

Submission by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media on developing rural tourism in Ireland.

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1. Introduction

The Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media would like to thank the Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media for the opportunity to submit the views of the Department on the topic of developing rural tourism in Ireland.

Ireland's rural towns and villages are central to Ireland's tourism product. Apart from its overall economic importance, the importance of tourism to local and regional economies cannot be overstated. In many rural areas, it is the only employer of note outside of agriculture. Analysis published by Ernst and Young on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Irish Tourism shows a significant proportion of jobs dependent on tourism in rural counties such as Kerry (18%), Donegal (13%) and Waterford (12%). In many such areas, there are no alternative sources of employment. It is also the case that the sector employs a higher proportion of young people. Almost one in two of those employed in the sector are aged less than 35, compared to less than one in three of the total workforce. It is also the case that the sector employs a higher proportion of young people on a part-time and seasonal basis providing them with their first experience of employment and valuable income to support further education.

New Sustainable Tourism Policy

There has been an increasing recognition that tourism growth must be sustainable – environmentally as well as commercially and socially. It is becoming more and more apparent that a business built on sustainability principles promotes longevity and further interaction with key stakeholders. Consumers are also voting with their wallets and this has led to many enterprises taking steps to make their offering more sustainable, generating more business as a result. It is clear, therefore, that the industry needs to continue moving in a sustainable direction – not just on account of the benefits for the environment and host communities, but also because of the benefits for individual businesses.

The Minister has initiated the development of a new national tourism policy that will seek to mainstream sustainability. The development of this new policy will involve extensive

consultation with the tourism industry and our communities to help set out a path for the coming years which will support a sustainable recovery and subsequent growth in the sector.

This new tourism policy will seek to support sustainable economic development in communities throughout the country, whilst protecting our environment and natural resources, and with a greater spread of demand across the year.

An increased focus on the promotion and development of sustainable tourism practices, such as adventure tourism, will be central to developing a more resilient and sustainable tourism sector. This form of tourism is an exemplar of a sustainable model as it stimulates regionality by taking place mostly in rural or more remote areas and is less impacted by seasonality.

Fáilte Ireland is aiming to support Ireland's ambition to be a renowned year-round destination for activity tourism and it has multiple projects and programmes to support sustainable tourism, including the opening-up of the outdoors for tourism purposes. Universal accessibility is a key goal along with the protection, appreciation and enjoyment of biodiversity and our stunning natural landscape. The content contained in this submission to the Joint Committee further outlines initiatives contributing to the development of rural tourism in Ireland.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 Diversifying the rural tourism offering: attractions, activity tourism, creative tourism, screen tourism, and the night-time economy

Regional development and the promotion of areas all over the country as great places to visit are at the heart of Fáilte Ireland's remit. Fáilte Ireland created the four regional brands of the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East, Dublin and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands as a way to bring to life the richness and diversity of experiences available to visitors across the country. At the more local level, these four Regional Tourism Strategies will be activated through a series of coordinated local Destination and Experience Development Plans (DEDPs), developed by Fáilte Ireland in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders.

Tourism Ireland promotes regional air and sea access to Ireland in overseas tourism markets through initiatives like the Regional Cooperative Marketing Fund, which seeks to encourage new access and maximise the potential of existing services to the regions, with matched funding from airlines, sea carriers, airports, ports and regional tourism stakeholders including Local Authorities.

The Regional Cooperative Marketing Fund has been very important in enabling tactical partnerships that have helped drive increases in visitors to the regions, amplifying the Ireland message overseas and supporting direct access. The allocation to Tourism Ireland in respect of the Regional Cooperative Marketing Fund for 2022 is €3 million. This scheme continues to form a very important part of Tourism Ireland's plans in supporting the recovery of Ireland's tourism sector in a post-pandemic environment.

Looking forward to 2023, Fáilte Ireland will continue to focus on building the regional brand. It will encourage domestic travellers to visit destinations across the country and, through online booking and sales and marketing supports, work with local industry to help them convert this interest into increased sales for their business.

Fáilte Ireland Regional Brands

Fáilte Ireland supports local authorities in the development of tourism in their area in a range of ways, including funding for capital investment, festivals and events. Festivals and participative events are also an important part of Irish tourism activities and in this context, Fáilte Ireland operate the Festival Innovation Programme Fund, details of which can be found at this link: <https://www.failteireland.ie/Identify-Available-Funding/Festivals-Innovation-Programme.aspx>

Festivals and events also play a significant part in attracting and holding visitors in particular areas of Ireland at different times of the year. Tourism Ireland works closely with many festivals to provide exposure for them in key markets overseas. The St Patrick's Festival, Galway 2020, Cork Jazz Festival, and Wexford Festival Opera are just some examples of festivals that have received extensive coverage through Tourism Ireland's marketing overseas. Tourism Ireland also work with Culture Ireland to bring the best of Ireland's artists, writers, poets, musicians and dancers to the attention of enthusiasts and new audiences, targeting both the traditional Irish diaspora and developing and growing a new "affinity diaspora".

To guide medium to longer term development, Fáilte Ireland aims to deliver four new Regional Tourism Strategies in 2022 which will set out a 10-year vision and 5-year action plan for each region. At the more local level, these four Regional Tourism Strategies will be activated through a series of coordinated local Destination and Experience Development Plans (DEDPs), developed by Fáilte Ireland in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders.

The domestic visitor is critical to tourism business, especially regional businesses, as domestic consumers will travel all year round and to a much wider breadth of destinations than the typical overseas visitor. Fáilte Ireland's focus on promoting the regions has included significant investment into brand building through individual 'Keep Discovering' campaigns for each of the four regional experience brands, as well as media publicity, digital channels, and online sales platforms. All four regional brands are being promoted across a mix of TV, press, radio, digital and social and there is a new press campaign also showcasing the regions.

In addition, through its 'Keep Discovering' campaign, Fáilte Ireland promotes individual destinations from Donegal to Wexford and Cork to Louth. Many of these destinations have been featured on their new Weather broadcast sponsorship, as well as in the national press. Looking forward to 2023, Fáilte Ireland will continue to focus on building the regional brand. It will encourage domestic travellers to visit destinations across the country and, through online booking and sales and marketing supports, work with local industry to help them convert this interest into increased sales for their business.

Fáilte Ireland's priorities for 2023 in terms of domestic marketing (and supporting the international marketing effort) include:

- RTÉ Weather Sponsorship
- Year-round marketing campaign 'Keep Discovering'
- Media partnerships to showcase Ireland and drive domestic demand to take short breaks across Irish media
- Further investment in marketing websites and ongoing optimisation of DiscoverIreland.ie website to drive domestic bookings
- Strong domestic sales promotion campaigns across multiple distribution partners' platforms, supporting regions and key festivals and events
- Hosting International Media to showcase all that Ireland has to offer.

Fáilte Ireland has developed the Attractions and Activity Providers Tourism Business Continuity Scheme 2022. The continued pandemic has meant that the attractions sector and activity tourism operators remain extremely vulnerable. The aim of this Fáilte Ireland Scheme was to provide financial support to attraction and activity tourism operators contributing to their sustainability until the end of 2022. The overall purpose of the Scheme was to assist attraction and activity providers' to withstand the challenges and impact of COVID-19 by providing a direct financial contribution to support their business continuity plans, covering areas such as fixed costs and seek to position them to continue operating.

Budget 2023

In Budget 2023, €15 million in additional funding has been secured for overseas marketing of Ireland. This includes €5 million to further develop a new tourism initiative aimed at stimulating international demand, The Invitation. This new initiative will seek to promote and build on the warmth of our welcome, the beauty of our landscape and the richness of our culture. The Minister aims to bring proposals to Government in the near future outlining her full ambition for this project and providing further detail on the work underway.

For 2023, a total of €214.762 million has been allocated to the tourism sector. This includes €36.5 million in capital funding for tourism product development for the continued delivery of enhanced visitor experiences in line with the objectives of the National Development Plan 2021-2030. Also included in Budget 2023 are wider measures that tourism businesses can avail of to assist with escalating energy cost and to plan for the future. This includes a €1.25 billion Temporary Business Energy Support Scheme.

Creative Tourism

The Arts Council offers a wide range of financial supports across art forms and arts practices, including festivals. The Arts Council sees festivals as key producers and presenters of the arts and are critical to engaging large and diverse audiences. The Arts Council also provides financial support to a number of single art form festivals (e.g. theatre, dance, film) and such festivals are supported within the policy context of those art forms. The Council also supports many multidisciplinary arts festivals, meaning those festivals that programme across different art forms, including literature, music, street arts, theatre, visual arts and different areas of arts practice. Their Festivals Investment Scheme, for example, is specifically designed to offer support to local/voluntary organisations to develop arts festivals. The larger festivals regularly supported by the Council include the Wexford Festival Opera and the Galway Arts Festival. Further details can be accessed on the Arts Council's website at the following link <https://www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Festivals/>

This Department runs a Small Scale Local Festivals and Summer Schools Scheme. The Scheme is designed to support local cultural festivals and summer schools which are not in receipt of other central Government monies, and which may not be eligible under funding criteria for

larger scale events supported by Fáilte Ireland, the Arts Council and similar bodies. The maximum funding available under this scheme is capped at €5,000. Details of the 34 events that were supported under the Small Scale Local Festivals and Summer Schools taking place around Ireland in 2022 can be found via this link <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/247c6-minister-martin-announces-funding-for-small-scale-local-festivals-and-summer-schools/>

The Department also provides funding to support Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ), which is the largest group involved in the preservation and promotion of Irish traditional music both at community and national level. Annual funding is provided to CCÉ for its work in the protection and promotion of Irish traditional music and culture. Many of us welcomed the return of the Fleadh Cheoil that took place in Mullingar from 31 July to 7 August. As the greatest annual gathering under the auspices of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, the Fleadh is principally organised at community level by the local branches in partnership with the local authority, media and other partners and sponsors.

The Creative Ireland Programme is a culture-based programme led by this Department to promote individual, community and national wellbeing. Its core proposition is that participation in arts, cultural and heritage-based activities drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal wellbeing and achievement. Under the Creative Communities initiative in the Creative Ireland Programme, this Department and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage provide funding to each of the 31 local authorities to enable them to implement their individual Culture and Creativity Strategies 2018-2022. These Strategies were developed in 2017 following extensive local public consultation and are unique to each local authority, reflecting the breadth of cultural and creative work being undertaken in each area as well as the strategic priorities identified by the local community. Within this context, many festivals and events have received support from their local authorities. Further information is available on <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/creative-communities/>

National Collections

Tourism is an important element of the overall visitor cohort to our national and regional cultural institutions, which welcome hundreds of thousands of local, national and

international visitors each year. Throughout the country, museums, galleries, arts centres and concert halls provide represent a critical element of our national tourism infrastructure presenting a wide range of public programmes to visitors. The National Cultural Institutions (NCIs) are committed to increasing access to the National Collections by presenting exhibitions and programmes in regional locations and, where appropriate environmental and security controls are in place, by lending objects to local exhibitions.

Capital Investment.

In order to ensure a healthy cultural offering across the country, this Department continues to invest in our national and regional cultural infrastructure through grants for the refurbishment and enhancement of the existing stock of arts and culture facilities through a number of schemes throughout the country.

Scheme	Total Awarded	Number of Recipients
Arts & Culture Capital Scheme	€10.214m	134 (104 outside Dublin)
Culture Capital Scheme	€3.4m	167 (124 outside of Dublin)
Outdoor Public Space Scheme	€5.23m	22 (21 outside of Dublin)

Major Cultural Tourism Projects

This Department works with Local Authorities to provide funding to large scale projects that have a significant impact on their cultural offering to tourists, particularly outside Dublin, for example

- In partnership with Kilkenny County Council, The Butler Gallery in Kilkenny was awarded grant of €2 million towards the cost of construction of a new cultural facility to house the Butler Art Gallery. This new building opened in 2021. This building is in the heart of Kilkenny's Cultural Quarter
- In partnership with Limerick County Council; The Foynes Flying Boat and Maritime Museum was awarded a grant allocation of €1.75 million to assist in its proposed building expansion which includes a Maureen O'Hara film museum, extension of the cinema and

exhibition areas, a viewing gallery, and archive space. This venue is a significant tourist attraction in Limerick with hundreds of bus tours of both national and international visitors annually. This project will have its official opening in 2023.

Screen Tourism

The Irish screen industry provides a tangible economic benefit to our country, through jobs, skills development, regional development and production spend on local goods and services. The Government has further ambitions for Ireland's screen industry and we want to see the Irish creative screen sector grow to become a global centre of excellence for the creative screen industries to tell our stories and capture imaginations everywhere. The Programme for Government ('Our Shared Future') encourages Ireland to be ambitious, visible and active in promoting our nation on the international stage. Ireland's screen industry is a high-impact way to do so.

The recent extension in Budget 2023 of the Section 481 Film Tax Relief from 2024 to the end of 2028 will send a strong international message that aligns with and bolsters Ireland's infrastructure, facilities, experienced crews, creative talent and beautiful scenery. The positive images of Ireland featured in many film and TV productions that benefitted from Section 481 funding, support the Government's activities in other areas of economic development such as overseas tourism and the promotion of foreign direct investment into Ireland.

The Regional film development uplift offers additional tax reliefs to incentivise film production in the regions (outside of the traditional main hubs of Dublin and Wicklow). The extension of the Section 481 regional uplift for an additional year in 2021 was an important support which further assisted growth in the industry. The impact of the Section 481 Regional Uplift was particularly evident in 2021 as Irish film and television projects filmed on location all around Ireland including counties Limerick, Mayo, Cork, Leitrim, Donegal, Galway, Tipperary, Kilkenny, Clare, and Kerry.

Screen Ireland's Inward Production Unit, both in Ireland and in L.A., promote locations throughout Ireland for filming. The Inward Production Unit has strong links with the regional

offices in various Regions throughout the country including Film Limerick, Kerry Regional Film, Screen Wexford, the Wexford Film Office, Donegal Film Office and the Sligo Film Office and they work in partnership to attract productions to those areas. They have started a new initiative for the regional film offices to enable them to access, manage and upload locations from their database pertaining to their county.

Night-time Economy

The Night-time Economy (NTE) is a hugely important sector, and an important driver of Tourism. The NTE includes a wide range of activities, from visiting the theatre through to socialising in bars, which predominantly take place in cities during the evening and night. For visitors, such cultural experiences have become crucial in how a city or town is enjoyed and perceived. The NTE contributes to Ireland's economy and cultural and creative sectors and it is important that we protect, support and sustain it.

The Night-Time Economy Taskforce Report which was published in September 2021 contains 36 actions which supports the development of a vibrant, diverse and inclusive Night-Time Economy and supports the revitalisation of rural towns and cities. An Implementation Group has been established to ensure that the recommendations contained within the Report are implemented in full and also, importantly, that the document remains current and that new ideas and new developments are included as the work progresses.

The Report of the Night-Time Economy Taskforce applies to the whole country and while some of the pilots in the National Cultural Institutions are Dublin based, many of the other initiatives will apply outside of this – for example the Night-Time Economy Support Scheme saw a significant amount of successful applications from across rural Ireland. This Scheme aims to revitalise town, village and city centres creating footfall and activity in off-peak times. In addition, the new National Museum of Ireland Pilot event in Turlough Park later this month will be a great initiative to showcase late night activity in a rural setting.

Night-Time Advisors - the City and County Management Association issued a call for applications to all local authorities for a number of pilot towns and cities across the country to take part in this initiative. Towns and cities in two categories will be selected by an

evaluation committee – towns between 5,000 and 10,000 and towns/cities above 10,000. Once the selection process has been completed and announced, a Night-Time Advisor will be appointed to each of the selected areas. It is envisaged that there will be a good regional spread of towns and cities across the country.

Fáilte Ireland is leading and supporting a number of the recommended actions in the Night-Time Economy Report including the following action:

Working in partnership with the Department to build on learnings from the Outdoor Public Space Scheme 2021 and other relevant schemes to find best practice interventions for the Night-Time Economy. Where possible, align existing & new funding schemes for urban animation and improvements to public realm.

The Department will continue to work with Fáilte Ireland to ensure that the Night-Time Economy is included as a target policy area for any relevant existing or new policies that exist.

The Department also has an assigned commitment under the Our Rural Future : Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 which states : *“Bring forward proposals for the development of a Policy on the Night Time Economy which will support the revitalisation of our rural towns, as well as our larger urban centres and cities, in the post-COVID recovery”*

2.2 Outdoor recreation and outdoor recreation infrastructure, including sustainable outdoor- and nature-based tourism

Our Rural Future 2021-2025 is the national rural development policy. It recognises that people living in rural areas should have access to good quality jobs and public services that enable them to continue to live sustainably in rural communities and help them to maintain a good quality of life.

There is a wide range of measures across all Government Departments with a large portion relating to the rural tourism offering. The range of measures seeks to ensure that rural areas are vibrant, attractive for workers, families and visitors alike. The Department of Rural and Community Development and this Department work together closely to provide support for actions that make the Gaeltacht area more attractive for local, national and overseas visitors.

In February 2022 the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys TD, launched a major €15 million fund that will support dozens of outdoor adventure projects across the country. The 2022 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) will see the development of natural amenities such as Ireland's mountains, lakes, beaches, bogs, walkways, greenways and blueways.

The Scheme, which saw its funding increased by Minister Humphreys as part of the Budget, will place a particular focus on developing adventure tourism in Rural Ireland. It will support activities such as hiking, mountaineering, kayaking, swimming and cycling, which were especially popular among families throughout the Pandemic. This announcement builds on the commitment under "Our Rural Future" to continuing the investment in infrastructure that caters for the growth in both local and international outdoor adventure tourism. The projects that will be supported under ORIS are designed to benefit the health and wellbeing of the communities in which they are located.

Fáilte Ireland is aiming to support Ireland's ambition to be a renowned year-round destination for activity tourism and has multiple projects and programmes to support sustainable tourism through the opening of the outdoors for tourism purposes. Universal accessibility is a key

goal along with the protection, appreciation and enjoyment of biodiversity and our stunning natural landscape.

In May 2021, Minister Catherine Martin announced the redevelopment of Avondale House and Forest Park. This €16 million project in partnership with Fáilte Ireland, Coillte and EAK (erlebnis akademie AG) has transformed Avondale into a unique family attraction and a key new destination in Ireland's Ancient East. It opened in summer 2022 and is already a vibrant destination for both our domestic and international tourists. Avondale Forest Park is also open to visitors to explore and enjoy the established walking and cycling trails, orienteering courses and recreation area.

The National Famine Museum at Strokestown Park House and Gardens was officially opened on 12 October 2022 by the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Catherine Martin. Developed by the Irish Heritage Trust in partnership with Fáilte Ireland and Westward Holdings, Fáilte Ireland's grant of €3.9million is one of the largest ever investments in a visitor attraction in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. The new Museum has been noted as a "flagship" for the North West and its success with national and international visitors will also help boost Leitrim and the region as a whole.

According to Fáilte Ireland's analysis; The National Famine Museum at Strokestown Park House and Gardens is expected to attract 115,000 visitors annually generating an additional €25 million for the local economy within ten years of opening and will provide 26 jobs (directly employed in full time, seasonal and part-time jobs); this investment will also indirectly lead to a further 65 sustainable jobs within the wider tourism sector and economy, over the next 10 years.

Projects opening in the near future

- Mount Congreve House and Gardens [Total Project Value: €6.2million. Fáilte Ireland investment = €930k] – *The gardens will open to the public in October 2022, the house will be completed and open Spring 2023*
- Strandhill Surf Centre, Co. Sligo [Fáilte Ireland investment: €1.36million. Total project costs €2.8million in partnership with Sligo County Council] – opening in *March 2023*

2.3 Developing a tourism strategy for Gaeltacht areas

The Údarás na Gaeltachta Strategic Plan 2021-2025 commits to developing tourism products as well as tourism packages. One of the main objectives of the plan is to make the Gaeltacht as a distinctive, vibrant place that is recognised and attractive in terms of culture, art and Tourism in order to deliver on its main employment objective of sustaining and growing the level of employment in the Gaeltacht to 9,000 employed in client companies in the Gaeltacht by the end of 2025. The approach to tourism development will be based on partnerships between the various relevant organisations and on the maximisation of the potential of resources such as the Wild Atlantic Way.

In February 2022, Fáilte Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta formed a strategic partnership after signing a Memorandum of Understanding detailing their commitment to making the Gaeltacht experience appealing, accessible and relevant to visitors. Through this formal agreement, the organisations will work together across a number of priority areas for tourism development including capital projects, building capacity within the tourism industry and supporting the development of tourism products to showcase the unique cultural offering of Ireland's Gaeltacht regions.

Údarás na Gaeltachta is also developing a pilot package for a cultural tourism offering in Gaeltacht areas aimed at ex-students of Irish colleges.

2.4 Opportunities and supports for agri-tourism in rural Ireland

The Department of Agriculture and Teagasc are critically aware of the importance of tourism to the rural community. While agriculture continues to be the main source of income for rural areas, the need to generate a second income in order to ensure viability remains a reality for most farm families.

Teagasc run annual workshops in regional centres where they deliver a wide variety of diversification options. These are presented to the farm families by a mixture of entrepreneurs, local development agencies and rural professionals. Rural Tourism is one of the most popular diversification opportunities.

There are many unique opportunities available such as:

- Canoeing/Kayaking
- B&B
- Glamping / Yurts
- Horse Riding / Treking
- Adventure tourism
- Angling
- Watersports
- Walking/ Mountaineering
- Nature Trails / Bird Watching
- Open Farms/ Farm Shops/ Tea shops
- Local events / Festivals
- Heritage & cultural activities
- Cycling

Fáilte Ireland had engaged with many farm families and assisted in marketing and offers advice and assistance where ever possible to help deliver in the unique holiday experience.

2.5 Rural tourist accommodation: standards, regulation, and challenges

Fáilte Ireland operates the National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF) which recognises accommodation businesses of all types and styles. This includes properties which are required to register with Fáilte Ireland, such as hotels and guesthouses prescribed under the Tourist Traffic Acts.

Fáilte Ireland have created a number of development plans for its' regional brands of Ireland's Ancient East, Irelands Hidden Heart lands and the Wild Atlantic Way. These documents went out to public consultation on September 29th. These strategies set out a ten year vision for the development of each region and identify the comprehensive package of measures needed to deliver sustainable tourism development across the country in the years ahead.

Action 20.4 of Housing for All, the Government's housing plan to 2030, commits to the development of "new regulatory controls requiring short-term and holiday lets to register with Fáilte Ireland with a view to ensuring that houses are used to best effect in areas of housing need".

Funding has been allocated to Fáilte Ireland for the design and implementation of a short term lettings registration system. The agency is currently recruiting staff to work on this project, with the project lead in place. Department officials are also working in consultation with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on scoping out the legislative provisions that will be required to underpin such a system with a view to bringing forward legislative provisions in this regard.

A stakeholder engagement plan is currently being developed which will be rolled out when the details of the proposed legislation are further advanced.

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