 2014

Following on from the growth in 2013, there is a clear, but tentative, optimism for the year ahead. Businesses have adapted and increased the services they offer to meet the changing needs of consumers.

“We are quietly optimistic for next year.”

Overseas markets continue to be identified for a slow and steady growth as Ireland remains on the map – partially due to the country's competitive prices and promotion of The Gathering.

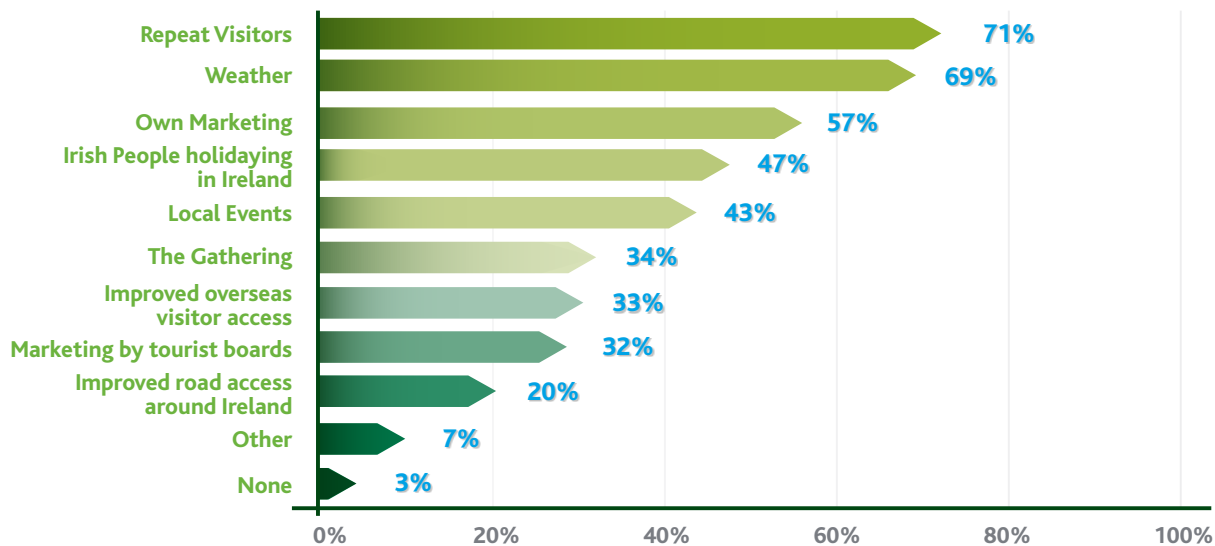
“There is a degree of optimism going into 2014. Most of the travel trade across Europe seems to be continuing their promotion of Ireland as a destination and this should hopefully convert into bookings.”

CONCERNS STILL REMAIN

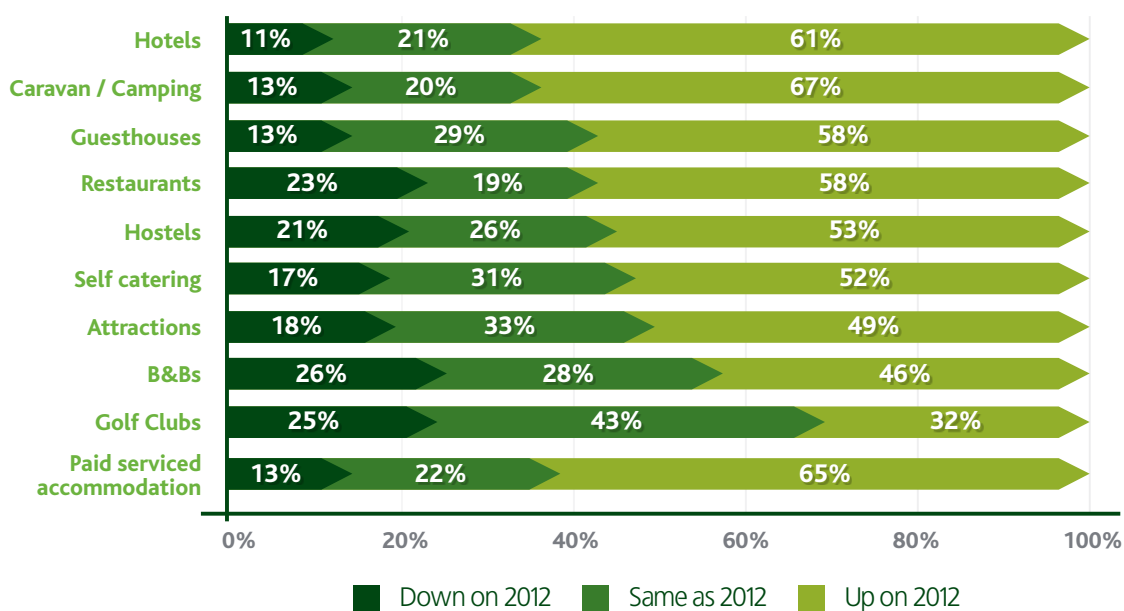
Behind the success story of tourism in Ireland this year there are still some issues which concern operators. Fuel and energy costs remain the most commonly expressed concern by tourism businesses and a fairly high proportion (63%) of respondents have stated 'state of the domestic economy' as a concern again, however the uncertainty over the economy is certainly not as bad as it was in previous years.

Comments suggest that the industry is looking forward to better days ahead. Financial concerns tend to be more about rising operating costs rather than lack of customers.

What are the main positive factors affecting your business this year?



How does the volume of your overall business to date this year compare with the same period last year?



What else does the September 2013 Barometer tell us?

9 out of 10

Expectations remain high - Nine out of ten of accommodation businesses expect the same or increased visitor volumes

27%

Revenue from North America is up by 27% for B&B Ireland members

8 out of 10

Attractions performing well - Eight out of ten report increased or similar visitor volumes as last year – almost 50% of them have welcomed more visitors

52%

52% of self-catering operators report increased visitors

58%

58% of restaurants report an increase in tourist business

2 in 3

Caravan and campsites have benefitted significantly from the fine weather with two in three reporting increased visitor levels

The full 2013 September Barometer, along with all the latest Fáilte Ireland research can be viewed at www.failteireland.ie/research-insights

TM Interview

with Redmond O'Donoghue

REDMOND O'DONOGHUE CV

EDUCATION:

- » Waterpark College, Waterford
- » University College, Dublin
- » Harvard Business School in the US

CURRENT ROLE:

- » Chairman of Good Food Ireland and the Confederation of Golf in Ireland

PREVIOUS ROLES:

- » Group Chief Executive Officer of Waterford Wedgwood
- » Chairman of Bord Fáilte (1999-2001)
- » Member of the Board of Greencore plc (1999 to 2009)
- » Chairman of Fáilte Ireland (2008 – 2013)



As he completes his tenure as Chairman of Fáilte Ireland, Redmond O'Donoghue speaks to *Tourism Matters* about what the last five years have meant to him and why he thinks the future looks bright for Irish tourism.

Tourism Matters: Your experience primarily lies in business, so how did you end up in the tourism industry?

Redmond: I was peripherally involved in tourism for many years as Chief Executive of Waterford Crystal. During my time there we built up a great tourism offering in the visitor centre which, at its peak in 2004, welcomed 350,000 visitors. Up to 80% of these visitors came from North America, so the visitor centre really transformed what was essentially a glass factory into a visitor attraction which enticed overseas visitors to the South East of Ireland.

As Chief Executive I was heavily involved in this transformation and I think it's that part of the day job that introduced me to tourism arena.

Tourism Matters: You were Chairman of Fáilte Ireland for the last five years – what has this role meant to you?

Redmond: Tourism is an industry I have always loved, so chairing the Fáilte Ireland Authority has been a terrific joy to me. The people involved in the tourism industry are not only very civilised and gentle, they are also very resilient and they have had plenty of opportunities to demonstrate this over the last decade.

It has been a great honour to be Chairman of Fáilte Ireland and it is something that I am very proud of. In addition to the last five years I was also Chairman of the late Bord Fáilte for two and have found it very gratifying to have had the opportunity to impact the development of Irish tourism over what have been an incredibly exciting fourteen years with all sorts of highs and lows.

During my tenure as Chairman of both Fáilte Ireland and Bord Fáilte there have been a number of incidents which have impacted on tourism – the Sars outbreak, Foot and Mouth, The Gulf War, September 11, July 7th, Volcanic Ash and of course the last five years of the

worst recession since the 1930's.

When you look across the industries of Ireland tourism was more affected by all of those incidents than any other individual industry and to come through these challenges and to be able to report visitor growth today is what gives me tremendous regard for the tourism industry and its resilience no matter the situation.

Tourism Matters: When you look back over the last five years are there any milestones or achievements that you are particularly proud of?

Redmond: There have been so many high points for me. One of course must be The Gathering and its success. By the time it ends on New Year's Eve more than 5,000 individual gatherings will have taken place which were supported by almost 100,000 volunteers. These figures really illustrate how this initiative really penetrated every city, county, town and parish in Ireland and how the drive of the local communities has contributed to the success of the initiative.

I have also been very deeply involved with golf over the past number of years and Ireland has had so many golf successes recently – we have hosted an incredibly successful Solheim Cup and The Irish Open has been going from strength to strength. Indeed, I felt bringing The Irish Open up to Portrush in 2012 was a real achievement for Irish golf which not only further highlighted the extraordinary successes of Irish and Northern Irish golfers but put Ireland as a destination in the minds of millions of golfers across the globe.

But it's not just golf and The Gathering that I will remember, Ireland has become extremely accomplished as a destination for hosting international events over the last number of years and I have great memories of the Tall Ships coming to Waterford which was a spectacular success, as was the Volvo Ocean Race in Galway

but these are just some among hundreds of event successes.

We have also made great gains in developing Ireland's tourism infrastructure. We have invested significant capital into the tourism sector in recent years and developed a number of new iconic experiences that had never before existed – look at the Viking Triangle in Waterford, the Medieval Mile in Kilkenny, Mayo's Greenway and soon we will have the Wild Atlantic Way, the longest defined coastal route in the world, to add to this list. This investment in infrastructure, at a difficult economic time, is what puts Ireland in the unique position it is in today to attract and welcome those visitors who have begun to travel once more.

Above all of these milestones however is the fact that we, the Irish tourism industry, have created 15,000 new jobs in Ireland in the last two and a half years. During such a difficult economic time it is truly rewarding to achieve this.

I also think that as we say goodbye to 2013 there is a very good chance we will have recorded up to 7 million visitors to Ireland. This is not too far off the peak of previous years. And this success, I think, comes as a result of many of these successes teamed with the fact that Fáilte Ireland has supported the development of a stronger tourism industry, one which has become more competitive and one that is equipped with better infrastructure and is more 'ready for action' than it has been for many years.

Tourism Matters: What do you regard as the biggest challenges and successes for the tourism industry (as opposed to Fáilte Ireland) over the last five years?

Redmond: I think the outlook for tourism in Ireland is strong. We have weathered the storm; we have invested in the infrastructure; access into Ireland has improved and very importantly

competitiveness has returned. I think we have a sharper tourism industry now than we have had for many years and I would be very hopeful that tourism will continue to grow for many years to come.

We are also keeping our eye on the prize and targeting much of the low hanging fruit that exists at the moment. We are targeting the German and French markets which are showing great promise for Ireland and we are working hard to reposition ourselves as a compelling and attractive destination to the Great British market through projects such as Dublin Now. All of this work offers great promise and I am confident that it will bring on further growth for Irish tourism.

Tourism Matters: Now that you have stepped down as Chairman of Fáilte Ireland what's next for you? Will you follow your interest in the food and golf sectors?

Redmond: I have thoroughly enjoyed and relished the challenges tourism has provided over the last five years so I am thrilled that my dalliance with tourism will continue through the work I am currently undertaking with Good Food Ireland whose mission is to raise the profile of Irish food in the food tourism sector.

More recently I have undertaken some work with the Confederation of Golf in Ireland which is a new umbrella organisation in Ireland bringing together the GUI, the ILGU and the PGA which will allow me to continue to develop Ireland's golf offering and contribute to the further success of Irish golfers and the Irish golf sector.

As you can see I am very close to golf and food and now that I have finished my time in Fáilte Ireland I hope to eat a lot of food, drink a lot of wine and play a lot of golf. However, if I can contribute anything further to any aspect of Irish tourism I will of course endeavour to do that.