


ecotourism handbook



for Ireland

Contents

foreword	01
1. taking the fear out of ecotourism	04
2. the ecotourism market	08
3. the journey from tourism to ecotourism	14
4. business planning for ecotourism businesses	28
5. funding for ecotourism	34
6. our responsibilities in tourism	50
7. certifying your ecotourism business	56
8. marketing your ecotourism business	62
9. ecotourism directory	70



We hope this handbook will help inform, inspire and stimulate ideas for you to develop your existing tourism business for the future or to set up a new one. It is hoped to provide you with a stepping stone to guide you in a practical way – where to find help, advice, training, products and services. Learn from the success stories and case studies. Becoming a more sustainable business has many advantages, from cost savings to developing new markets.

Fáilte Ireland and Greenbox are working in partnership to develop ecotourism as a product of excellence for Ireland. Ecotourism internationally is developing at all levels, from the tourism product, tour operators and consumer demand is rising all the time. By embracing ecotourism principles fully into your business you have the potential to create a unique tourism experience using the natural resources of your local area while ensuring high environmental standards for our sector.

Fáilte Ireland's Business Development Manager will help tourism enterprises identify their business and people development needs and assists in the design, development and provision of programmes and services to meet those needs.

The tourism consumers of the future are seeking an authentic quality and ethical experience and also choose their holidays based on lifestyle principles and choices. Ecotourism will ensure sustainability at all levels for your business, community and the environment and offer you a competitive advantage in the marketplace. We wish you every success with your efforts and look forward to working with you to help you achieve them.

Joan Crawford,
**BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER,
FÁILTE IRELAND**



Mary Mulvey,
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
GREENBOX**



foreword

Ecotourism is a sector which is steadily gaining significant credibility within the tourism industry in Ireland. The core ethos and principles of the ecotourism sector are also beginning to permeate mainstream tourism businesses in response to increasing demand by tourists and the cost savings that can be made by 'going green'. Fáilte Ireland has long held the belief that the future sustainability of our tourism industry depends on the extent to which we protect the credibility of our clean green image. It is also important that visitors to Ireland are given options to reduce the carbon footprint of their holiday. With an increase in the levels of good environmental practice in the tourism sector in recent years, Ireland is in a better position than ever to offer choices to visitors wishing to have a lower emissions holiday. Fáilte Ireland is delighted to have been involved in funding this handbook which we believe will assist tourism businesses to help protect our clean green image.

Shaun Quinn,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, FÁILTE IRELAND



Fáilte Ireland
National Tourism Development Authority

one taking the fear out of ecotourism



The term ecotourism is daunting for many, as there is no clear definition of the word. In fact at the last count, one researcher found over eighty meanings in various books, magazines and websites. As well as that, there are other words to throw into the mix, like sustainable, responsible, ethical and green. Whatever you choose to call it, and there are endless academic studies looking at the pros and cons of each term, it is without a doubt the future of tourism in Ireland.

Ecotourism is a rapidly growing movement towards creating a greener and more ethical form of tourism worldwide. The most popular definition of the term is the one used by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), which is given in the box to the right. A good ecotourism business will embrace some, if not all, of these principles. In short, as well as looking at the impacts our tourism businesses have on the environment, we also need to look at ways in which we can help support the local economy, culture and communities in the process. The result – not only a tourism product which is more ethical and fair, but also of greater interest to tourists who are changing the way in which they travel. A rapidly growing number of tourists want their travel to be less invasive, environmentally and culturally, and more beneficial economically to their hosts. This is thanks to organisations like Fairtrade, which have paved the way for tourists, who now have a greater awareness of

the ethical impacts they might have in a commercial world. It is now tourism's chance to show that it can play an equally responsible role and, at the same time, show tourists that Ireland can still offer a high level of tourist satisfaction. Whether that it is an eco-hostel, a 5-star hotel, canoeing or a camping holiday. Or whether the visitor is from Dublin or Dubai.

Ecotourism in Ireland started off in pockets around the country, with products of excellence developing island-wide, particularly in the Northwest of the island. Many people have been committed to these principles for years, long before green took on a deeper meaning for Ireland than the traditional shade of emerald. Such people pioneered ecotourism products, and have become shining examples of the direction in which many more Irish tourism businesses can go. Trinity Island Lodge, for example, is on a small island in the lakelands of County Cavan, now joined to the mainland by a narrow road, built by the O'Dowd family who has farmed the land for generations. Between 1994 and 1999 they restored an old barn on the island, converting it into a guest lodge. They erected a windmill and solar panels to create electricity, installed a wood-burning sauna and stove, both of which have a good source of fuel from the 200 acres of land which they have also reforested over this period. They provide boats and bikes, free of charge, and maintain their

Ecotourism is about uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel. This means that those who implement and participate in ecotourism activities should follow the following ecotourism principles:

- minimise impact
- build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
- provide direct financial benefits for conservation
- provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate

SOURCE: THE INTERNATIONAL ECOTOURISM SOCIETY,
WWW.ECOTOURISM.ORG

“This is a very relevant, ethical and timely handbook for visitors and hospitality businesses alike. The positive concepts, performances, strategies and real actions on the ground, which genuinely protect and enhance our environment and natural habitats, need clarifying and bench-marking. There’s an absence of knowledge, information and awareness, of the environmental impacts of the tourism and hospitality industry in Ireland, and the appropriate mitigation measures that can be introduced to effectively combat the pressures.

Many of these behavioural practices and capital investments in new, efficient and renewable technologies also save money and waste, with effective paybacks and an improved competitive edge. There is a lot of ‘green-washing’ by businesses, claiming ‘eco’ benefits that are often untrue or only form a small part of the overall impact. There are, however, some really good initiatives taking place that are not given enough exposure or credit. On the consumer side, there are many visitors today that genuinely want to choose the ethical alternative and avail of these hospitality facilities”.

Duncan Stewart,

PRODUCER AND PRESENTER
OF RTE’S ECOEYE.

property using eco-friendly products and principles, which they invite guests to respect and learn from. They have also been awarded the prestigious EU Flower Ecolabel for good green practices.

At the Clare Island Yoga Retreat, the owners, Christophe and Ciara, managed against all odds, to construct one of Ireland’s most successful yoga centres on this remote Mayo island. Accommodation is in a restored traditional island cottage, with workshops in a new wooden building, both fusing organically with the island’s rugged landscape. There are solar panels for heating water, wood-burning stoves, and the use of natural materials such as wood, hemp, lime plaster, terracotta and natural slates. They grow and source as many of their ingredients as possible on the island, and water is from their own well. They host many visitors to Clare Island, and support several local businesses as a result.

Such ecotourism initiatives are not something to be daunted by, rather inspired by. In addition, learning about good practice like this on the ground is the best way to define ecotourism. We can see how someone not only created a product which protects a valuable piece of landscape, but also invites a

tourist to interact with nature and culture, while possibly sustaining a farming family, as well as the local economy.

Ecotourism is about maximising the positive impacts of tourism for everyone and everything. Ecotourism encourages conservation of the biodiverse landscape of Ireland. If everyone working in tourism worked with the same eco-principles, then there would be a nationwide change in attitude towards keeping Ireland green. This handbook aims to spread the word to all people involved in tourism, from farmers, fisheries, health practitioners, market stall holders, restaurateurs, to transport providers and, of course, accommodation providers.

Many people say that achieving a perfect ecotourism product is impossible. But no one is asking for perfection. If the Irish tourism industry acts together in a collaborative way to instil some of these ecotourism practices into our everyday business, we can aspire to an excellent ecotourism product en masse. Some will always have the capacity and will to do more than others, but it is the mass movement which will create a genuine ecotourism product. That is to say, a fair, sustainable and attractive one, and one that Ireland can be proud to put on the rapidly expanding green map of Europe.



two the ecotourism market



READING THE SIGNS

You don't need to read too many statistics to see that the demand for a greener, more ethical tourism product is growing. Although tourists have been slower to connect their holidays with other purchases, such as Fairtrade food and clothing, there is a greater sense of ethics around general consumption which is now creeping into the traveller's mindset too.

According to The International Ecotourism Society the market has been growing since the 1990's at a rate of between 20-34% every year, depending on the destination¹. This is more than three times the growth rate of worldwide tourism as a whole. A recent survey in the United States by Tripadvisor, showed that just over a third of travellers reported plans to stay at an eco-friendly hotel or resort in 2009, a 30% increase in a year. The World Travel Market, one of the largest international travel trade exhibitions, has a whole day dedicated to it. There are numerous international awards for it, and green travel books are now being published by organisations such as Rough Guide and The Guardian newspaper. Two of Rough Guide's biggest recent sellers are Rough Guide to Climate Change, and Rough Guide to Ethical Living. As well as this, many of the leading tour operators now have, or are creating, full time positions for sustainable tourism managers, such as Thomas Cook and TUI PLC.

This is not just a green bandwagon, as organisations like this do not publish books or sell holidays to preach to a niche or create a demand. They know that the demand for greater understanding of how we should change the way in which we travel is out there. And growing.

THE GREEN BANDWAGON

Travel companies which specialise in selling ecotourism holidays, such as responsibletravel.com, Explore, Exodus, The Adventure Company or Tribes Travel continue to grow from strength to strength. They knew what was coming, established a strict ethical framework early on, and have been able to build upon it as demand grew. Responsibletravel.com, one of the world's pioneers and leaders in ecotourism, based in UK, was proud to announce a 25% increase in revenue in 2007/08, at a time when many other tourism businesses were feeling a strong pinch from the worldwide economic downturn.

Many travel businesses are now accused of jumping on a bandwagon, and some are. However, the majority are in it for the right reason and hold a firm commitment to the bigger picture of sustainability. Just because you have a good business head, and recognise that ecotourism is a growing market should not be a reason for criticism. Especially if the process of greening your business is done with support and guidance from experts

"Increasingly, sustainability and green tourism are becoming one of the major economic drivers for the industry. We hope to encourage more companies and organisations to adopt sustainable policies, ensuring a low impact on the environment and local culture while, at the same time, helping generate prosperity, employment, and the conservation of local ecosystems".

Graham E Cooke,

FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF WORLD TRAVEL AWARDS. WWW.WORLDTRAVELAWARDS.COM

“We must not forget the dual relationship between tourism and global warming, both as its victim and vector. While rising sea levels, desertification, deforestation or the melting of snow and glaciers hurt the tourist economy, our sector also contributes through its very existence to the warming process”.

Francesco Frangialli,

UNWTO SECRETARY-GENERAL, CLIMATE CHANGE – REALITY CHECK AND OPPORTUNITY FOR TOURISM.

in the field. As the number of people working in ecotourism grows, at home and abroad, so does the support network.

HOW MANY BUSINESSES DOES IT TAKE TO CHANGE A LIGHT BULB?

It is important to know that as you work to make your tourism business more sustainable, you are part of a worldwide movement of change. One of the most influential official bodies supporting countries for which tourism is a key industry is the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO).

At the Second International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism in Davos, Switzerland, in October 2007, co-run by the UNWTO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), representatives from the UN signed the Davos Declaration. This was a ground-breaking commitment to adapt tourist businesses and destinations to climate change. The 80 signatory countries accepted that the tourism sector must “rapidly respond” to climate change by reducing its Greenhouse Gas Contribution (GHC). Considering that tourism is still one of the largest industries in the world, and transport and accommodation are two of the most important parts of its makeup, this contribution is more than significant.

Currently, the CO₂ emissions from tourism are estimated at 5% of overall worldwide emissions, which may not

seem particularly high. But it is the ongoing growth of tourism which raises alarm bells in the long term. Furthermore, the accommodation section accounts for 21% of carbon emissions for each holiday taken. This is a big piece of the pie, and a slice which can easily be cut.

As a result, the UNWTO is now focused on “mainstreaming climate change” or getting the message to every organisation, big or small, that their business plans should now prioritise climate change. This involves leadership at government level and policy-making on adapting transport systems, conservation, protecting landscapes and coastlines. But such change cannot take place without the support and enthusiasm of all of the country’s tourism providers.

In Ireland, Fáilte Ireland put in place a Carbon Strategy in 2008, entitled Facing the Challenges of Climate Change, as part of its Environmental Action Plan, 2007-2009. As part of this strategy it has committed to measuring the carbon footprint of the 18,000 tourism business in Ireland. Working closely with Change, the national awareness and communication campaign on climate change, which is being led by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG), it will enable experts to assess and act upon the most efficient ways of reducing tourism’s current environmental impact as quickly as possible.

TOURISM IS UNSTOPPABLE

According to the UNWTO's forecasts, the worldwide annual growth in tourism is estimated to be 4.1% per year from 1995-2020. The number of trips taken in Europe is projected to grow by 57% between 2000 and 2020². The UNWTO has extrapolated these figures as far forward as 2035 to see what carbon effect this increase in tourism will have. They take a 'business as usual' approach, meaning that they assume that the tourism industry will not suffer any huge setbacks in the meantime. They also take into consideration technological advances to improve energy efficiency from airlines. Despite the current economic downturn, the UNWTO is confident that tourism will still continue to grow at this rate in the long-term.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the footprint factor is not good. Emissions from the tourist accommodation sector are forecast to increase by 170% between 2005 and 2035. This is a much greater increase than that of predicted aviation emissions, due to the technological advancements that are taking place in this sector.

GREEN MEANS GROWTH

The good news is that as tourism grows, the ecotourism share is predicted to grow also, and at an even greater speed. This increase is not only due to tourist awareness of the impacts of their holidays, but also by the increase

in oil prices, airline tickets and so on. This has created a sudden realisation for many people, that a holiday which is less costly in carbon is also less costly on their personal budgets.

In Ireland, the majority of international visitors are from the United Kingdom, where the growth in ecotourism holidaymakers is significant. According to the UK's Federation of Tour Operators, 87% of British tourists think it is important that their holiday does not damage the environment. 70% of them feel that their tour operator's environmental policies are important to them. At the same time, there is a greater emphasis in the UK media on air-free travel to all European countries, and Ireland can be included in this new 'Slow Travel' phenomenon. Examples of this are award-winning website www.seat61.com, which promotes train travel from UK to anywhere in the world, Time Out's latest publication Flight-Free Europe and the recent publication of ecoescape UK and ecoescape Ireland (with sections on Slow Travel options), Organic Places to Stay in UK and Ireland by Linda Moss, and Alastair Sawday's Green Places to Stay. In Ireland, there is now a regular ecotourism column in the travel supplement of The Irish Times, called Ethical Traveller.

In 2006, Fáilte Ireland commissioned a survey of tourism providers, as part of a review of good environmental policy and practice in the tourism sector.

"It is important that tourists to Ireland are given the options to reduce the carbon footprint of their holiday. Fáilte Ireland intends to offer further marketing opportunities to businesses with an environmental standard or accreditation as part of a new 'green tourism' section of its consumer website".

Fáilte Ireland,

CARBON STRATEGY 2008 FACING THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE.

“I’m delighted to lend my support to this handbook, sponsored by Fáilte Ireland and Greenbox. It is a great contribution towards helping tourism providers to develop good ecotourism products. Previously a niche market, ecotourism is becoming mainstream, as environmental protection and sustainability become more and more important for consumers. They are becoming more demanding, and rightly so, and are keen to ensure that they enhance rather than damage the places they are visiting. This development is a wonderful opportunity for tourism providers in Ireland. The low impact tourism philosophy is also good for our tourist areas, as it ensures that they are sustainable in the long term. Ecotourism shows that what is good for the environment is usually good for business too”.

John Gormley TD,

MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

One of the questions posed to tourism providers was, “which issues/drivers are most likely to motivate you to change the way the environmental aspects of your business are managed?”. The answers showed that 82% of businesses were likely to change their practices in response to the changing needs of customers. The customers are now changing their needs and so it is time for the industry to respond, if they want to stay top of the tourism pile.

THE ECO-TOURIST

Some see the eco-tourist as the archetypal hippy, wanting to go wild camping and foraging in the forest. Others perceive eco-tourists as rainforest explorers or hiking-biking lycra wearers. The International Ecotourism Society describes the typical ‘eco-tourist’ as having ‘more’ of everything. They have more education, more money and more years on them than most other tourists. According to Fáilte Ireland’s research, the majority of visitors to Ireland in 2020 will be over 55 years old. As well as that, it claims that “Tomorrow’s customer will be better educated, more individualistic and more discriminating than their predecessors”. Additionally, consumers are developing an increasing “desire to reconnect with some traditional values, things like simpler ways of living, slower pace of life and family-centred lifestyles”³. Ecotourism products suit all of these needs and interests.

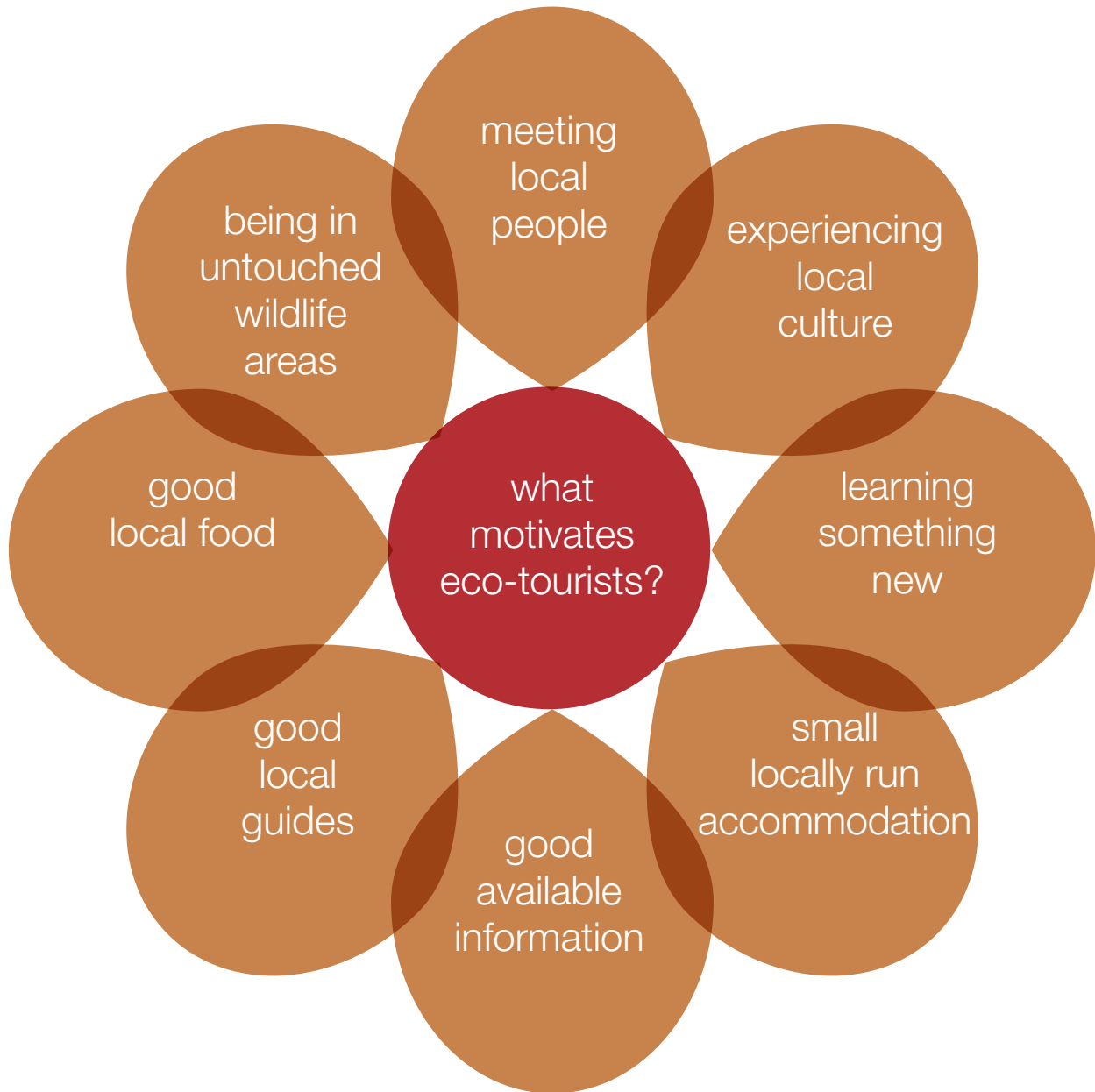
However, ecotourism does not need to be limited to this ‘more’ tourist as the eco-tourist does not have to be stereotypical. Over three quarters of visitors say that unspoilt natural scenery is an important reason for visiting Ireland, whether they are educated, economically advantaged, entering their silver spending years or not. Moreover, among Irish people taking holidays at home, over 20% are hikers. Additionally, nearly a third of US travellers buy specifically from companies which donate part of their profits to charity⁴.

These are not niche numbers. This is a significant number of tourists who are changing the way they think about their purchases. This new way of thinking about travel was predicted by the UNWTO when it published its Global Code of Ethics for Tourism in 2001. This document is a must-read for anyone wanting to gain a greater understanding of ecotourism. It talks about “tourism’s contribution to mutual understanding and respect between peoples and societies”, and steers away from the traditional language of sustainable development. Similar to Fáilte Ireland’s predictions for tourists who are changing the way they think about travel, this Code talks about the importance of concepts such as value, taste, expectations and spiritual fulfilment for tomorrow’s tourists⁵. First it was coffee and cotton consumption and now, at last, the ethical and ecotourism message is starting to hit the holiday maker’s radar.

³ Tourism Product Development Strategy, 2007-2013, www.failteireland.ie

⁴ The International Ecotourism Society. Factsheet – Global Ecotourism, www.ecotourism.org

⁵ Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, www.world-tourism.org/code_ethics/eng.html



three journey from tourism to ecotourism



Every business is different, but there are two things for sure. First, every business can become an ecotourism business. It can respect the environment, support the local economy and be culturally and socially aware. Whether it is a farmhouse in Fermanagh or a seaweed bathhouse in Sligo. Second, it does not have to cost you more money in the long term. Sustainability is the core of any ecotourism business, and that also means making sure that you can sustain yourself well into the future as a thriving business.

You might be thinking about establishing an ecotourism business from scratch, or working out the best ways to upgrade your business from a good tourism business to an even better ecotourism business. Whatever your goal, there are many ways to reduce your footprints, and many steps you can take to be more ethical throughout your tourism business practices. With the ecotourism market growing three times faster than the rest of the tourism industry, it is no longer just the green converts who strive to make these changes. Ecotourism is, out of necessity and through consumer demand, taking a worldwide move from niche to norm.

The following sections of the book are aimed at helping you understand how to become a successful ecotourism business.

The principles are listed below. For help and hints on how to put these into practice, please refer to each section in detail. In order to assess your business practices, and how you might be able to improve them to make them more responsible, you need to consider the following:

- What is the environmental impact of your business?
- How much do you, and could you, feed into the local economy?
- Should you have an ecotourism policy in place for your business?
- How can you develop a business plan to specifically suit your ecotourism product?
- What is eco-labelling and how can you get it?
- What funding and training is available in ecotourism?
- How do you market or sell an ecotourism business?



“Energy is often mistakenly regarded as a fixed overhead. However, it is one of the easiest costs for a hotel to manage. Hotels can reduce their energy costs by up to 20% without significant investment”.

Alan Ryan,

SME PROGRAMME MANAGER, SUSTAINABLE ENERGY IRELAND (SEI).

IMPROVING YOUR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

1. Change the lightbulbs is the first big step in switching on the green light in any business. There is no point in spending precious time, energy and money investigating the benefits of becoming an ecotourism business if you aren't prepared to take some basic steps in the right direction.

Unlike other areas of change, this one is technologically easy, and the statistics on cost savings are well-known. Light bulbs account for around 12-20% of domestic electricity usage, and around 95% of the energy used in traditional incandescent bulbs is lost in heat. Energy-efficient compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) reduce energy waste by more than 75%, and last almost ten times longer. Most CFLs can be bought in supermarkets and DIY stores now, but for leading online suppliers see www.avocalite.ie, www.greenme.ie in ROI and www.nigelsecostore.com, in NI.

Switching off the lights and keeping things natural is preferable to any artificial light. Good lighting management can account for up to 70% savings in electricity use in many hotels. See Sustainable Energy Ireland's (SEI) website, for information on ongoing projects to help SMEs change their lighting systems to more energy efficient and, consequently, cheaper ones, (www.sei.ie).

There have been a lot of media scares about the danger of energy-efficient light bulbs, due to the small amount of mercury contained in them. But the disposal of them is quite straightforward: Irish Lamp Recycling Managing Director John Cuddy says: “If a CFL breaks in the home, the householder should open the window in the room for fifteen minutes and carefully sweep up the broken glass. The broken glass should be placed in a double-lined, strong plastic bag and brought to the local Civic Amenity Site, where it should be placed in the container with other fluorescent lamps.” They are then collected from the site by Irish Lamp Recycling, broken down, and each section recycled separately, and the mercury disposed of carefully. The same applies in Northern Ireland. Some retailers also offer a take-back scheme, where unbroken used bulbs can be returned to the store for recycling.

2. Bring sunlight into darkness with the use of sunpipes. Whether you are building from scratch or greening an existing building, there will always be black spots somewhere, where natural light cannot access, such as basements, cellars, dark hallways or walk-in cupboards. One way around this is by installing a sunpipe. You don't need to make any huge structural alterations to fit one either. See www.sunpipe.co.uk and www.slatesalesireland.com for details in NI and ROI respectively.

3. Install a carbon counter, otherwise known as a smart meter, to tell you just how much carbon you are emitting every day. Using a device which is connected to a meter, this is an excellent way of monitoring energy usage and patterns. You don't even need an electrician to install it. See www.electrisave.ie or www.ecostore.ie for details.

www.change.ie is an Irish website dedicated to promoting carbon reductions in all areas of our lives, at home, work and play. It is an extremely useful resource with constantly updated information, such as changes in regulation regarding CO₂ emissions, guidance for SMEs on how to put in place a carbon management scheme, as well as providing research material, facts and figures.

4. If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen. Or just find simple ways to reduce it. These include careful use of the dishwasher, avoiding the use of power-drying cycles, making sure all appliances are A-rated for energy efficiency, putting lids on saucepans, and turning all appliances off when they are not in use.

5. Insulation is another simple way of keeping costs down, and the earth cooler. Reassess all roof and cavity insulation, as well as boiler, water tank

and pipe lagging. Regular servicing of boilers and hot water tanks, as well as digital monitoring of correct water temperatures, are all excellent energy management actions. Natural insulation is not only kinder to the environment because it uses a lot less energy in the manufacturing process, but it is also more efficient, safer to handle, can help farmers either through hemp production or sheep rearing, and can eventually be composted. For a list of suppliers in ROI see www.sustainabledevelopments.ie and www.therenewableenergycentre.co.uk for NI. For sheep's wool insulation see www.sheepwoolinsulation.ie

6. One degree down on the radiator represents at least 100kg less CO₂ emissions. It is worth putting valves on radiators, as well as thermometers and thermostats on water heaters. Water temperatures should be between 55-65°C and room temperatures should never need to exceed 24°C, with a minimum of around 16-18°C for comfort. Electric heaters, including storage heaters, are carbon criminals, producing almost twice as much CO₂ as gas systems. There is a wealth of information on quick and easy cost-cutting exercises on The Travel Foundation's website, a prolific and pioneering UK charity working to increase the sustainability of tourism businesses in popular UK destinations. See www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk

The Old Schoolhouse in County Cavan is the perfect example of converting old to new, with sustainable energy at its core. This 1930's schoolhouse was completely refurbished as a modern, luxurious self-catering house, with all energy coming from renewable sources. There is a wood pellet boiler, solar panels, both of which supply hot water and underfloor heating. There is also a wood-burning stove in the living area and plenty of Velux windows to provide passive solar heating. The schoolhouse proves to be very energy efficient, with running costs being recorded and analysed on a regular basis. Modifications to the original heating design are ongoing and changes implemented to improve the efficiency of the system. A recent example included the provision of a thermostat on the return temperature of the solar collector, to allow the transfer of excess heat to the underfloor heat store when temps exceeding 80°C are achieved within the buffer store. All of these superb state of the art eco-features, as well as a rainwater harvesting and reed bed system, make this restored schoolhouse much more about the new than the old. www.theoldschoolhousecavan.com

7. For sustainable building seek out an architect who is expert in sustainable building practices. For further information on green building practices, workshops and courses, the Environmental and Sustainable Construction Association, EASCA, (www.easca.ie), The Living Architecture Centre

(www.livingarchitecturecentre.com), Construct Ireland (www.constructireland.ie), www.sustainable.ie and www.cultivate.ie are all excellent starting points to inspire you to keep Ireland's buildings green. You can also subscribe to Ireland's Sustainability magazine, www.sustainability.ie. For more information on building with hemp lime, see a recent publication by Northern Irish architects Rachel Bevan and Tom Woolley, entitled Hemp Lime Construction. In ROI, contact Steve Allin of Hemp Ireland, based in County Kerry, who has also written a book on the subject, entitled Building with Hemp, as well as offering an environmental design consultancy service (www.hempbuilding.com).

Noeleen Tyrrell and Brendan Murphy bought Ard Nahoo in County Leitrim in 1994, which comprised six acres of land overlooking Lough Nahoo, an old house and a dilapidated barn. In 2001 they converted the barn into a health farm, including a yoga studio, two treatment rooms, a flotation tank and a steam room. In 2003 they hosted part of the first ever Green Living Festival. In 2005 a small wooden cabin was built to accommodate residential stays. The grounds were developed to include a wild flower meadow, wildlife pond and Celtic Nature Trail in 2007. In order to develop Ard Nahoo further, they researched sustainable architects, and hired Peter Cowman of Living Architecture in 2006. In 2007 the health farm was closed in

order to build two eco-cabins, a new yoga studio and the Uisce area, an indoor/outdoor wet area with sauna and hot tub. The entire construction was conducted along green principles, and all buildings are timber-framed, cedar-clad, finished with natural paints, heated with wood pellet stoves, use limited concrete and no petrochemicals. Later that year, Ard Nahoo was awarded the EU Flower, and the new Ard Nahoo was opened in 2008 by John Gormley TD, Minister for the Environment, Heritage & Local Government. Visiting groups can be picked up by Ireland Ecotours, with a bus run on vegetable oil. Bike hire can be arranged, an organic vegetable box ordered in advance for visitors, and there are organic herb gardens planted between the eco-cabins. (www.ardnahoo.com). Extract, with permission, from *ecoescape: Ireland*, by Catherine Mack (www.ecoescape.org)

8. Converting to carbon free forms of energy is the ideal for many businesses and homes.

Renewable energy resources such as the sun, wind, water, ground heat and biomass (wood, waste and energy crops) are abundantly available in Ireland. These offer natural, cleaner and sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels.

Two leading organisations set up to help small individuals and businesses convert to clean power are Sustainable Energy Ireland (www.sei.ie) in Republic of Ireland, and Action Renewables (www.actionrenewables.org) in NI.

Both provide all the latest technological updates, assessments, grant guidance and mentoring, with SEI, for example, offering excellent energy management courses for SMEs. See also Cultivate in Dublin for interesting courses on renewable systems (www.cultivate.ie). You can even heat a swimming pool from ground heat these days, as proved at Bellinter House, a luxury hotel in County Meath (www.bellinterhouse.com). International magazine Green Hotelier is also an excellent source of examples of best practice around the world (www.greenhotelier.com).

You can make a significant difference by moving energy suppliers to one that is using only renewable sources. Renewable resources include electricity generated from hydro-electric, solar, wind, wave and ground heat sources. For details of all options available, as well as suppliers, see The Ecological Best Practice Guidelines at www.greenbox.ie

9. Clean the rooms, not the environment

by using biodegradable cleaning products. This is a must for any green business, as the petrochemicals used in many cleaning products are toxic, and although they may break down the grease, they are slow to break down in the ground water and waste water systems. Many also contain phosphates; the guiltiest of chemicals for stopping septic tanks or other waste water systems do their thing.

Eco-friendly products use plant extracts as their main cleaning agents, and also pump-action sprays instead of aerosols. Yet such products are still feared by many tourism providers because they believe that their cleaning action is 'sub-standard'. But this is not the case. Put the bleach away and start putting your trust in products which do not harm the environment. They are more readily available now, including chemical free cloths, which are designed to clean without any products at all, and at a much reduced cost. One business puts lemon juice and vinegar on the kitchen counter in its self-catering cottages, explaining to guests the cleaning properties of both: lemon juice as bleach, and vinegar on the windows. Baking soda will do the saucepans too. Ask your local shop to order eco-friendly products in bulk for you, or you can order online. If you subcontract cleaning services, then broach the subject with them too. It is not a big ask anymore.

10. Saving water in Ireland is like a bad Irish joke, with the seemingly endless downpours providing one of the Irish tourism industry's biggest nightmares. However, diminishing rainfall is not the only reason for reducing water usage. Every drop we use also has to be treated, and then retreated, the endless cycle requiring vast amounts of energy. The UK's not-for-profit research organisation Waterwise found that the energy used to pump, treat and heat the water in an average family produces

more carbon equivalent than a return flight from London to New York (www.waterwise.org.uk). Not forgetting to mention the ever-increasing water costs. Put water-saving devices in toilets, such as quick flush buttons, or tap inserts to reduce the water flow to a spray. Restricting output flow of showers to 10L per minute is the ideal. There are various flow restrictors on the market for this purpose.

Water the garden from rainwater, collected in child-safe water butts, or take a step further and plumb in a grey water system which reuses bath, washing machine and sink water for toilet flushing. This is neither complicated nor costly. A bigger investment is to install a complete rainwater harvesting system saving around 50% on water consumption. Broadstone Engineering Ltd (www.bel.ie) and Envirocare (www.envirocare.ie) are both leading Irish suppliers.

The best solution is to go the whole green hog and build a reed bed or constructed wetland system, which requires expert consultation and planning due to physiological limitations in some cases, depending on where your business is in the country. For more details www.nireedbeds.co.uk and www.wetlandsystems.ie in NI and ROI respectively.

"A shower flow controller costs around €5. If one of these is put in every shower in an average 100-bed hotel, there would be a cost-saving of approximately €7300 every year. It would also reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 9.800 kg of CO₂ every year. This water conservation measure requires an investment of €500, and achieves a payback of one month. Installing tap aerators in the same hotel, at a cost of approximately €3 each, to reduce flow from 15L/min to 6L/min, will result in a water and energy saving of €2600 per year. The impact of implementing a three day bed linen change policy in a 100-bed hotel is a reduction of water and energy costs of €3700 per year".

The Travel Foundation,

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS.
WWW.THETRAVELFOUNDATION.ORG.UK

Delphi Mountain Resort in Connemara is nestled between two stretches of water, Killary Harbour at Leenane, and the Bundorragha River, which flows down the Delphi Valley's mountain sides. The owners, Rory and Aileen Concannon, put waste, and in particular, water waste, as one of its top eco-priorities. Consequently, they have installed their own on-site natural water treatment plant, and use the local spring for water supplies. Sustainable energy sources are also impressive at Delphi, with all heating and hot water running off two wood-energy boilers, walls are insulated with recycled paper, and roof tiles made from recycled wood and copper.
www.delphimountainresort.com

11. Wake up to Waste is the name of Northern Ireland's advisory body on recycling. The benefits of recycling are now well known, but we have not all woken up to the reality of just how important it is yet. We still throw out about 20% of the food we buy which is not only a waste of money, but adding to unnecessary methane emissions.

You can easily transform the ethos of your business using the three R's of Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. From buying recycled paper for all your business stationery to using refillable printer cartridges. Aim for a 100% no waste to landfill policy. With careful planning and sourcing, it is possible, (www.wakeuptowaste.org).

Wineport Lodge in County Westmeath has invested in its own bottle crushing machine, to reduce the storage space and cost of recycling its constant flow of empty glass bottles. This machine allows 680 bottles (in less than 10 minutes) to be processed through its specially designed system of hammers, reducing bin volume from 5-1 and collection costs by 80%. Ray Byrne, the owner, is adamant that this has been an excellent investment, predicting it will have paid for itself in less than three years. He bought it from Irish supplier PEL Recycling Equipment (www.pelmfg.com). In addition to their other eco-friendly practices, Wineport Lodge is also one of few hotels in Ireland offering to pick guests up at the local station if they choose to arrive by train. www.wineport.ie

Good waste management is also an excellent way of cutting costs. First and foremost avoid packaging when and if you can. Even down to the plastic bags used in guest waste paper bins; only replace them when they are soiled, and use biodegradable ones if possible. The Ferrycarrig Hotel in Wexford, for example, shreds all its newspapers locally, and they are then distributed for animal bedding. Freecycle is an organisation which operates North and South of the border, and is a great way of recycling anything you don't want anymore, by giving it free of charge to someone who does, (www.freecycle.org).

In the meantime, just about everything can be recycled if you do your research. For more information see www.wakeuptowaste.org in NI and www.repak.ie and www.enfo.ie in ROI.

Greenbusiness.ie is an initiative of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which is designed to support waste prevention and resource efficiency within the business sector. Tools, tips and advice are provided on how to reduce waste, conserve energy and save water. www.greenbusiness.ie.

The importance of composting as a form of waste disposal cannot be stressed enough. There are many courses around the country on composting, such as the Irish Peatland Conservation Council (IPCC). Its mission is to protect the bogs, many of which have been irreparably damaged due to intensive mining for peat for gardens. Their website is brimming with information on how to compost, (www.ipcc.ie).

Eco-tourists are now taught to reduce the amount of packaging they bring on holiday, so as not to pass the burden on to destinations, so most people understand this international language now. Recycling is a two-way thing, a contemporary way of thinking and soon to be the norm everywhere.

The Creevy Cooperative in Ballyshannon, County Donegal, has installed wooden compost bins in the gardens of each of their beautifully restored stone cottages. The wooden bins are made from recycled wood, and built by members of the cooperative. With careful instructions to visitors regarding what can and cannot be composted, it has proved a successful venture and the cooperative gardeners have plentiful supplies of compost to redistribute on their chemical-free visitors' gardens. www.creevyexperience.com

12. The nappy issue is not something you see on many ecotourism policies. Toilets, compost and reed beds make frequent appearances, but for some reason, nappies are still no-no's. The plastic used in a conventional nappy takes hundreds of years to breakdown in landfill, and the granules which act as absorbency agents soak up groundwater. However, as an ecotourism provider it is an easy situation to deal with. In your information pack to visitors, state that you are aiming towards a zero waste policy, and request politely that they use biodegradable nappies. Or if you have room, stock a few packets of each size, which you can then sell to your visitors. There are more details on composting these nappies on the excellent Irish website www.ecobaby.ie where you can also buy stock. They supply both ROI and Northern Ireland.

13. Bathroom goody giveaways are passé for any ecotourism business. Small disposable toiletries may be seen

as treats for guests, but go against the green grain in several ways. Many are sourced outside Ireland, most contain chemicals, and they all add hugely to the amount of waste created by the tourist industry. Try to source natural bathroom products for guests, if possible locally, and use pump-action refillable bottles. There are many other treats you can offer guests without creating unnecessary waste.

14. Seasonal and slow are the buzz words in food tourism. Many people battle over where to source their orange juice, what to do with its packaging, and whether it should be Fairtrade or not. Few consider the option of simply not offering orange juice for breakfast. But sometimes it is only by breaking traditions that change can be achieved. Other healthy alternatives using produce which hasn't been flown thousands of miles can be offered; smoothies using berries, for example, or at least if you want to provide juices, use Fairtrade ones. The Fairtrade organisation aims to ensure sustainable development in trade and commerce, "so that everyone through their work can maintain a decent and dignified livelihood and develop their full potential". So, any eco-aware business should, at the very minimum, use Fairtrade coffee and tea in guest rooms and in the kitchen. But there is also room for other product usage, such as Fairtrade wines, cottons, chocolate and so on. For product and supplier information see www.fairtrade.ie or www.fairtrade.org.uk for ROI and NI respectively.

If and when possible use local produce and, even better, organic. The Slowfood movement promotes this throughout Ireland, and their website www.slowfoodireland.com gives all the information you need about staying local. They organise many food events around the country, and it is worth joining your local branch, so that you can get support and inspiration in this area as well as getting involved in local events to celebrate local produce.

Organic produce is more environmentally friendly as it allows the natural biodiversity of the land to grow. Because producers do not use man-made fertilisers, organic produce is also a lot less carbon guilty, as these fertilisers require a lot of energy to manufacture, not forgetting the disposal of packaging issue. Research is still being carried out to prove the effect of chemical run-off into ground and river water, and the quality of the soil itself.

For self-catering accommodation, it is also useful to offer the provision of a food hamper with local and/or organic cheese, vegetables or meat products. The Organic Centre in Rosssinver, County Leitrim (www.organiccentre.ie) offers excellent courses on creating your own vegetable gardens, or sharing one within a community. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland provides a detailed list of organic food suppliers, (www.ruralni.gov.uk).

15. Guest gadgets go beyond the telly. Some progressive businesses are now choosing not to put televisions in the bedrooms, as they are often left on standby and consume vast amounts of energy. Flat-screen plasma televisions are the worst offenders, using around four times as much energy as traditional cathode ray tube models. Some places offer low-energy options instead such as CD players or portable DVD players. You can also provide solar chargers for laptops, mobile phones and ipods for guests. Such changes do not have to reduce the standard of an accommodation, but simply illustrate a changing approach in your tourism practices. If television is a feature in your business, ensure to inform guests and staff about the carbon impacts of leaving them on, or on standby. And switch them off whenever you can.

Delphi Mountain Resort in Connemara and Gregans Castle Hotel in The Burren, both luxury four-star hotels, have chosen to be television-free, not simply for energy-saving reasons, but also because they believe that the visitor experience is improved by enjoying the landscape around them without intrusion from the outside world of media and movies. If visitors understand the reasons for taking such decisions, through information given to them by the accommodation providers in advance or during their stay, then it will never take away from the quality of the service provided. www.gregans.ie and www.delphimountainresort.com

16. Rethink your transport policies to see if your carbon footprint could be lighter. Ireland's total greenhouse gas emissions in 2006 were 25.5% above 1990 levels, compared to our target of 13%. The worst offender is the transport sector with a 165% increase since 1990 due to all the cars we have on the roads. Around one in three holidaymakers use a hired car to get around. See below for suggestions of ways to offer greener transport options.

Greener transport options

- Offer discounts to those who leave their car at home
- Offer a service to pick up guests at a train station or airport, either yourself, or using a local taxi firm
- Put public transport information in a very visible position on your website, so that guests can see their low carbon options easily
- Advise how near and far various leisure and shopping facilities are, whether visitors can reach them easily by bike, on foot or by public transport. That way they might consider leaving the car behind
- Have a car-free zone, with cars kept as far off site as possible, so that guests can cycle or walk freely without the danger of cars
- Provide bikes for staff use or an electric vehicle if you need to transport staff or guests short distances
- Offer free bikes to your guests

Ecobooley, an eco-friendly cottage in County Tipperary, gives details of the local rural transport service, Ring a Link, in its visitor information pack. Although it only operates Fridays and Saturdays, it is perfect for catching the farmers' and organic markets in Clonmel on a Saturday morning, and costs only €5 return. It also collects visitors at the front door of the cottage, and brings them back just in time to cook their local produce, put it in the cleverly-supplied slow cooker, walk straight out into the forests and hills of the Tipperary Heritage Trail, and back in time for dinner. By providing simple information like this local service, you can completely change the visitor experience for the better, and also reduce carbon footprints all round. www.ecobooley.com

Trinity Island Lodge in County Cavan not only offers free bicycles to guests but also free canoes. Situated on the shores of Lough Oughter, you can canoe into Killeshandra for everyday shopping, or make a day of it and take a 5k canoe trip to Belturbet, stopping for a picnic at Lough Oughter castle on the way. Tom O'Dowd, the owner, offers to pick guests up at the end of this trip, putting their canoes in his trailer. Irish hospitality at its greenest and best. www.trinityisland.com

17. Changing towel and bed linen only as requested is now the norm, and gone are the daily changes of sheets in most tourist accommodations, from five to one star. The usual practice is to change linen every three days, with daily changes only when requested by a guest.

18. Tell your staff what you are doing to improve the eco-credentials of your business. It is important to include all staff in the changes you are making, showing them that this new way forward is not just a cynical cost-saving exercise, but an overhaul of the way in which you think your tourism business affects the community and environment you live in. Your employees and staff are part of that community and their feedback and positive participation in your changing business practices are hugely important.

19. Conservation concerns over tourism impacts are growing, and it is good to keep in touch with local groups, which are already aware of the physical impacts of visitors on the local land and seascapes. Get advice from them about land access issues for hikers, trampling of delicate landscapes such as bogland, picking of wild flowers, or the dangers of wildlife viewing when people get too close. Jet skis, sailing boats, cruisers, scuba divers and sport fishing boats can be detrimental to the natural marine ecosystem, causing destruction to reefs and marine wildlife, such as whales and dolphins. Many local authorities now have a conservation or heritage officer who will have unique information on flora and fauna specific to your region.

All of this information should be offered to guests, on your website and in your welcome packs. Fáilte Ireland's recent publications "Guidelines for the protection of biodiversity" and "Biodiversity Action Plans" are excellent guides for businesses and tourists alike. The website which supports these publications, www.noticenature.ie, provides a wealth of information for tourism businesses. This can be anything from protecting badgers or creating natural ponds to building a tourist walking trail, and many other similar nature-driven projects which require expert guidance. The Field Studies Centre in Derrygonnelly, County Fermanagh, also provides colourful informative factsheets, (www.field-studies-council.org).

By taking it one step further and setting up wildlife watching facilities for local fauna such as badgers, bats, or barn owls, to name but a few, you will also add to your business' Unique Selling Point, or USP. Show your guests that you are working closely with such pivotal organisations and that you are keen to share your knowledge in this area.

Whale Watch West Cork in Union Hall, has its own Responsible Whale Watching Code of Conduct. It has been devised by the company's founder, Nic Slocum, a zoologist, marine conservationist, and skipper of bespoke whale watching catamaran, MV Voyager. As a marine expert, he knows that behaviour varies from species to species, each with its own breeding and feeding patterns. He has studied Codes of Conduct from around the world and, drawing from all of them, has created a Code which he hopes other responsible Irish tour operators will follow. This includes guidelines on boat speed, direction of approach, how a boat must never come between a mother and her calf, and watching distance should never be closer than 100 metres. www.whalewatchwestcork.com

20. Plant some trees, and ask your guests to help. This is a popular way of compensating, even in a small way, for the amount of CO₂ we are responsible for in all our business and domestic lives. It is important to research the type of trees to plant, ensuring they are indigenous to the area, (www.treeforall.org.uk/northernireland). You can also ask your guests to support this scheme through donations during their stay. For more information of similar schemes and tree-planting information see www.treecouncil.ie and www.crann.ie

“For Coopershill ‘greening our business’ has resulted in reducing energy bills, reducing waste disposal bills, making our employees feel better about where they work and giving us a marketing edge. Saving the planet just happens to be a by-product”.

Simon O’Hara,

COOPERSHILL HOUSE, COUNTY SLIGO.

21. Offsetting your carbon emissions

is something many tourism providers are now starting to offer visitors. The basic premise of carbon offsetting is that you can ‘neutralise’ the effect of your personal CO₂ contribution to the world’s greenhouse gases, by supporting a project which absorbs the emissions, or investing in carbon-reducing projects, usually in developing countries. There are many carbon offsetting companies out there which will calculate either yours or your visitors’ carbon contribution and calculate an amount of money for you to pay as a ‘carbon cost’, relative to the mode of transport and distance travelled.

Choose a respected and reputable offsetting company, and then you can arrange to link directly to them on your website, explaining to your guests, that you recommend they offset their carbon emissions. You can provide examples of how much it might cost them to offset if they fly, and what sort of projects their financial contribution will go to fund. If you prefer not to ask your visitors to do this, you can always opt to do it on their behalf, and include it in the cost of their holiday. But you can discuss these options with the carbon offsetting company you choose to work with.

However, this area is still controversial; the choice of companies is overwhelming; carbon calculators are still inconsistent and at present there is still no international standard for offsetting companies, nor any regulating body for these companies, most of which are profit-making. ABTA, The Association of British Travel Agents, also

representing Irish agencies, has an excellent jargon-free offsetting website, with concise breakdown of where your money is going. See www.reducemyfootprint.travel for details. They also offer a bespoke offsetting service for larger businesses, advising you on how to work together on carbon offsetting. If you want to choose another offsetting company, choose one that it is being independently monitored by a recognised organisation such as The Gold Standard carbon credits certification scheme (www.cdmgoldstandard.org) or from 2009, by the Department for Environment, Food or Rural Affairs (DEFRA, www.defra.gov.uk) in UK.

Most importantly, it is worth remembering that carbon offsetting is not just a way of offsetting yours or your visitors’ guilt at having contributed to the world’s increasing CO₂ emissions. Reducing your carbon, and helping your visitors to do so also, should always be the main priority.

IMPROVING YOUR ECONOMIC IMPACT

1. See what is happening on your doorstep and whether you can incorporate any local activities into your tourism business. This way you are stretching out into the community and sourcing everything you can within an easy radius. This is difficult in rural areas where it might feel like nothing is available to you in terms of produce or services. But unless you look and talk to everyone in the community, you won’t find out. Have an open evening at your

accommodation for local businesses and suppliers, and talk together about how to work as a community to sustain tourism in your region. It may be that there is no one supplying chicken or eggs in your area, for example, but maybe someone just needs the excuse to start. Just touching base with everyone out there is the first big step to embracing all that is local.

2. Your business is not a bubble, and most tourists are visiting to see the surrounding countryside or attractions, not just to enjoy your fine facilities. This is why it is important to keep guests up to date with everything local, so that they can spend their hard-earned cash in your area. This does not just mean sticking a load of leaflets on your reception desk. It means really communicating what is special and unique about your region, and trying to show your guest that there are important aspects of Irish culture and heritage in the immediate area. Such as walking or cycling trails, sporting events, local folklore, crafts outlets, cookery workshops, canoe hire, traditional music, book readings and theatre. You need to provide a carefully written information pack, as well as similar information on your website.

3. Feature your local artists and support one of Ireland's main reasons for tourism – the Arts, both visual and performing. Instead of buying photos from department stores to decorate the bedrooms or visitor spaces, consider commissioning a local artist or

photographer. Similarly, you can support local musicians by playing and selling their CD's, or keep a noticeboard of such events in your area. By keeping this updated, you are showing visitors that your region has a lot to offer culturally, as well as providing much-needed income to these artists. You could also offer your facilities for temporary exhibitions of local artists' work.

4. Buy your food locally. Tourist income can be like a leaky pipe. By fixing the smallest of drips of money which leak out of the local economy you can have a huge positive impact in the long term. One self-catering company kept a small independent grocer in business by asking him to supply food hampers to guests staying in its luxury country cottages. With a note of how to find his shop, the guests would then shop there for the rest of the week. The tourism provider worked with the grocer to help him upgrade and modernise his stock as part of this negotiation, and it is now a thriving business once again. Similarly, if you buy your bacon, eggs, milk and jam from cheap European import retail outlets in order to put an Irish breakfast on the table for guests, you are depriving many local producers of good business.

5. Food is part of our culture, which is why it is important to share all the information about locally available food with your guests. If you are serving local beef in your restaurant, tell people you are doing so. Give all the details of its traceability if you can. For example, if it

“Responsible travel of the future will be about celebrating (and sustaining) the diversity of places, cultures, people and environments rather than offering homogenous experiences often associated with mass tourism. Smart destinations, such as Ireland, will plan ahead, focusing more on the types of tourists they need and matching these to the most suitable areas and communities within their country. As a result, we will have tourism that creates the most economic benefits at the least social and environmental cost”.

Justin Francis,

DIRECTOR, RESPONSIBLETRAVEL.COM

comes from a farmer who has had the farm for four generations, his wife has a stall at the local farmer's market, and they both play music in the local pub on a Friday night, then this is a story. Put it in writing in your menu, as this encourages tourists to understand what Slowfood really means. It didn't travel far from the field to fork, and it comes from a real farmer, with a real life, not just a package on a supermarket shelf. It also keeps the storytelling culture of Ireland alive. Similarly, you might take brown bread for granted, but guests may never have tasted it before. Consider giving a small recipe on the back of your menu, or details of where to buy it locally.

6. Ready made meals is a huge gap in the Irish tourism market, considering the amount of self-catering accommodation on offer. Go in search of a local caterer who can provide a menu for guests, so that they can choose some ready and home-made meals to be in the fridge for them when they arrive. These should be of high quality, using local ingredients, organic if possible. A menu could be put on your website, and the visitor can liaise directly with the caterer before arriving at the accommodation. Being able to offer a visitor a meal, ready to go, instead of them having to go out and find a restaurant, takeaway or supermarket on their first night creates a great welcome. It is a growing market in other countries, and the perfect way to bring food suppliers in as an important link in the tourism chain.

Orchard Acre Farm in County Fermanagh knows all about sharing food with visitors. They have a tipi on the grounds of their farm, with camping stove for cooking. You can order a food package before you arrive, including home-made soup and bread, local cheese and chutney, local bacon, Irish yoghurt, home-grown fruit and many more treats. As well as this, Teresa, the co-owner, offers cookery workshops as an activity for children who come to stay. Using seasonal produce they might pick, for example, the farm's rhubarb, learn how to prepare it for a pie, make the pastry and cook the pie. All carried out in Teresa's teaching kitchen. One of her favourite recommended trips is to the local farm, where Tickety Moo ice-cream is made. Visitors get to see the cows being milked from a purpose-built gallery, and then buy the ice-cream afterwards. You can also order dinner in advance from Teresa who will have it prepared and waiting for you to eat, tipi style, around the fire. Most of it she has also grown herself. www.orchardacrefarm.com

7. Farmers' markets are thriving centres of rural life in Ireland, and fundamental sources of income for many local people. They are also wonderful places to visit. Guests in self-catering might want to stock up for the week, hotel guests can shop for snacks, lunch or gifts, or hikers can put a picnic together for a day out on the hills. But there is no point in telling guests about them when it is too late for them to visit. Give details, time and locations of all your local farmers' markets on your website, as well as when you greet your

guests. Not forgetting local farm shops, butchers, smoke houses and so on. That way, they know what facilities they will have available for buying local food well in advance, and not have to bring lots of food with them, or do a last minute supermarket shop en route. For more details on farmers markets see www.slowfoodireland.com, www.nots.ie, and www.bordbia.ie

8. Have a library on hand for visitors.

There are so many books out there for people who want to learn more about the local flora and fauna, and having them to hand to browse at their leisure, is a wonderful way of welcoming them to your area. Do not just opt for the obvious travel guides, but search out books which take a more sustainable view to life in Ireland. Books on Irish birds, trees or wildflowers for example. Books by local writers or poets, or Irish cookbooks, especially those featuring Irish food producers. Guidebooks such as *ecoescape:Ireland* by Catherine Mack, Ireland's first ever green guidebook, *Organic Places to Stay in UK and Ireland* by Linda Moss and Georgina Campbell's guides, which focus on local food and suppliers. Or choose from many walking books such as *Best Irish Walks*, by Joss Lynam, or bird-watching books such as *The Complete Guide to Ireland's Birds* by Eric Dempsey and Michael O'Clery. For local heritage, a must for all bookshelves is *Guide to National and Historic Monuments of Ireland* by Peter Harbison. See also the *Waymarked Ways of Ireland's* website

for other recommended reading material, as well as maps, and walking guides of each of their trails (www.walkireland.ie). For walking trails in NI, see www.walkni.com

9. Find a local guide for guests who want to discover more about the natural heritage of the area they have chosen to visit. This might be someone who runs a local walking group, or a cycling guide. If you advertise this service in advance on a website or in other publicity material, it adds one more eco-friendly service available to guests, as well as providing employment for a local expert. If your accommodation is big enough you could organise a weekly guided tour for guests, at a fixed charge. Themed walks such as archaeological, botany, foraging or literature trails are worth considering, and there are often experts on hand who might be willing to contribute to this tourist activity.

The Gyreum Ecolodge in County Sligo has gained a good reputation for the Pilgrims' Progress Walks it operates out of this eco-friendly hostel. It is a seven-day 250km circuit on land, sea and lake, covering six counties of Ireland, starting and ending at The Gyreum. Visiting Celtic Hermits' dens, monastic sites on remote islands, sweat lodges and ending with a 24 hour retreat in time for the full moon. This quirky trail attracts good business for The Gyreum, ties in with many other tourism providers along the way, and is very low impact in terms of carbon emissions.
www.gyreum.com

10. Support a local charity and encourage your guests to do the same. In addition to the tree planting schemes suggested above, there are various community schemes you might like to support through your tourism business' activities. Such as a school fundraising event, or raising money for a sporting activity, a conservation group or local hospital. Conservation Volunteers Ireland and Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland, for example, have an ongoing list of days where they call upon volunteers to become involved in everything from hedgelaying to dry stone walling. Keep an eye on their websites (www.cvi.ie and www.cvni.org) and let guests know, as many may like to participate. In 2000, research carried out in UK showed that nearly half of outbound tourists said they would prefer to stay with a company which supported local charities. Such requests to visitors for community support are not seen as 'charity' anymore, but they are considered an important part of ecotourism, linking tourists to the communities they have come to spend time in. You can become an official sponsor for a charity through your business and, in doing so, are creating a social responsibility policy. This shows a truly committed approach and understanding of some of the main principles of ecotourism and sustainability.



four business planning for ecotourism businesses



An ecotourism business has specific needs which should be incorporated into any new business plan, or development plans. In addition to a normal business plan, a tourism provider interested in going green can assess its potential strengths and weaknesses in this specific area. Do you have local support, such as conservation organisations? Are you in a National Park or a protected area? What is your local supply chain like? Are there many farmers willing and able to produce good quality food for your business? There are a lot of questions that need to be asked, and a lot of answers to be presented, if you want to take your ecotourism business one step further. Planning is the best way to do this, and with many organisations out there willing to promote ecotourism, you will have plenty of support.

THE BUSINESS PLAN

A business plan is a tool for understanding how your business is put together, and has many uses: monitoring progress, controlling your costs and sales and raising funds. Writing out your business plan forces you to review everything at once, such as your understanding of the ecotourism market, how you plan to run your business, staff it and finance it.

A business plan should clearly present all of the important information regarding your ecotourism business. This includes all aspects of your plans for incorporating ecotourism principles

into your practices, from protecting the environment, supporting the local economy, supporting cultural heritage and protecting the local biodiversity. Greenbox, Ireland's leading ecotourism organisation has examples of business plans, as well as detailed versions of some of the sections listed below (www.greenbox.ie). Your business plan should be divided into a number of key sections:

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Approximately two pages long, this section should summarise all the important aspects of your business. It is best to write it at the end, after dealing with all the other details of the plan. It should include a succinct summary of what is to come. An easy way to think about it is by imagining all the points you might cover in a five-minute interview about your business, such as: What is your ecotourism product? Who will your customers be? Who are the business owners? What are the future prospects for the tourism industry and your ecotourism business? What are your competitive advantages in the ecotourism market?

If you are applying for a loan or grant, state clearly how much you want, precisely how you are going to use it, how it will make your ecotourism business more profitable, thereby ensuring repayment. Make it enthusiastic, professional, complete, and concise.

“A well developed business plan can serve as one of your most important management tools in progressing an enterprise idea. Initially it will form the basis for decision making by funding agencies and lending institutions. Thereafter it will become a blueprint and step-by-step guide on how to translate your ecotourism idea into a profitable business. As ecotourism is a relatively new concept in Ireland, it will be important to inform your funding agency about this growing sector of the tourism industry. A business plan should highlight the opportunities in your business proposal and demonstrate the reasons why you are the best person to deliver on them”.

John Burke,

SPECIALIST ADVISOR ON THE GREENBOX CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME, WHICH FUNDED 44 BUSINESSES IN THE IRELAND'S NORTH WEST.

2. BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

Any investor or reader of the business plan will need to know a few fundamentals of how your ecotourism business is structured and operated.

Aim to provide the reader with an understanding of the industry, the owners, the business model and market, including:

- **Business Objectives:** Set out no more than four key business objectives and describe in one sentence how you will achieve them. For example: ‘to have a successful business that is a leading provider of eco-friendly accommodation in the North West of Ireland, and achieve EU Flower accreditation’
- **What business will you be in?** Are you an accommodation provider, health and wellness services provider, bike hire business or perhaps a nature and educational walks provider?
- **To whom will you market your products?** State it briefly here, with greater detail in the Marketing Plan section
- **Describe the tourism and ecotourism industry.** Start with a general overview and then give some specific details about your business. Is it a growth industry? What changes do you foresee in the industry, short term and long term? For example, are increasing oil prices affecting Irish people’s choices to holiday at home? How will your company be poised to take advantage of them? Back up your

statements with relevant statistics

- **Describe your most important business strengths and core competencies.** What factors will make your ecotourism business succeed? What do you think your major competitive strengths will be? e.g. Maybe you have no local competition. Or perhaps you operate from an historic building. What experience, skills, and strengths do you personally bring to this new venture? List your qualifications
- **Legal form of ownership:** Sole proprietor, Partnership or Limited Liability Company. Why have you selected this form?
- **Describe in depth your ecotourism product or service.** Give a description of the products or services offered. Describe things such as level and quality of service. What is the price of your product or service? How and where will it be delivered? Briefly how will it be marketed and sold?

3. MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION

The aim of this section is to provide the reader with the information they need about your professional background and experience. It will allow readers to gauge whether you have what it takes to run a successful ecotourism business and allow an investor to feel comfortable that they have made a wise investment choice with their funds. It should include:

- **Owners and Managers** – List their professional experience, skills and

qualifications, specifically highlighting any relevant ecotourism experience. Is there a plan for continuation of the business if key people are lost to the business?

- **Job descriptions** – Include CVs of owners and key employees. List the functions of the key employees such as sales, marketing, operations etc.
- **Professional and advisory support** – Provide details of all your professional advisors: solicitors, accountants, bankers, insurance brokers, business advisors or mentors

4. MARKET ANALYSIS AND MARKETING PLAN

An ecotourism business cannot succeed without effective marketing. Market research will allow you to establish pricing, distribution and promotional strategies for your ecotourism product or service. In order to create your marketing plan, you need to:

- **Define your Market** – Define the total ecotourism market in terms of size, structure, growth prospects, trends and sales potential. As already discussed, refer to published statistics available from Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland or the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Then define your target market, which is your chosen segment of the overall market
- **Project your Market Share** – Estimate the size of the target market you plan to capture. For example, you may estimate that your business

will capture 30% of tourists visiting your region, who are seeking an ecotourism health and wellness experience

- **Analyse the competition** – List the strengths and weaknesses of each competitor and compare your product or service to theirs. Define your competitive advantages. They can be as simple as having a small library on responsible travel available for your guests to a gourmet welcome hamper full of locally produced food for their first evening meal

5. MARKETING AND SALES STRATEGY

- Once you have projected a reasonable market share you will now need to outline how your ecotourism business will achieve that share, through a marketing and sales strategy. Set out your promotion plan, or a list of points which show how you will sell your product or service. Take account of what your competitors are doing, and how they are getting publicity. Which publications are they in, and which ones would you like to be in? How quickly can you find them on a search engine and what's different about their websites? For more information on this, see the marketing section of this handbook
- Show what the price of your product or service will be. The price charged must be enough to cover costs and make a profit. It must also be competitive, taking into account the

quality of your product or service as well as your competitors' prices

6. OPERATIONAL PLAN

This section explains the daily operation of the ecotourism business, including:

- Location – the amount of space you have, type of building, special features and facilities, preferably using a photo as well as maps providing details of access, parking facilities, and access to public transport
- Administration – Briefly describe administration functions, such as how sales, cash receipts, payments etc. are dealt with. If your business has to keep other records such as visitor disclaimers for certain activities, provide details
- Legal or regulatory issues that apply to your business – For all businesses this will include a health and safety statement, employment policies and public liability insurance. For those providing food, a food safety statement is needed. Specifically relating to ecotourism, provide details of any special accreditations such as the EU Flower Ecolabel
- Personnel – State the number of employees, pay structure, training requirements for staff and job descriptions and show again how this can relate to delivering an ecotourism product or service e.g. all staff have undertaken a Leave No Trace workshop

7. FINANCIAL PLAN

Cash and finance are the lifeblood of

what makes a business sustainable. In many cases finance and financial planning are often overlooked because business managers are too busy dealing with staff, customers and products on a day to day basis. Without proper financial management even the most profitable of businesses can fail.

Financial planning is not a difficult process and you do not need to be an accountant or financial advisor to draw up and follow a financial plan for your business. Who else knows the intricacies of a business better than the owner or manager?

The financial plan is the section of your business plan that determines whether or not your business will be profitable. It is also, therefore, a key to determining whether or not you will be able to attract investment. There are over 20 agencies/support organisations in Ireland that can assist you to prepare financial plans or provide you with training or mentoring when developing your business. Many are listed in the funding section of this handbook. Your own accountant will also be helpful. A good financial plan will give the reader confidence that you really understand your business. It must take into account all of the running costs, should not be overly optimistic and use reasonable assumptions to back up any figures. Remember there is lots of help out there so don't be afraid to avail of it. The contents of a good financial summary for your ecotourism business are provided in the following box.

The Financial Summary of an Ecotourism Business Plan

Sales Forecast	A month by month forecast for the first 12 months of the business. A yearly sales forecast can be provided for following years.
Start-up Expenses	You will have many start-up expenses before you even begin operating your business, which you need to estimate as best possible e.g. business registration fees, business licensing and permits, starting stock, rent deposits, down payments on property, down payments on equipment, such as renewable energy equipment and utility set up fees, such as telephone or broadband.
Operating Expenses	These are the expenses associated with the running of the business e.g. wages, salaries and PRSI, food and beverages, eco-accreditation, maintenance and repair (e.g. renewable energy installations), equipment leases, rent and rates, telephone, energy, web development, stationery, professional services e.g. accountant, insurance.
Capital Requirements	This is a statement of how much money you need to purchase equipment for your ecotourism business, such as solar panels, wood pellet burner, catering equipment etc.
12 Month Profit and Loss Projection	This is where you put all your first year's sales and costs projections together and work out the profit or loss for that year. Explain the major assumptions used to estimate the business income and expenses. For example you might estimate a monthly telephone bill of €200 or weekly purchases of local organic produce of €80. Once year one is completed, you can then prepare projected profit and loss accounts for years 2 onwards, Generally, a 3 year profit and loss projection will suffice.
Projected Cash Flow Statement	The cash flow projection shows how much money you need to start and run your ecotourism business over a 12 month period. The cash flow projection is just a forward look at your bank account. For each item, determine when you actually expect to receive cash (for sales) or when you will have to write a cheque (for expense items). A cash flow differs from a profit and loss account as it deals with when you receive and spend cash. For example, you might buy stock in month 1, but only pay for it in month 3. It will also include items not shown in a profit and loss account like VAT payments or refunds, payments for capital items like equipment or buildings, proceeds from bank loans etc.
Financial Summary	To finish the financial section, provide a short summary, highlighting the important aspects e.g. sales, profits, total expenses, borrowing requirements, and grants required. Also, provide a personal financial statement for the business owner, showing assets and liabilities held outside the business and personal net worth.



8. APPENDICES TO THE BUSINESS PLAN

Appendices are an ideal way of presenting information to support the main information contained in your business plan and avoiding clutter in the main part of the plan. These include CVs of business owners and managers, maps and photos, details of equipment to be purchased, leases and contracts, letters of support from future

customers, and list of assets available as collateral for a loan. If you are trading as a company include memorandum and articles of association, and if an existing business, copies of previous two years accounts. Also, you might want to add in any plans for conservation of the area, such as planting trees, building ponds or footpaths, which aim to protect the biodiversity of the area.

five funding for ecotourism



GRANTS AND GRANT AID

A grant is financial assistance given to a business to help cover the costs associated with the start up or running of that business. In general it does not have to be repaid as long as it is used for the purpose for which it was given. Grants are usually awarded by enterprise support agencies to develop business sectors that have potential to create employment and develop new markets.

Ecotourism is recognised as a sector that has a high growth potential and one that is underdeveloped in Ireland, therefore enterprise support agencies are prepared to provide grant aid to both new and established businesses planning to enter this market. Grant support is usually provided towards the costs of purchasing new plant and equipment for an ecotourism business, such as renewable energy systems, or equipment used in eco-friendly outdoor pursuits. In some cases grant aid can be obtained for marketing materials and feasibility studies.

Every grant agency will have a specific application form, however once you have prepared your ecotourism business plan,

this will contain all of the information you require to complete a grant application form. In order to apply for a grant you will need all the exact details of what you want to grant aid for, how much it will cost, and where you will get the balance (usually 50%). You also need to thoroughly research which is the most suitable agency to apply for a grant to.

The following directory presents the 20 agencies and support bodies that provide financial, training, mentoring and other supports to ecotourism businesses in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Each table shows both the capital grant support and the training/mentoring/advice role of each organisation (if applicable). Provision of supports such as training and mentoring may be of much more value to a business than grants in some cases. For example on site e-business training may support you to move your business to a much wider market and in turn increase visitor numbers/revenue.

County Enterprise Boards

CONTACT DETAILS	www.enterpriseboards.ie
DESCRIPTION	Support the start-up and development of local business in Ireland including ecotourism businesses. Supports include advice, mentoring and grants / financial supports for training and capital investments such as equipment. There is an Enterprise Board in each County of Ireland
FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital grants up to a maximum level of €75,000 for machinery and equipment purchases or for purchasing or altering premises, including tourism premises • Employment grants towards the cost of labour. A grant of up to €7,500 for each job, up to a maximum of 10 jobs, may be provided • Feasibility grants may be provided to assist with the cost of market research, business feasibility studies, and the general viability and sustainability of the venture. The maximum feasibility grant available is €7,500 (BMW region) and €5,100 (S&E region) per individual study
TRAINING/ADVICE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business management and development courses such as marketing, operations, finance, etc • Can provide an expert mentor to work on a one to one basis with a business e.g. can provide a marketing or financial expert to assist with particular business issues
AREA REMIT	Republic of Ireland

Fáilte Ireland

CONTACT DETAILS	www.failteireland.ie
DESCRIPTION	Provides strategic and practical support to develop and sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourist destination
FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant aid under the Tourism Capital Investment Programme for projects costing a minimum of €5 million. Aid is towards buildings, equipment, marketing and product development • Product Development Programme – Funding of 50% for projects involved in developing looped walks, coastal walks, angling facilities, environmental management, beach management, rural heritage trails and historic towns
TRAINING/ADVICE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operate Tourism Learning Networks in each county where a structured programme of relevant business development courses are delivered annually to tourism providers • Web-Check programme to audit IT capability and help tourism businesses increase their skills in this area
AREA REMIT	Republic of Ireland

FÁS

CONTACT DETAILS

www.fas.ie

DESCRIPTION

FÁS provides a range of training and employment programmes, recruitment services, services to business initiatives and support for co-operative and community-based enterprises

FUNDING

- “Start your Own Business” programmes provide basic businesses skills to those interested in setting up their own enterprises
- Training grants are available for up to 70% of training costs for businesses in the tourism sector participating in FÁS approved training programmes
- Training grants of up to 80% of eligible programme costs are available for specific Health and Safety programmes

TRAINING/ADVICE

- Help with sourcing prospective employees through FÁS Jobs Ireland, an online jobs marketplace (jobbank.fas.ie).
- Target highly skilled candidates abroad through the EURES Network and at www.jobsireland.com
- Identifies training needs of companies and the development of training strategies to meet these needs
- Plans and organises specific training programmes, in collaboration with various business sectors, such as tourism
- FÁS offers training courses suited to every need, including online training through ecollege (www.fas.ie/en/Training/eCollege.htm). These include evening courses and traineeships.
- FÁS provides various financial supports in the form of allowances to assist participants of training courses, and grants or subventions to encourage employers to support training programmes. (See www.fas.ie/en/Allowances+and+Grants/default.htm)

AREA REMIT

Republic of Ireland

Responsible Tourism Skillnet

CONTACT DETAILS www.responsibletourism.ie

DESCRIPTION A new, dynamic initiative promoted by Greenbox, Co. Leitrim, Responsible Tourism Skillnet offers island-wide training, networking and mentoring to enterprises working in ecotourism. Training aims to increase knowledge and skills of those working in the ecotourism sector and make business more environmentally and economically sustainable

TRAINING/ADVICE A 3-year programme of training is being rolled out, which was developed to specifically focus on the needs of ecotourism businesses. In addition to the courses the network can also develop customised training for individual organisations. It provides networking opportunities to support members, and study tours to different business to discuss ideas and share best practice

Courses available include:

- Introduction to Ecotourism
- Achieving The Greenbox Ecolabel Tourism Package
- Achieving The European Ecolabel for Tourist Accommodation (The EU Flower)
- Certificate In Ecotourism
- Sustainability For Profit
- ‘Leave No Trace’
- Market Research
- Price, Place & Promotion Of Your Package
- Communicating Your Message
- Optimising Your Web Marketing Capacity
- Optimising Your Management Performance
- Train The Trainer
- Safety Awareness and the Legal Framework
- Setting Up Your Own Business Website

AREA REMIT Republic of Ireland

Western Development Commission (WDC)

CONTACT DETAILS www.wdc.ie

DESCRIPTION The WDC is a statutory body promoting and facilitating economic and social development in Counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Galway, Mayo and Clare. It works closely with various government departments and agencies

FUNDING	The WDC Investment Fund totals €32 million and can give loan or equity finance to large-scale ecotourism projects capable of making a large impact on the economic and social development of an area. Typical minimum investment is €150,000 up to a maximum of €1 million
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AREA REMIT	Counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway, Clare
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Bord Bia

CONTACT DETAILS	www.bordbia.ie
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DESCRIPTION	The role of Bord Bia (Irish Food Board) is to act as a link between Irish food and drink suppliers and existing and potential customers, and to develop export markets for Irish food and drink companies
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FUNDING	While no direct grant aid or funding is given to the ecotourism sector, individual businesses would be eligible to obtain the consultancy and technical support services provided by Bord Bia. The relevant ones are listed below
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TRAINING/ADVICE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers' Markets – A guide with information to assist growers, producers and other food entrepreneurs who wish to sell through Farmers' Markets, Farm Shops and Box Schemes in Ireland (Republic and Northern Ireland) is available • Business Development/Training – Bord Bia provides business development support and training to the horticulture industry to promote the growth and development of the industry. Participants gain up to date skills to manage their businesses, promote best practice and production skills • Consultancy services – Customised services are provided to SME companies engaged in the processing and marketing of agricultural products. Consultancy services are funded at a rate of 50% by Bord Bia and can cover various aspects of their marketing efforts • Just Ask – is a public awareness campaign that aims to encourage consumers when eating out to look for information on where the food (particularly meat) on their plate comes from and to encourage chefs to provide this information on their menus.
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AREA REMIT	Republic of Ireland
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Sustainable Energy Ireland

CONTACT DETAILS

www.sei.ie

DESCRIPTION

Sustainable Energy Ireland was set up by the government in 2002 as Ireland's national energy agency to provide advice, guidance and support on energy efficient measures for home and business, administer grant schemes and provide support for renewable energy development

TRAINING/ADVICE

The Renewable Energy Information Office of Sustainable Energy Ireland, promotes the use of renewable resources and provides independent information and advice on renewable energy development. They organise conferences, workshops and meetings on renewable energy issues, operate a helpdesk, informed by a comprehensive library of materials and publications, publish a range of brochures, newsletters and supplier contact lists, provide an advisory service for commercial heating projects as well as a range of publications covering all aspects of sustainable energy, from factsheets and leaflets to case studies and detailed reports

Sustainable Energy Ireland operates a number of programmes that provide financial support to demonstrate superior energy technologies or provide essential support in specifically identified sectors. Programmes relevant to ecotourism businesses include:

- The Greener Homes scheme – provides grant aid towards the installation of renewable energy equipment in homes. Homes utilised as a guesthouse or B&B would qualify
- Renewable Heat (ReHeat) Deployment Programme – provides assistance for the deployment of renewable heating systems in industrial, commercial, public and community premises
- Combined Heat and Power (CHP) Deployment Programme – The new SEI CHP Deployment Programme will provide grant support to assist the deployment of small-scale (<1MWe) fossil-fired CHP and biomass (anaerobic digestion (AD) and wood residue) CHP systems
- SEI provides a mentoring service with an expert advisor, who will talk to you about your energy use and suggest actions you can take

AREA REMIT

Republic of Ireland

Action Renewables

CONTACT DETAILS

www.actionrenewables.org

DESCRIPTION

Action Renewables is the leading organisation in Northern Ireland in the promotion and development of renewable energy. They deliver a large portfolio of programmes including general awareness raising, road shows, seminars, performance monitoring of technologies, research, evaluation and policy

TRAINING/ADVICE	Action Renewables provides advice to communities, individuals and businesses on various schemes related to renewable energy. They can direct your business towards the most suitable agency to provide grant or loan support for ecotourism businesses
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AREA REMIT	Northern Ireland
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Carbon Trust

CONTACT DETAILS	www.carbontrust.co.uk
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DESCRIPTION	Set up by the Government in 2001 as an independent company, its mission is to accelerate the move to a low carbon economy by working with organisations to reduce carbon emissions and develop commercial low carbon technologies
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FUNDING	Loans of between £5,000 and £200,000 interest-free towards the cost of relevant energy-saving measures including renewable technologies such as geothermal heat systems, air to water heat systems, pipe insulation, solar panels etc are available
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TRAINING/ADVICE	Provides building design advice, all the information SME's need to know to about how to save money and manage their carbon emissions and also provides useful starter toolkits
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AREA REMIT	Northern Ireland
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Equity Network

CONTACT DETAILS	www.intertradeireland.com
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DESCRIPTION	EquityNetwork is InterTradeIreland's major initiative to promote the use of private equity to accelerate business growth
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FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Runs the annual All-Island Seedcorn Business Competition for new start-up ventures with a total prize fund of €230,000 for the best business plans on the island. Ecotourism enterprises are eligible to compete • Equity Network together with Investment Belfast run the Halo, a business angel network, to service Northern Ireland. This facilitates matching of investors with suitable projects. Ecotourism businesses may submit their business plan for circulation among potential investors
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TRAINING/ADVICE	Operates an all-island education programme to raise awareness of the availability and benefits of using private equity, organising seminars and producing publications. It has developed a comprehensive island-wide Non-Executive Director Advisory Panel available to businesses
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AREA REMIT	ROI and NI
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International Fund for Ireland

CONTACT DETAILS	www.internationalfundforeireland.com
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DESCRIPTION	IFI is a fund established with contributions from the US, British, Canadian and Australian governments to stimulate economic and community development in disadvantaged communities and parts of Northern Ireland and the Border Counties
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FUNDING	In 2006 the fund changed its focus from investment in economic infrastructure such as buildings towards reconciliation projects in Northern Ireland and the Border counties. It will now fund projects that address the key issues of deprivation and unemployment, social cohesion, and community leadership on a cross-border basis. Therefore it is unlikely that the IFI will be a relevant funder for the majority of ecotourism initiatives
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AREA REMIT	Border Counties and Northern Ireland
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Intertrade Ireland

CONTACT DETAILS	www.intertradeireland.com
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DESCRIPTION	InterTradeIreland's aim is to expedite and develop island-wide trade and business growth. It has a wide range of business development programmes, however only a limited number are relevant to ecotourism enterprises. Details are given below
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FUNDING	The Microtrade Programme offers a number of supports and activities to small enterprises aimed at assisting businesses in developing island-wide contacts and trade. Supports include networking events, a tender support training programme, financial supports for cross-border enterprises
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AREA REMIT	ROI and NI
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Invest NI

CONTACT DETAILS

www.investni.com

DESCRIPTION

Invest NI's role is to grow the Northern Ireland economy. It principally supports businesses in the manufacturing and tradable services sectors, but has programmes of relevance to the tourism sector

- The SME Energy Grant scheme can provide financial aid to businesses that wish to adopt energy efficient practices. Grants of 25% of project cost. Minimum project cost £1,000
- ENVIROWISE Programme provides assistance to promote a better environmental performance within the UK industry
- Environmental Audit Support Scheme provides assistance to examine a company's environmental impact
- Loan Action provides an interest-free loan of up to £25,000 for non-manufacturing companies to implement energy-saving measures
- Lightswitch provides a 50% rebate, against the capital cost (supply and installation) of lighting controls, up to a maximum of £3,000
- The Green Technology Initiative offers 3-year interest-free loans of up to £50,000 towards the cost of capital equipment
- The DTI's low carbon buildings programme offers grants through Invest NI to create low carbon buildings
- The Tourism Development Scheme (TDS), administered by Invest NI, offers selective financial assistance for a wide range of capital projects. Support can be given to all accommodation types, amenity and activity providers
- The Energy Efficiency Loan Scheme helps businesses reduce their energy costs by providing interest free loans for the implementation of energy efficiency projects. In association with the Carbon Trust, businesses may borrow amounts between £5,000 and £400,000 interest-free through an energy efficiency loan fund. The loans can be used towards the cost of relevant energy saving measures such as replacing or upgrading existing equipment with a more energy efficient version
- The Carbon Trust Programme is a portfolio of services that helps businesses to become or remain energy efficient. The services, developed in conjunction with the Carbon Trust, include:
 - energy seminars and workshops
 - publications about energy efficiency
 - a dedicated energy helpline: 0800 085 2005
 - energy efficiency design advice

TRAINING/ADVICE

Invest Northern Ireland can offer advice and training programmes to ecotourism businesses

AREA REMIT

Northern Ireland

Local Enterprise Agencies

CONTACT DETAILS	www.enterpriseni.com
DESCRIPTION	Local Enterprise Agencies are independent, not-for-profit companies which work for the benefit of their communities by supporting small business and community enterprises
FUNDING	The Enterprise Northern Ireland Loan Fund can be accessed in each Local Council area through the Local Enterprise Agency. Services include loans from £500 upwards, financial planning support and mentoring. Loans are intended for those starting or operating a small business
TRAINING/ADVICE	Each Local Enterprise Agency operates training programmes in business development and management, such as finance, marketing etc. Ecotourism enterprises are eligible to participate. Contact your local agency for details, as programmes differ between areas
AREA REMIT	Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

CONTACT DETAILS	www.nitb.com
DESCRIPTION	The aim of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board is ‘to increase the contribution that tourism makes to the economy in a way that responds to the needs of visitors, respects the environment, is acceptable to the people who live here and is economically viable in the long term’
FUNDING	Grants administered by NITB can be categorised into three broad categories: Marketing, Event Support and Capital / Non-Accommodation
TRAINING/ADVICE	Training and advisory support are available through regional tourism bodies associated with NITB
AREA REMIT	Northern Ireland

Department of Employment and Learning

CONTACT DETAILS www.tea-ni.org.uk

DESCRIPTION The aim of the Department of Employment and Learning is to assist economic development and help people find work through training and employment services delivered on the basis of equal opportunity

FUNDING

- Employers with less than 250 staff, with the exception of schools and public funded bodies, receive first time human resource assessment free of charge under the Investor in People Programme
- The Jobskills programme encourages trainees, between 16-17 years to achieve NVQ's, whilst being placed with an employer
- The New Deal programme supports 18-24 year olds, who have been unemployed for 6 months. The employer receives a subsidy for the employee
- The Tourism Training Trust is for 20 future managers in Northern Ireland's tourism and hospitality industry to provide practical experience of hospitality management and customer care standards
- The STEP programme places undergraduates within small companies for summer placements
- The Management and Leadership Development Programme (MLDP) is designed to help companies meet their management and leadership development needs. MDLP is a portfolio containing a range of management development activities, each of which attracts bursary support from the Department of Employment and Learning. 75% funding is available to ecotourism businesses

AREA REMIT Northern Ireland

Department of the Environment (DOE)

CONTACT DETAILS www.drdni.gov.uk

DESCRIPTION DOE is associated with environmental issues. However, it does administer a selection of grants which can be accessed by ecotourism businesses

FUNDING Historic Buildings Grant assistance is available towards the repair and maintenance of historic fabric of the building. The rate of grant is dependent on the grading of the listed building

AREA REMIT Northern Ireland

Local Action Groups (ROI)

CONTACT DETAILS www.pobail.ie

DESCRIPTION Although not yet operational the programme it is expected to commence in early 2009. This programme replaces what was known as the LEADER programme, but will continue with the same role and objectives, which are to create sustainable rural enterprise and communities. Developing, marketing and promoting rural tourism is a key part of the new programme and over €60 million in grant aid will be available in Ireland for tourism-related measures between 2009 and 2013. However the programme is specific in that investments must be in new and innovative products and businesses that have the capacity to generate new tourism markets, attract new visitors and create sustainable enterprises in an economic and environmental sense. Therefore ecotourism is a sector that is ideal for support under the LEADER or rural development programme. There will be approximately 40 groups operating the programme in Ireland

FUNDING Although final guidelines are not yet available, it is likely that support will be along the following lines:

- 50% grant aid to a maximum of €200,000 per project for projects investing in new capital equipment, buildings, or marketing for eco tourism purposes
- Up to €12,000 could be available at a rate of 50% to conduct feasibility and market studies into the establishment of new ecotourism enterprises

AREA REMIT All areas of Ireland except urban centres (those with a population of approximately 7,000 or more)

Others in Northern Ireland

CONTACT DETAILS www.bitc.org and www.lowcarbonbuildings.co.uk

FUNDING

- Northern Lights Carbon Reduction Programme caters for organisations with annual energy costs of less than £50,000. The programme gives carbon footprint audits to Northern Ireland based companies for a small fee
- The Low Carbon Buildings Programme has a fund totalling £10.5 million available to householders and community organisations to fund a range of renewable energy technologies

AREA REMIT Northern Ireland

Local Action Groups (Northern Ireland)

CONTACT DETAILS

www.dardni.gov.uk

DESCRIPTION

Axis 3 of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013 (NIRDP) which is co-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development is worth £100 million. The focus of Axis 3 is to improve the quality of life in rural areas and encourage the diversification of economic activity. This axis will provide funding under six different measures. The tourism measure aims to attract visitors and create new employment opportunities through the sustainable development of tourism initiatives. Tourism projects which can be supported by the South West cluster include:-

- Activity tourism
- Niche/specialist tourism markets/local crafts or produce
- Ecotourism
- Self-catering accommodation with 5 or more units (contact DARD if you have a proposal for less than 5 units)
- Rural Signature Projects – enhancement or development of significant tourism infrastructure projects or programmes that impact significantly on rural tourism.

Applications will be welcome from, among others, the following groups:

- Farm households
- New and existing micro businesses
- Socio-economy enterprises

Axis 3 will be delivered by seven Council clusters each in partnership with a newly appointed Local Action Group

FUNDING

Although final guidelines are not yet available, it is likely that support will be along the following lines:

- 50% grant aid to a maximum of £50,000 for the private sector
- Up to £5,000 could be available at a rate of 50% to conduct feasibility and market studies
- 75% grant rate to a maximum of £250,000 for Social Economy Sectors

AREA REMIT

Northern Ireland

Environmental Protection Agency

CONTACT DETAILS www.epa.ie www.greenbusiness.ie

DESCRIPTION **Green Business Initiative**
 The Green Business Initiative is an on-line resource for businesses who wish to reduce their consumption of energy and water and reduce their waste production. The Waste Audit Tool (WAT) lets you break down the types, volumes and sources of your waste, helping you to monitor and hence reduce costs. The Water Audit and Value Estimator (WAVE) lets you calculate where you might be losing water through unintentional emissions and the associated costs of this. The tools also allow your business to create an individual account to store this information, so you can benchmark internally, year on year, and against other businesses, so as to check your progress with resource efficiency.

FUNDING The Green Business Initiative is funded by the EPA.

TRAINING/ADVICE The website contains comprehensive tips and advice on saving energy and water and managing waste. Businesses can also receive free audits and mentoring support by registering on the website.

AREA REMIT Republic of Ireland

Green Hospitality Award

CONTACT DETAILS www.ghaward.ie

DESCRIPTION A Type 1 Eco-Label programme designed for the hotel and accommodation sector which also facilitates access to the EU Flower. Supported by the EPA through its Green Business Initiative. The programme offers a step-by-step approach to the implementation of an environmental management system. GHA receives support from the EPA, SEI, Fáilte Ireland, Irish Hotels Federation & the Irish Hospitality Institute

FUNDING GHA programme is heavily subsidised by the Environmental Protection Agency allowing businesses to access Best Practice advice and training at a value for money members fee.

TRAINING/ADVICE Businesses receive on-site environmental reviews followed by advice and mentoring. Regional training workshops run during the year deliver best practice know how and allow for the development of networking and the sharing of ideas and experiences. Members receive an environmental audit in the initial years.

AREA REMIT Republic of Ireland (2009) – All Ireland (2010)

six our responsibility in tourism



No matter what size the tourism business, the time has come for transparency and upfront information on tourism companies' environmental and social policies. Sometimes referred to as CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) or a Responsible Tourism Policy, all businesses aiming to play a genuine, committed role in the ecotourism market should draw up such a policy, helping them to then put the practical wheels in motion. A policy like this acts as a management tool to help a tourism provider clarify its responsibility to the environment, as well as to the people living in the area of its business practices, not forgetting the people who work for the organisation. Such a policy should incorporate the aims, visions and objectives of a company in achieving a more ethical standing, and it should be updated on a regular basis. Ensure that the targets you set are real, and that you measure them each year. That way you can also communicate your achievements on a regular basis on your website and other publicity outlets.

SHOUT ABOUT IT

It is amazing how many tourist providers there are out there practising exemplary ecotourism principles, and yet they have no official policy in place. It may always have been the norm for them to protect the environment, or support local community projects, and they just never chose to shout about it. Such practices must be applauded, of course. However, it is also advisable to formalise them in the form of a written policy. That way,

businesses are able to keep a good track of how they are maintaining their policies on an annual basis, and can use this information at key meetings such as with investors, shareholders, banks etc. By not doing this, they are also selling themselves short to their visitors who, when browsing websites, are more and more frequently being drawn to companies which are displaying their ethical credentials.

Large companies are advised to seek guidance from CSR consultants specialising in tourism, in order to give a broad assessment of all the company's activities. It is worth considering the multiplier effect of having a CSR policy. Ethical business practices are a growing trend now throughout industry, and if your business involves hosting corporate clients for conferences etc. many of those now seek to use suppliers, which also practise CSR policies. So, this common ground can also be an excellent way of increasing your client base. The Greenbox is a specialist in this area which, until recently, worked regionally in the Northwest counties of Ireland. However, it is now stretching its training island wide, through its training arm Responsible Tourism Skillnet (www.responsibletourism.ie). It works with all tourism businesses provides training and networking to help you draft a CSR or responsible tourism policyspecific to the makeup of your business.

"We ask a lot of tourism these days ... that it be eco, that it be sustainable and that it be responsible. Global tourism has changed in the 00's and the signs are encouraging. A growing number of tourists want their journeys to be less invasive and more beneficial to the local community. They want to better understand the culture of the places they visit. Perhaps responsible tourism goes a step further, to what is called the Platinum Rule: treating others the way they wish to be treated. While tourism campaigns have long touted 'destinations', in fact we are simply entering a place that is someone else's home. If those working in the tourist trade embrace the values our counterparts wish developed, then we can make a huge leap forward. The trick lies in listening to the locals, listening to visitors and creating the opportunities that connect top-down and grassroots efforts. Travel agents, travel providers and travellers are the principal players".

Ron Mader,

EDITOR, PLANETA.COM, THE LEADING GLOBAL JOURNAL ON PRACTICAL ECOTOURISM.

“CSR is a core business risk issue, going to the heart of our acceptance by customers, investors, the public, and destination governments and communities”.

Manny Fontenla-Novoa,

CEO, THOMAS COOK GROUP,
SOURCE:WWW.THOMASCOOKGROUP.CO.UK

The Green Hospitality Award offers a step by step approach to the accommodation sector to achieve accreditation in environmental best practice. At the time of writing, the award is available only for hotels. This award programme operates across Ireland and is supported by all the major tourism and environmental agencies (www.ghaward.ie).

The Travel Foundation in UK also has a wide variety of training courses including one for introducing responsible practices to tourism managers, (www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk).

PUT IT IN WRITING

Having reflected upon all of the issues raised in this handbook, you have already make a good start to creating a responsible tourism policy. Preparation and assessing your business in terms of its current ethical standing, compared to where you would like it to be in, say, five years time, is crucial to creating a good framework for you to work within. Preparation for creating your new policy should include:

- Read all you can on the subject. There is a lot of information out there on ecotourism. This handbook aims to summarise all you need to know, and there are further reading sources and websites listed in this handbook's directory. But you could go on reading about ethics and eco-gadgets forever. It is important to remember that ecotourism is an area where actions speak so much

louder than words. By just removing disposable bathroom products, or providing biodegradable nappies, you are already taking huge steps in the right direction.

- List all the areas where you think your business is already making a difference in terms of reducing your impact on the environment, supporting the local economy, or increasing your role within the local community. Alongside this, make a second list detailing any further changes you think you should make, as well as ones you think realistically you could make. You should involve all your employees in this discussion as input from every level is important from the beginning, so that you can maintain a level of commitment and excitement about the changes you hope to make from everyone involved in your business.
- Look at other examples of responsible tourism policies on tourism providers' websites, and get an idea of how you want to present it on your website.
- Once the policy has been drafted, annual CSR or responsible tourism reports should be presented at management meetings to summarise the progress being made, and any new initiatives which might have been thought of in the interim. Ideally, any savings in carbon emissions should be recorded, and any other records regarding staff or community projects, or conservation work,

should be noted and used as a point of reference each year.

WHAT YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR

A good CSR or responsible tourism policy in tourism should boast the following features:

1. Environmental principles applied to all areas of its business practices. As already referred to in other sections of this handbook, these include a detailed scrutiny and rethink of a business' energy use. This should lead to the creation of your own carbon management plan to reduce or ideally eliminate all carbon emissions. You should also have a policy on building materials, water consumption, waste and transportation and carbon offsetting. In order to put a detailed environmental policy into place, you may need to use the services of an Energy Services Company (ESCO), as mentioned earlier in this handbook. See also www.change.ie or www.sei.ie.

If you are looking at developing a new site for ecotourism purposes, you may have succeeded in getting planning permission, but make sure that you have a detailed site survey done for biodiversity purposes to. With the help of an expert, you can find out exactly which areas you need to protect, develop them in terms of natural resources to maintain their biodiversity and, ideally, enrich them. You can incorporate the results of this process into your responsibility policy. See Fáilte Ireland's booklets on Biodiversity Action Plans and Guidelines for the protection of Biodiversity, or

www.noticenature.ie

2. Put in place a purchasing policy, in order to commit to using products that are locally sourced, ideally within the same county and, if possible, organic. Fairtrade products should also be added to this list, as well as eco-friendly cleaning and guest products. This also gives you the opportunity to commit to using suppliers with similar environmental policies, such as minimum packaging on supplies.

Gregans Castle Hotel in The Burren, County Clare takes a strong stance on sustaining The Burren, as well as the livelihoods of those who live there. Most importantly, the farmers. Despite its barren appearance, agriculture is an important agricultural resource in The Burren. The hotel is a member of The Burren Beef and Lamb Producers Group. This was set up as part of The Burren Life project which aims to revive farming on The Burren and, in doing so, revive the local habitats, which are otherwise in danger of disappearing due to changes in grazing patterns (www.burrenlife.com). As members, Gregans has committed to sourcing all beef and lamb locally. It also promotes the leading sustainable food organisations, Slow Food Ireland (www.slowfoodireland.com) and Good Food Ireland (www.goodfoodireland.ie) through its restaurant activities. Consequently, the chef buys all the smoked fish, salads, eggs and cheeses from small Burren producers and also features a large selection of organic and bio-dynamic wines on its extensive wine list. www.gregans.ie

3. A social policy not only within your local community but for your staff as well. A tourism business plays an important role within a community, as it invites visitors into the area, who then can have various impacts on the daily lives of people living there. Hopefully these impacts are positive, but with the help of a strong social responsibility policy, you are demonstrating that you are putting your neighbours' needs, not just your net profits, at the top of your priority list. Examples of social policies include getting involved with a local charity, supporting community facilities which are valued by residents such as parks, sports grounds, arts venues etc, becoming involved in schools or colleges, or joining a conservation project.

Open your doors to local residents, by offering your facilities at a reduced rate such as the restaurant or rooms when they have family or friends visiting. You can offer conference facilities free of charge to small local groups during quieter seasons, or leisure facilities at a reduced rate.

The nature of tourism often involves seasonal employment. But remember, during that season, your employees, wherever they are from, are part of your community, so you need to welcome them into it as much as you would any of your guests. Inclusion and integration is as much a part of any social responsibility policy as anything else. Have regular employee social gatherings, offer incentives to stay from year to year

“Everyone has the right to fair treatment and by doing the right thing in terms of social responsibility we will improve stability and performance in businesses. Generally, the first local people your customers have an opportunity to talk to are your staff, so they naturally become ambassadors for the destinations and also for your business. Business with good employment practices report improved productivity, increased trust, an enhanced image in the local community and enhanced potential to recruit high performing people”.

Supplier Sustainability Handbook,

FEDERATION OF TOUR OPERATORS.

by providing training and increasing their skills, such as language lessons for non-English speakers and taking them to exhibitions or conferences. Bring the cleaners to the green products exhibitions, for example, or the chef to the Slowfood event. Other employee benefits can include free uniforms, free meals, free transport, gym membership or medical insurance. Having an open complaints procedure is also excellent practice. Exploitation of staff in the tourism industry is often a concern in developing countries, but it can happen anywhere in the world. A good social policy will provide incentives to staff to stay, learn and enthuse about your business as much as you do. Making a job sustainable is all part of making a sustainable business.

Wilderness Scotland is an award-winning company offering outdoor low-carbon holidays in remote parts of the Scottish highlands and islands. These include hiking, canoeing, ski-touring and cycling. Their committed approach to sustainability and ecotourism is laid out in detail in their responsible tourism policy, which features clearly on the home page of their website. Their work in responsible tourism is highly regarded internationally, and Wilderness Scotland now helps others to build their own policies through consultancy work in UK and internationally. The box to the right shows an abridged version of this policy, but for more details see their inspiring website www.wildernessscotland.com

Wilderness Scotland – Sustainable Tourism

OPERATING POLICIES

Environment – Our business activities and trip operations are purposefully designed to minimise environmental impact and operate on a low carbon basis. For example, all of our group holidays start at mainline train stations and we keep the use of motorised vehicles to a minimum. We are all about experiencing the wilderness using human power, be that on foot or by bike, kayak, canoe or sail boat. Like any business, we cannot eliminate our consumption of energy altogether and therefore we have taken the decision to offset all remaining carbon emissions by 110%.

Local communities & economies – We are absolutely committed to engaging local businesses throughout our entire operation and ensuring that the economic benefits are distributed in this equitable way. As well as providing a great service to our clients, by working with local partners it also means that our groups always receive a warm welcome from the locals wherever we go.

Supporting grass roots initiatives and campaigns – We work in close association with the Wilderness Foundation UK. They believe that only by experiencing wild places at first hand, will individuals truly understand and appreciate the continued value

of wild places in our modern society; in partnership with the Wilderness Foundation, Wilderness Scotland has set up a Community and Environment Fund which provides direct financial support and consultancy advice to several conservation and tourism development projects in Scotland and around the globe.

OFFICE POLICIES

Reducing use of paper – clients receive trip documentation by email and insofar as is reasonably practical and legally possible, we conduct all other business correspondence by email and internet. The use of electronic methods for recording telephone calls, meeting minutes and other documentation is part of company policy. We use smaller font sizes and have a policy of printing paper double-sided. We only purchase recycled paper for use in our business. If paper can be re-used we re-use it. Only once its re-use is no longer possible do we recycle.

Promotional material – we aim to keep paper based promotional material to a minimum, consistent with the successful running of a business. Letterheads, invoices and other correspondence are printed on recycled paper and all high-quality brochures have been produced using an Elemental Chlorine Free Process.

Other materials – we re-use and recycle envelopes, cardboard, glass, plastic bags and clothes. We use only environmentally friendly cleaning products in the office.

IT hardware and consumables – When hardware e.g. desktops, monitors and printers has come to the end of its business life, we distribute them to charity for re-use. Other IT consumables, such as printer cartridges, are recycled.

Energy consumption – We use energy efficient light bulbs, keep artificial lighting to a minimum, ensuring that lights not in use are always switched off. Regular processes such as ensuring that non-essential electronic equipment is fully powered off at the end of the working day are also followed. We use LCD monitors in preference to CRT monitors, and multi-function fax/copier and printer.

Transport – All of our staff walk or cycle to work each day. At all times we aim to keep transport movements to a minimum preferring other means of communication or choosing to access meetings on foot or cycle. For longer distances we use the train wherever this is reasonably possible.

**SOURCED WITH KIND PERMISSION FROM WILDERNESS SCOTLAND.
WWW.WILDERNESSSCOTLAND.COM**

A close-up photograph of a woven basket overflowing with fresh autumn harvest. The basket is filled with a variety of fruits, including large red apples, smaller red and yellow apples, clusters of dark blueberries, and blackberries. The basket is set against a background of green grass and more berries. The text "seven certifying your ecotourism business" is overlaid in white on the upper part of the image.

seven certifying your ecotourism business

With evidence of a substantial support network of ecotourism businesses starting to grow in Ireland, there will always be a few out there, which are guilty of 'greenwashing'. This means that they are making token gestures to appear 'eco-friendly' for marketing purposes only, when the reality is that it is all talk and no action. If you are serious about attaining genuine ecotourism status, then it is highly recommended that you seek official accreditation of your business at some stage.

Not only do accreditations or ecolabel schemes provide good audited approval of your eco-efforts, but they also provide excellent structures for you to work within, set up targets for you to aim towards, and motivate you to keep trying new practices. They come with their own inbuilt support network, and often with a mentoring scheme, with experts to advise and inspire along the way.

Labelling is going to become more and more important as demand for ecotourism products grow. If a tourism product has achieved a reputable green label, this gives the tourist a focal point when trying to choose how or where to start looking for a good ecotourism product. Tour operators specialising in ecotourism will be more interested in featuring accredited products. The form-filling side can also be advantageous, as it encourages you to keep financial records of all your income from and costs of ecotourism related products.

Having an eco-label also gives the travel media, which is increasing its coverage of ecotourism products, a starting point for researching what is out there. This is why such schemes are so often described as benchmarks; they are like trusted starting points for people who are interested in learning about, participating in or visiting good ethical businesses.

IRELAND'S GREEN CHOICE

Accreditation or labelling for green businesses can be controversial, as there are several choices of award schemes around the world, rather than one straight forward 'ethical' labelling system, such as Fairtrade.

In Ireland, there are two eco-labels available for the tourist accommodation sector: the Green Hospitality Award and the EU Flower eco-label. Both are classed as Type 1 eco-labels as defined by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO). The ISO defines Type 1 eco-labels as "voluntary, multiple criteria-based third party programmes that award a licence authorising the use of environmental labels on products based on life-cycle considerations".

Fáilte Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) both recognise the European Ecolabel for tourist accommodation, called the EU Flower. This label was created by the European Commission in 1992 and aims to signal high environmental performance in

"Fáilte Ireland will support the promotion of the EU Flower Ecolabel for tourism accommodation and, in association with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB), will investigate and promote appropriate all-Ireland environmental accreditation schemes for tourism operators and providers across all tourism sectors".

Fáilte Ireland,

TOURISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT, FÁILTE
IRELAND'S ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PLAN
2007-09.

“The Council’s 10-Year Tourism Strategy, “Destination Fermanagh”, prepared in partnership with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, confirms the growing importance of ecotourism. In fact, ecotourism has been identified as one of the main product development opportunities for our tourism sector. Our tourists today are environmentally aware and discerning in the products that they are seeking. It is important that we deliver what they expect and that the quality of what we deliver can be measured. The EU Flower Ecolabel is important and its use must not be diluted. It should never be too easy to achieve. We look forward to working with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to give ecotourism its rightful place”.

John O’Kane,

CHAIRMAN, FERMANAGH DISTRICT COUNCIL,
EU FLOWER AWARDS CEREMONY.

The Benwiskin Centre, Ballinrillick, County Sligo

“Benwiskin, the main peak of the Dartry Mountains, is central to everything here. It rises out of the earth like a giant tipi, overlooking the equally magnificent Benbulbin. This is the dramatic backdrop for this small community-run hostel in Ballinrillick village. Set up originally by the local environmental group to combat illegal dumping on their otherwise perfect landscape, it has refurbished the old village schoolhouse. Built to excellent eco-friendly standards, it boasts a wood pellet boiler and solar panels to provide heating and hot water. In good hostel style, there are notices everywhere reminding you about recycling and energy-saving, so you can’t put a foot wrong.

Tourist accommodations like Benwiskin are inspirational models of rural development. It not only serves as a clean and comfortable budget accommodation, but also as a community centrepiece, with classes and workshops throughout the winter. However, it’s not the single-hand card games or solar panels which bring visitors to this part of the world. It is the solace of the mountains and their extraordinary viewpoints over the Atlantic coastline of Sligo and Donegal.

Benwiskin provides a detailed list of cycling and walking routes, with four bikes to hire at the hostel. Cycle out the gate straight onto the country lanes which lead into the lower foothills of Benbulbin. Not too challenging, an hour’s cycle will take you close enough to see the countless waterfalls tumbling down the deeply carved gorges. A more ambitious walk or cycle is into the Gleniff Horseshoe Valley, with its 12kms walk through some of the most unforgettable hill walking in Ireland”.

Extract, with kind permission, from *Staying Green in Ireland*, published by Dept. Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Greenbox. See www.greenbox.ie

all areas of industry and commerce throughout the EU. It is a pan-European eco-label that is promoted within each European country. In tourism, it can be applied to any accommodation, including hostels, bed and breakfasts, hotels, self-catering, campsites or caravan parks.

The Green Hospitality Award (GHA) is a step-by-step environmental management programme specifically designed for the hospitality sector. At present, the programme is available

for hotels. Each successful member receives an award based on a set of strict criteria allowing them to use the GHA Logo. Awards are made at Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum level, which reflect the environmental standard at which the hotel is operating (the Platinum level being equivalent to the EU Flower Eco-label standard). The website also contains a benchmark calculator so you can see how your hotel is performing compared to Irish and international benchmarks. The GHA is part funded by the EPA and is supported by Fáilte

Ireland, the Irish Hotels Federation and the Irish Hospitality Institute. www.ghaward.ie

One example of an EU Flower Ecolabel holder is The Benwisikin Centre, in County Sligo, as featured in the table on the left hand page.

The EU Flower Ecolabel in tourism complements the other ongoing island-wide and European work in sustainability issues, such as Green Schools, EcoSchools, Green Hospitality Award, Blue Flag beaches, Green Coast, Golf Environment Europe ECOManagement Award, Wake Up to Waste, and the Change campaign. Fáilte Ireland is actively promoting the EU Flower Ecolabel through its various marketing outlets, such as the Tourism Ireland website. For more information on the EU Flower, see their website www.ecolabel-tourism.eu and training site www.traintoecolabel.org.

The EU Flower Ecolabel was brought to the industry's attention by Greenbox, the non-profit making organisation, based in County Leitrim, which started working with tourism businesses in the Northwest of Ireland in 2002. Both Fáilte Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board recognise Greenbox as Ireland's leading ecotourism advisory, training and marketing organisation. Consequently it has now expanded to working island-wide, due to the growing

demand for excellence in, and supply of ecotourism products. In addition to the many businesses it helps achieve the EU Flower Ecolabel, it also offers extensive marketing services to all these businesses.

Like any accreditation scheme, the EU Flower Ecolabel involves quite a lot of form-filling and administration, which is why it is worth having the support of Greenbox to guide you through the process. You can also apply directly through the National Standards Authority of Ireland (www.nsai.ie), which is the competent body assigned by the EU to be its administrator and auditor in Ireland. In Northern Ireland, the competent body representing the EU Flower Ecolabel is DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs). See <http://ecolabel.defra.gov.uk> for more details. Applicants must conform to certain eco-criteria, and make various changes to their practices to improve their environmental standing. However, anyone can start the process. You do not need to have all the latest eco-gadgets such as wood-burning stoves or solar panels to make some of the basic changes they recommend.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO DO TO GET ACCREDITED?

By putting the EU Flower Ecolabel on your tourist accommodation's publicity, you are telling your visitors that you have taken steps towards the following:

"Having experienced the economic benefits of wood pellets versus oil as a means of heating Belle Isle Castle, the Estate is now attempting to gain the EU Flower. By going green, there is not only the saving in energy and water rates but also a tremendous opportunity in marketing Belle Isle under the European Ecolabel".

Charles Plunket,

BELLE ISLE, COUNTY FERMANAGH.
WWW.BELLEISLE-ESTATE.COM

"We can tell that the majority of people visiting Ard na Breatha are very aware of the environment and appreciate what we are trying to do. We feel proud when our guests comment on our green efforts".

Ard na Breatha,

EU FLOWER HOLDER, AND WINNER OF
GEORGINA CAMPBELL'S GUESTHOUSE OF
THE YEAR 2009.
WWW.ARDNABREATHA.COM

“At Orchard Acre Farm we love being an ecotourism provider. Orchard Acre Farm thrives on protecting and promoting Ireland’s best assets: our natural and cultural heritage. It is our reason for being; the fact that our core environmental and ethical values are also our selling point and marketing pitch, is just the green icing on our home grown carrot cake. However, our niche in the global market combined with wise building design saves on running costs too. We certified and trained in ecotourism through Greenbox because, with the whole world to choose from, our customers expect only genuine ecotourism”.

Orchard Acre Farm,

COUNTY FERMANAGH.
WWW.ORCHARDACREFARM.COM

“Sustainable Travel International has recently completed assessing Ireland’s Greenbox Ecotourism Label and the associated Ecolabel Course for community participants. Greenbox was founded upon a regional Peace through Tourism initiative geared toward educating communities about how to develop sustainable ecotourism initiatives, which are also marketed through the Greenbox. As a part of this process, STI met the Greenbox representatives and assessed the course and it’s participants to verify the strength of the program. We are happy to announce that thanks to Greenbox, the Northwest border region between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (UK) has one of the strongest regional ecotourism development efforts we have seen. You can now travel to Ireland, find and support quality tourism products and services that promote environmental, community and cultural heritage by visiting the Greenbox web site”.

Sustainable Travel International,

WWW.SUSTAINABLETRAVELINTERNATIONAL.ORG

- Limiting energy consumption
- Limiting water consumption
- Reducing waste production
- Favouring the use of renewable resources and substances which are less hazardous to the environment
- Promoting environmental education and communication to your employees and guests

To be awarded the EU Flower Ecolabel, you are given a number of points for achievements in each of these areas. You can work up gradually to getting the number of points required, starting with changing your lightbulbs, detergents or energy supplier, to eventually taking on some of the bigger steps of installing solar panels or renewable energy heating systems. Once the application has been approved, you can display the EU Flower Ecolabel on all of your publicity material for three years, after which you will have to be re-audited. As with all labels, there is an annual fee for using the EU Flower Ecolabel (0.15% of annual sales of the product), as well as an initial administration fee.

As the EU Flower Ecolabel only works with accommodation providers, Greenbox also offers another form of

accreditation to Irish tourism businesses which offer ecotourism packages, but may not have accommodation. It is Ireland’s first ecotourism label, called The Greenbox Ecotourism Label and both the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Fáilte Ireland participated in its development. It has also been recognised by OutdoorNI, a leading leisure activity website in Northern Ireland ([www.outdoorni.com](http://WWW.OUTDOORNI.COM)). Similar to the EU Flower Ecolabel, this accreditation provides an assurance to visitors that you are a genuine ecotourism practitioner. By achieving the Greenbox Ecotourism Label you are showing that you have met all the key elements of ecotourism in the ‘experience’ you offer visitors. For a modest fee, you undergo training, get advice, guidance and mentoring, all to help you apply and achieve either, or both, of these accreditations. For examples of companies which have gained the Greenbox Ecotourism Label, as well as details of all of Greenbox’s training courses, which range from a half day introduction to ecotourism to an eight day practical course, see [www.greenbox.ie](http://WWW.GREENBOX.IE) or their training department’s own website [www.responsibletourism.ie](http://WWW.RESPONSIBLETOURISM.IE)

The Wilderness Therapy Weekend at the Lough Allen Adventure Centre in County Leitrim has achieved the Greenbox Ecotourism Label. On these weekends, Kevin Currid, the owner, leads groups by canoe on to an island on Lough Allen, where they camp and learn bushcraft skills. Throughout the weekend a series of talks aim to give participants a privileged insight into local biodiversity, archaeology & history. The Centre itself runs on renewable energy and promotes the Leave No Trace ethos in all its activities. www.loughallenadventure.com

Both the EU Flower Ecolabel and the Greenbox Ecotourism Label are independently audited on a regular basis. The Greenbox Ecotourism Label has been recently audited by Sustainable Travel International, an independent auditor of green labels, and it summarised its findings as quoted left.



eight marketing your ecotourism business



Green is not just a fad, it is here to stay. It is the contemporary way to conduct business and, done well, it can serve to create a higher quality, more interesting, ethical and saleable product. The Blue Book's quotation on the right demonstrates this perfectly. However, as already discussed throughout this handbook, ecotourism products do not necessarily mean luxury products either. In the past, tourists perceived ecotourism as two very different things. As an eco-tourist you were either a wealthy adventurer who opted to stay in luxurious rainforest eco-resorts or, in direct contrast, a tree hugging hosteller. Ecotourism is now an option for everyone, with products being created and marketed under the ecotourism umbrella to suit all budgets and tastes.

Looking at the growth in marketing and distribution channels for ecotourism products over the last few years confirms the departure of ecotourism from niche into the mainstream. There are eco-spas, eco-cottages, eco-castles and eco-cabins. The list is growing. Of course, some of these are simply using the 'eco' prefix as a marketing ploy, or 'greenwashing' as it is often called. However many are genuine players who are trying to make a difference. It is becoming clear through all the emerging publicity for ecotourism products, as well as consumer research, that you are no longer confining yourself to the earlier preconceptions by calling yourself an eco-tourist either. A recent article in

UK's The Times newspaper entitled "Ten sexy eco-breaks" covered an eco-chic boutique hotel in Andalusia, an eco-island off the west coast of Scotland, and an organic farm in Italy. Look at any listing in a travel article, such as 'Ten best beaches' or 'Ten best activity holidays' and there is nearly always a green one, or more, listed alongside all the others. In Ireland there is now a regular column in the travel section Go of The Irish Times, called Ethical Traveller, as well as eco-interest columns in almost all other national papers.

For tourism to be truly sustainable, all sectors need to consider ecotourism at some level of their business practices. In Ireland, there are now examples of community-run hostels, yoga retreats, luxury hotels, caravan parks, corporate hospitality venues, adventure centres, restaurants, pubs and leisure facilities which are changing the way they conduct their tourism businesses so that they can be more responsible. The switched on ones are marketing their businesses not only to tourists who are already green converts, but to the tourist market as a whole. Without marketing, your business is unlikely to survive, and the good news is that as ecotourism grows, the marketing channels grow to meet this demand.

"The members of the Blue Book association have always been very interested in best environmental practice. When the opportunity arose for the Blue Book to assist our members with the EU Flower process, we did so without hesitation. The commitment shown by our members to introduce best environmental practice to achieve this accreditation is quite staggering. It is not an easy process, requiring staff as well as owners to work towards the changes required, but the effort will be worth it. We hope to be the vanguard for Irish hotels and are confident of having a bouquet of Blue Book members with EU Flower accreditation in 2009".

Hilary Finlay,

MARKETING DIRECTOR, IRELAND'S BLUE BOOK. AN EXCLUSIVE LISTING OF LUXURY ACCOMMODATION IN IRISH COUNTRY HOUSE HOTELS, MANOR HOUSES AND CASTLES.
WWW.IRELANDS-BLUE-BOOK.IE

"Tourism by its very nature is dependent on the environment and the local culture. We have been slow as an industry to understand our wider responsibilities to both local communities and the environment. Omagh Hostel attracts people who appreciate and actively seek out providers who try in many small ways to be more responsible and make a difference. My business figures are well up for this summer, in some cases by 100%. I am attracting the ethical vote and I would have only got that through being an ecotourism business".

Marella Fyffe,

CO-OWNER, OMAGH HOSTEL.
WWW.OMAGHHOSTEL.CO.UK

“Tourism Ireland is responsible for marketing the island of Ireland overseas. As such, we have entered the ecotourism market with one major marketing advantage. Ireland is green. This is why people choose to visit us, and that is why Ireland is making a serious commitment to keeping it that way. We are listening to our visitors’ requests to preserve the natural and cultural heritage which is uniquely ours. We are also taking our tourism providers’ need for sustainability seriously too. And most crucially, we are all too aware that ecotourism in Ireland can play a major role in the fight to combat climate change, and we are striving to lessen our impact as urgently as possible”.

Paul O’Toole,

CEO, TOURISM IRELAND.

“When I was researching my book, *ecoescape:Ireland*, I turned over every stone to find ecotourism products to feature in this first green travel guide to Ireland. I got there in the end, and am delighted with the results. After publication, however, several businesses which promote themselves as ‘eco’ got in contact to complain that they had not been considered for the book. The simple fact was that they were off the research radar. If I could not find them through my detailed research using regional tourist boards, web searches, ecotourism organisations, newspaper articles, and the all important word of mouth, then how are tourists going to find them? My advice is to get out there and shout about your product. Get on blogs, links, websites, and meet your regional tourism officers and tell them what you are doing to be green. It takes time to spread the word, but it will be worth it”.

Catherine Mack,

AUTHOR, ECOESCAPE:IRELAND
WWW.ECOESCAPE.ORG

THE GROWING NATIONAL GREEN TOURISM BRAND

With Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board backing ecotourism as a major contributor to Ireland’s green brand, the promotional channels for Irish ecotourism providers are opening up all the time. You are no longer fighting against other niche products for a piece of the national marketing pie. The most important result of this big move of Irish tourism towards promoting itself as a green destination is that an ecotourism product now has the potential to reach worldwide markets. However, the buck doesn’t stop here. Any ecotourism business must be ready to take on a busy, proactive marketing campaign, not just in order to sell its own product, but also to play a major part in the bigger sustainable tourism picture in Ireland.

HOW DO I GET MY BUSINESS OUT THERE?

The growing number of marketing channels for ecotourism products outside the tourist boards in Ireland are evident. All ecotourism businesses should familiarise themselves with these outlets, how they work, what sort of businesses they represent, whom to contact, costs they might incur in using these channels and the potential benefits of each. Larger companies can hire the services of a good PR company to do this for them, but smaller businesses usually have to take this task on themselves. The most popular marketing channels include:

1. eMarketing. Ecotourism is undoubtedly the way forward, and so is the use of modern communications. To conquer both, it is absolutely vital to have a good website for your ecotourism business, and to understand the importance of marketing across the worldwide web. Or emarketing as it is often called. You will rarely find a newspaper or magazine article about a business without a website being mentioned nowadays. It is not just the way to move forward, it has been the way for quite a number of years now, and so if your business is up and running, and your website isn’t, then this should become an urgent priority.

One of the best starting points is to look at all the other ecotourism websites out there in the world. Just do a web search on ecotourism in various destinations. This way you can get an idea of the sort of websites you like, and ones you don’t. Then it is time to approach a web designer and talk over your marketing plan. Getting the right design for your ecotourism website is fundamental, and this is where good research pays off, as you can brief your website designer accurately with as much detail as possible of how you want your website to look. Do you have your ecotourism policy ready to display on the front page of your website? Do you have good photography, which not only shows your interior design, but also represents the biodiversity of your area? Are you able to respond to web

enquiries quickly and efficiently (within 24 hours is recommended)? What sort of web content management system (CMS) do you need? Do you need video, podcasts, and how many photographs do you need to use? How often do you need to update it? Gather feedback from visitors and press to put on your website, so that potential customers can read it immediately.

Greenbox offers website development courses and workshops for ecotourism businesses. See www.greenbox.ie and www.responsibletravel.com, their training arm, for details and up to date lists of courses. Such training helps take the fear out of the internet, web development and other time-consuming subjects for non-technically minded entrepreneurs.

Understanding how to maximise the amount of traffic to your website, or Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is, for example, one of the keys to successful emarketing. This is done through all sorts of means, such as incorporating the right words (ecotourism, green, responsible, sustainable etc), into your web text and, in particular, your front page or by creating links with other websites. You also need to start to understand who is looking at your website, and how long they spend on it. This is called web analytics, and through gaining knowledge of how your website is doing, you can then work to improve it. There are also many books on the subject,

including the reputable *Web Analytics for Dummies* for any beginners who are trying to get to grips with the subject. There are many internet marketing companies out there to help you with this and so, if like many ecotourism businesses, you are not yet shouting about the efforts you have been making, it is time to get the message out there into eco-cyberspace.

See www.greenbox.ie for recommendations. At the time of this publication going to print, a Google search of 'ecotourism in Ireland' brought Greenbox up top, with other Irish ecotourism providers Corralea Activity Centre and Orchard Acre Farm, both members of Greenbox, The Omagh Hostel (EU Flower holder) and UK award-winning internet retailer www.responsibletravel.com all coming up high on the listings. Nothing else was jumping out at the top of the web search pages, which suggests huge potential for development in this area. It also shows the shift that needs to take place in the way ecotourism businesses are spending their time and money marketing their products or services.

If you look at some of the leading ecotourism information websites, all listed at the back of this handbook, you will see that most have blogs or forums for debate. These are also quite powerful tools of communication, and are great ways of telling the world about who you are and what ecotourism service or product you are offering.

Creating a database is also an important feature of emarketing. Repeat business is a strong feature of ecotourism. Award-winning ecotourism company Intrepid Travel's co-founder and MD, Geoff Manchester stated at the World Travel Market 2008 that 45% of business was generated by repeat visits. "Once a person has travelled in this style or manner, they keep coming back. Word of mouth is now our most important form of marketing". So you need to ensure that your website has a good database facility, and that you keep it up to date.

Most importantly, you want your ecotourism message to be clear, ensuring that the overall feel of your website portrays the ethos of your business. Then you want to make sure that the website reaches all the rapidly growing number of eco-tourists out there in the world.

2. The media includes everything from newspapers, magazines, radio, television and online media. For every travel editor there is almost always an online travel editor too, as the readership for online travel articles is growing. The media can be regional, national and international, and although international publicity is much sought after, it is worth remembering that millions of trips are taken at home by Irish residents every year, so local coverage plays a hugely important role. Think about the markets you want to target, research the names and contact details of various travel

“It’s critical for their survival that very small tourism businesses use the web. Having a website is well and good but if potential customers can’t find you, it’s been a waste of money – no matter how pretty it is. The work involved for small tourism businesses in order to be found on Google is 10% ‘technical’ and 90% marketing. If you don’t market your business well in the real world, you will fail online – that’s the sad truth. To rank highly on Google’s free results is not actually “free” which is a lesson many smaller businesses learn the hard way. We’ve worked with two accommodation providers in Sligo and Mullingar and both of them have nearly full occupancy rates”.

John Ring,

MD OF RINGJOHN ONLINE MARKETING,
INTERNET MARKETING EXPERTS IN UK
AND IRELAND.
WWW.RINGJOHN.COM

“ecoescape believes that there is only one way to go and that is to go green. We work with businesses, large and small, to help them benefit from sustainable tourism – to save money, find new customers and enjoy a better way to work and live”.

Laura Burgess,

FOUNDER, ECOESCAPE.
WWW.ECOESCAPE.ORG

editors, and create a database for marketing purposes.

The media is looking for travel stories, and needs to have something interesting to cover. You just have to get your story out there, making sure it is an interesting story. This takes work and persistence. It is important not to bombard the press. Editors get too many emails to read in a day, and no-one likes have an overflowing inbox, or constant PR phone calls. Learn how to send a press release, and send it out when it is relevant. If you have a Halloween Walking weekend planned, for example, this is quirky good news, and you just need to make sure you send it out in time. For newspapers this might be a month or so before you think they might want to write about this subject, and for magazines, you often need to send the story to them three to six months in advance. Note also that if a UK national newspaper, for example, has just published a large feature article on Ireland, it will not usually publish another one for a good few months.

It is worth seeking out the writers who are contributing regularly and trying to contact them directly. In particular, look out those writers who specialise in ecotourism, which media they write for, and target them. Or find out who is writing the travel news sections in a travel supplement, as this person will be looking for weekly short snippets on what is new out there in the world of travel. In order to do this, you need

to read the travel pages, listen to radio coverage, watch the travel programmes, and see what sort of places they are covering, and who is covering them.

If you specialise in food, look at the food magazines too. If hiking is your speciality, then look at the outdoor activity magazines around the world. For yoga holidays, there is a plethora of health and fitness magazines out there looking for stories. For every activity there is at least one magazine out there. For most forms of transport there is also a magazine, so keep an eye on inflight, ferry, train and coach magazines. The publishers’ association PPA’s website is an important source of information on which publication covers what, as its membership includes the majority of magazine publishers in UK and Ireland. See www.ppa.co.uk and www.ppa.ie for detailed list of publishers, which you can then contact to see if they have a specific travel editor.

If you manage to contact a journalist who is willing to cover your ecotourism business for a magazine, most will expect to be offered a complimentary visit for this purpose. The cost of this is something you should incorporate into your marketing budget. Prepare well for such a visit, and offer suggestions of local activities which would suit the publication he/she is writing for. Invite them to the local farmers’ market, crafts centre, a café serving locally sourced food, or provide a hired bike and map

of local cycle routes. Link in with other ecotourism providers for the article, and offer suggestions to the writer in advance, as you are not only helping them with their research but you are also showing a genuine enthusiasm for and understanding of ecotourism in your area. Freelance journalists will often try and generate three or four articles out of one trip, using different angles for each article, so the more suggestions you can offer, the better. Greenbox also offers useful media workshops for ecotourism providers. See www.greenbox.ie for details.

3. Guidebooks are here to stay and, despite the growing number of online guides, tourists still like to travel with a book that they can put in their bags. Some of the leading green publications are Alastair Sawday's Green Places to Stay, ecoescape: Ireland and ecoescape: UK, AA Green Rooms, Organic Places to Stay, and Lonely Planet's Code Green. Both Rough Guides and The Guardian are due to publish responsible tourism guidebooks in 2009.

All of these guidebooks have websites now, and contact details, so that you can find out how to feature in forthcoming publications. Some guidebooks charge to be featured, and others don't, so be sure to check what their policy is on membership fees. Although accommodation is often the main feature of a guidebook, they will usually mention activities, restaurants,

cafes and transport options. Like any other marketing area, do use your ecotourism features as a USP (Unique Selling Point), and the more of these you can talk about, the better. Most guidebooks specialising in ecotourism will also welcome the fact that you are working towards or have achieved an accreditation of some sort.

4. Consumer and trade fairs – These vary from large international fairs such as the World Travel Market in London, or Destinations in London and Birmingham, to smaller green fairs around Ireland. The number of fairs emphasising ecotourism is on the increase, such as Reispavillon in Germany, which describes itself as an alternative travel fair. The larger fairs or exhibitions are often prohibitive financially for smaller businesses, but if you can share a stand with someone else, or even a regional group, it is a great way of getting direct contact with the media and/or consumers at the same time. It is also worth just taking the time to visit one of these fairs from time to time, to see what is out there, and keep up to date with, and be inspired by other ecotourism products on the market.

Larger ecotourism businesses might want to keep the international fairs in mind, if they are looking for business in the corporate travel market. As more and more companies put Corporate Social Responsibility policies in place, they are going in search of sustainable tourism providers to host their events, and

international fairs are good networking places for making such contacts. Smaller providers should research the large number of smaller fairs going on out there closer to home, not only in Ireland, but also in UK or France, as eco-tourists start to look for holiday destinations closer to home. One good example is The Very Best of Britain and Ireland fair in London, where prices are more accessible than some of the bigger international fairs (www.britainandirelandevent.co.uk). Contact Fáilte Ireland or NITB for more details of travel fairs. There are many opportunities to promote your ecotourism product through these organisations, which attend lifestyle trade events as well as travel ones, such as green building or health and wellness exhibitions. Fáilte Ireland's Promotions Department has produced a useful calendar of all relevant travel and consumer promotions events. It is always worth contacting them before signing up to a fair and handing over a lot of money, without knowing what reputation it has, and the number of visitors it expects to receive.

If you are specialising in outdoor activities, for example, you could also look into the Adventure Travel Show in London, or if food is your speciality, look into exhibiting at many of the food fairs which take place in Ireland, UK and around Europe throughout the year. Follow up immediately on all your contacts that you make at any trade or

consumer fair, as many standholders and visitors lose business cards, leaflets and flyers, and it is a way of keeping a presence in their ‘inbox’.

Similarly, it is also important to keep the Irish Tour Operators Association up to date with all your activities, as they participate and run many trade events throughout the year (www.irishtouroperators.com).

Rathmullan House, a prestigious four-star country manor house in County Donegal, has taken a creative approach to its marketing. Famous for its fine food, they decided to get people to taste their food around the country, and then see if this entices them to take a break at the hotel. Travelling around various food fairs in UK and Ireland with their state of the art catering truck, they sell their fine fare to happy customers, and distribute hotel leaflets at the same time. No better way of promoting your hotel, than by letting people taste some samples of what they might get to eat if they then decide to come and stay.
www.rathmullanhouse.com

5. Internet retailers. Responsibletravel.com is the leading internet retailer of ecotourism holidays. Based in the UK, it was ahead of the game in promoting ecotourism and has now established an excellent reputation worldwide for its involvement in and promotion of ecotourism products. Each provider

must fulfil specific criteria that include environmental, social and economic policies in order to be accepted as a member of the responsibletravel.com network. The fee depends on the size and nature of your business, as well as a commission for every booking. See www.responsibletravel.com for details.

6. Certification schemes such as those already mentioned in this handbook, such as the Green Hospitality Award (www.ghaward.ie) are not only there to help ecotourism suppliers raise their sustainability standards, but also provide excellent ways of marketing. With the EU Flower Ecolabel, for example, you not only get publicity through its own website, but if you train to achieve the award with Greenbox, the leading ecotourism agency in Ireland, they also market you through their website. As Greenbox is recognised worldwide as a leading ecotourism organisation, (Highly recommended for both the Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards and the World Travel and Tourism Council’s Tourism for Tomorrow Awards) it has already tapped into a huge market.

7. Awards are a growing feature of the ecotourism sector. The most prolific are the Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards, which take place every year at the World Travel Market in London. It has categories for everything from best responsible transport initiative, best small tourism provider, best small hotel,

best large hotel and so on. Anyone can be nominated and you can even nominate yourself. Nominations usually take place over the summer months. The event generates a lot of media attention as well as ongoing publicity through responsibletravel.com’s website throughout the year, as they are major sponsors of the awards. See www.responsibletourismawards.com for details. Other awards include The Guardian, Observer and guardian.co.uk Travel Awards, which has an Ethical Travel category, the World Travel and Tourism Council’s (WTTC) Tourism for Tomorrow Awards, The World Travel Awards and The Times Online Green Spaces Awards.



“Getting to know more about each other remains one of the most important hopes for the peaceful future of the planet. If we are really to understand each other better, then we need to be reminded to travel carefully and thoughtfully, listening to people along the way and respecting the world we are privileged to travel through. The Responsible Tourism Awards are one of the most important ways in which we can understand how to travel better”.

Michael Palin,

SOURCE
WWW.RESPONSIBLETOURISMAWARDS.COM

nine ecotourism directory



One of the main problems for businesses interested in the ecotourism sector is access to information. There are many organisations which support sustainable tourism initiatives through information and training, as well as publications and websites. From Fáilte Ireland to the United Nations, The Organic Centre to The International Centre for Responsible Tourism, all have important information to share. These organisations provide, literally, a whole world of inspiration and education to those committing to ecotourism ventures. Many of them have played an important part in the research of this handbook.

Action Renewables

Northern Ireland's leading organisation in the promotion and development of renewable energy

www.actionrenewables.org

Country of Origin: Northern Ireland

Bord Bia

The Irish Food Board is responsible for promoting Irish food, and creating a link between suppliers and potential customers. Website provides information on organic food production and Feile Bia, its certification programme for meat production

www.bordbia.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Change.ie

Irish website dedicated to promoting carbon reductions in all areas of our lives, at work, home and play

www.change.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland and Conservation Volunteers Ireland

Organisation offering conservation opportunities for groups or individuals across Northern Ireland and ROI

www.cvi.ie and **www.cvni.org**

Country of Origin: Ireland and Northern Ireland

Construct Ireland magazine

Ireland's only magazine dedicated exclusively to sustainable construction in Ireland. It plays a key role in raising consciousness of the need for low energy, low impact, healthy buildings in Ireland, affecting the design and construction of tens of thousands of new buildings. Subscribe to online newsletter or magazine in post

www.constructireland.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Crann

Irish NGO promoting tree culture in Ireland, and replanting of broadleaves throughout Ireland.

Subscribe to quarterly magazine

www.crann.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Cultivate

Centre, based in Dublin, for information on sustainable lifestyles. With good retail outlet and many excellent workshops and courses. Also provides detailed sustainable directory of goods and services

www.cultivate.ie and **www.sustainable.ie**

Country of Origin: Ireland

Ecoescape

Green travel guidebooks for UK and Ireland, and excellent ecotourism website

www.ecoescape.org

Country of Origin: UK

ENFO

Ireland's leading information website on environmental issues, set up by Department of the Environment and Local Government

www.enfo.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Environmental and Sustainable Construction Association (EASCA)

Members organisation, promoting suppliers of sustainable construction products and services in Ireland

www.easca.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Ethicaltraveller.ie

Catherine Mack's website, Ethical Traveller columnist for Go travel section The Irish Times, and author of ecoescape:Ireland

www.ethicaltraveller.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland and UK

EU Flower Ecolabel

Set up by the EU Commission, this certification scheme is aimed at helping consumers recognise green, eco-friendly products. Applies to accommodation only in tourism

www.ecolabel-tourism.eu and

www.traintoeoclabeol.org

Country of Origin: EU member countries

Fairtrade

Fairtrade addresses some of the economic imbalances around the world, by requiring companies to pay sustainable prices to suppliers of produce. Working mainly with developing countries, it ensures better prices for producers, decent working conditions, local sustainability, and fair terms of trade

www.fairtrade.ie and www.fairtrade.co.uk

Country of Origin: Worldwide

Forum for the Future

UK charity working in partnership with public institutions, leading businesses and national and local government to accelerate the transition towards a sustainable way of life. Good source of info, research and publications

www.forumforthefuture.org

Country of Origin: UK

Freecycle

UK and Irish recycling organisation which has created an online community aimed at people redistributing unwanted items to people who can make use of them

www.freecycle.org

Country of Origin: Worldwide

Friends of the Earth

Internationally recognised and respected organisation campaigning for environmental justice and sustainability. Very active branches in ROI and NI

www.foe.ie and www.foe.co.uk/northern_ireland

Country of Origin: Worldwide

Greenbox

Ireland's leading provider of ecotourism training, marketing and support

www.greenbox.ie and www.responsibletourism.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Greenbusiness.ie

Greenbusiness.ie offers Irish businesses free advice on improving resource efficiency through reducing the wastage of materials, consumables, water and energy. The website contains very useful audit tools for energy, waste and water.

www.greenbusiness.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Greenme

A very informative green lifestyle emagazine, with plethora of information and suppliers

www.greenme.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Green Hospitality Award

The Green Hospitality Award (GHA) is an environmental management programme, currently available to hotels in Ireland, leading to accreditation at bronze, silver, gold or platinum level.

www.ghaward.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Green Hotelier

Quarterly magazine on environmental and socio-economic issues affecting the international tourism sector and a showcase of best practice

www.greenhotelier.com

Country of Origin: UK

Greentraveller.co.uk

Green travel website, brimming with ideas and good articles, founded by Richard Hammond, one of UK's leading green travel writers

www.greentraveller.co.uk

Country of Origin: UK

The Heritage Council

The Heritage Council has responsibility to promote interest, education, knowledge and pride in Ireland's national heritage. This includes monuments, archaeological objects, architectural heritage, gardens etc.

www.heritagecouncil.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

International Centre for Responsible Tourism

The International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT) is based at Leeds Metropolitan University, which offers post-graduate training and research in responsible tourism.

www.icrtourism.org

Country of Origin: UK

Irish Peatland Conservation Council

Irish organisation aimed at protecting Ireland's bogs

www.ipcc.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Leave no Trace

An outdoor ethics programme designed to promote and inspire responsible outdoor recreation through education, research, and partnerships. Brochure available to download online

www.leavenotraceireland.org

Country of Origin: Ireland

National Organic Training Skillnet

Due to the rapidly increasing demand for organic produce, this organisation offers training courses for organic farmers, smallholders, and small food producers in Ireland

www.nots.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Notice Nature

Ireland's public awareness campaign on biodiversity. It aims to raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity and to encourage everyone to play their part in its protection. Good publications available

www.noticenature.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Organic Places to Stay

Online directory and book of accommodation which incorporate the principles of the organics movement into their hospitality. 2009 publication of Organic Places to Stay in UK and Ireland available to buy online

www.organicholidays.co.uk

Country of Origin: UK

Planeta.com

Online journal of international ecotourism. Great articles and interesting forum for debate

www.planeta.com

Country of Origin: USA

Power of One

Advisory organisation helping individuals and businesses change their energy consumption patterns, and reduce their carbon footprints

www.powerofone.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Renewable Energy World

International online information website on renewable energy developments and products

www.renewableenergyworld.com

Country of Origin: USA

Repak

Repak is an industry funded non-profit making organisation established to help Irish businesses meet their legal recycling obligations

www.repak.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Responsibletravel.com

Leading retailer of worldwide responsible tourism products

www.responsibletravel.com

Country of Origin: UK

Rural NI

Set up by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland, this is an electronic information source for farmers and producers

www.ruralni.gov.uk

Country of Origin: Northern Ireland

Slowfood Ireland

International movement started in Italy, to promote the use of local foods as an inherent part of a country's cultural heritage, as well as supporting local producers

www.slowfoodireland.com

Country of Origin: Worldwide

Smart Planet

Consumer e-magazine with plenty of articles, reviews, product information on all things green

www.smartplanet.com

Country of Origin: UK

Sustainable Developments

Good source of information on sustainable product suppliers in Ireland, with green directory provided on website

www.sustainabledevelopments.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI)

Set up by the government in 2002 as Ireland's national energy agency, to promote and assist the development of sustainable energy. Offering information, training and services to ecotourism businesses

www.sei.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Sustainable Tourism Ireland (STI)

Irish organisation aimed at building a community of like-minded businesses sharing a vision and passion

of growing sustainable tourism in Ireland

www.sustourism.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Sustainability Journal

Ireland's only magazine dedicated solely to sustainability issues. With detailed, high calibre features and excellent up to date information on product sourcing. Subscription available

www.sustainability.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Talktourism

Online forum for debate and discussion of all aspects of tourism in Ireland

www.talktourism.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

The Living Architecture Centre

Internet School of Architecture offering Courses In Sustainable House Design & Construction

www.livingarchitecturecentre.com

Country of Origin: Ireland

The Travel Foundation

Independent UK charity aiming to help the outbound travel industry manage tourism more sustainably. Excellent source of information and ecotourism guidelines

www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk

Country of Origin: UK

Tourism Concern

Charity campaigning against exploitation in the global tourism industry

www.tourismconcern.org.uk

Country of Origin: Ireland

Travelmole Vision

Sustainable section of Travelmole, acclaimed and global online community for the travel and tourism industry. Excellent source of news and developments in ecotourism activities

www.travelmole.com

Country of Origin: UK

Tree Council of Ireland

The Tree Council of Ireland is a voluntary non-governmental organisation formed to promote the planting, care and conservation of trees in both urban and rural areas

www.treecouncil.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

United Nations Environment Programme

United Nations' environmental department, aimed at encouraging international partnership in caring for the environment. Website excellent source of information and publications

www.unep.org

Country of Origin: International

Wake up to Waste

Campaign set up by Northern Ireland's Environment and Heritage Service, to promote good waste management

www.wakeuptowaste.org

Country of Origin: Northern Ireland

Walk Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland's walking trails website, with details of trails, and local events

www.walkni.com

Country of Origin: Northern Ireland

Waymarked Ways of Ireland

Part of Sports Council of Ireland, this organisation manages an ever-growing network of walks in Ireland (currently 31). See website for maps etc.

www.irishtrails.ie

Country of Origin: Ireland

Woodland Trust Northern Ireland

Tree for All campaign has target to plant 500,000 trees in Northern Ireland by 2010. Details of how and where to plant on website

www.treeforall.org.uk/northernireland

Country of Origin: Northern Ireland

World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO)

A UN agency and leading international tourism organisation. It plays a central role in promoting the development of responsible, sustainable and accessible tourism, encouraging the implementation of its Global Code of Ethics for Tourism

www.unwto.org

Country of Origin: Spain

World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTTC)

Forum for business leaders in the Travel & Tourism industry. Good source of information and research, and also founders of Tourism For Tomorrow Awards

www.wttc.org

Country of Origin: UK

Suppliers of eco-products mentioned in handbook	Website
Avocalite	www.avocalite.ie
Building with Hemp	www.hempbuilding.com
Broadstone Engineering Ltd	www.bel.ie
Ecobaby	www.ecobaby.ie
Ecostore.ie	www.ecostore.ie
Electrisave	www.electrisave.ie
Envirocare	www.envirocare.ie
FH Wetland Systems	www.wetlandsystems.ie
Nigels Ecostore	www.nigelsecostore.com
NI Reedbeds	www.nireedbeds.co.uk
PEL Recycling Equipment	www.pelmfg.com
Slates Ireland	www.slatesalesireland.com
Sunpipe	www.sunpipe.co.uk
The Renewable Energy Centre	www.therenewableenergycentre.co.uk
Sheeps Wool Insulation	www.sheepwoolinsulation.ie



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Fáilte Ireland,
Amiens Street, Dublin 1,
Baggot Street Bridge, Dublin 2

Tel: 1890 525 525
+353 1 602 4000 / 884 7700
Fax: +353 1 602 4100 / 855 6821

www.failteireland.ie
www.discoverireland.ie

Greenbox,
Park Rd Industrial Estate,
Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim

Tel: +353 71 985 6898
Fax: +353 71 985 6931

www.greenbox.ie
www.responsibletravel.ie

