

Tourism policy 'out-dated' says ITIC



The Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC) announced a new eight year strategy for tourism following a 12 month consultation with the sector. The strategy, Tourism: An Industry Strategy for Growth to 2025, finds that the Government's existing national tourism policy is already "out-dated and overtaken by events such as Brexit".

The ITIC Strategy estimates that earnings from overseas tourism can increase by 65% to €8.1 billion annually by 2025 if the right policies and investment strategies are adapted and pursued. This would mean 80,000 more jobs nation-wide and an increase to the exchequer in direct tourism-related taxes from overseas visitors to just under €2 billion annually.

Eoghan O'Mara Walsh, CEO of ITIC (pictured), says: "The strategy is borne of extensive consultation and research over the last 12 months with Ireland's tourism industry throughout the country and the policy recommendations within it are the considered views of the Irish tourism sector."

Maurice Pratt, chairman of ITIC said: "Irish tourism is Ireland's largest indigenous industry and is at a key juncture - correct actions need to be taken now to ensure that the sector's significant potential is to be achieved.

The Irish tourism industry is confident of future growth and it estimates that tourism revenue from overseas visitors to our shores can grow by 65%, to €8.1 billion, by 2025. This is significantly more than the national tourism policy target which is €5 billion for the same period. The Government must match the industry's ambitions and commit appropriate funds to overseas marketing and new product development so that tourism can realise its potential for the country."

The strategy outlines ambitious goals for Irish tourism, a key export sector, and contains 40 recommendations across 10 pillar areas. It identifies key enabling factors including the construction of new hotels, the expansion of Dublin Airport, the retention of competitiveness,

maintenance of the tourism industry's ability to match and exceed visitor expectations, and increased state investment in overseas marketing and tourism investment. Brexit is the major

issue for Irish tourism currently and the British market is in retreat with Fáilte Ireland estimating that the Brexit cost to Irish tourism last year was €86 million.

The strategy has also been supported by other business sectoral groups including IBEC, the Irish Exporters Association, and the Irish Farmers Association.

The ITIC strategy argues that the engine behind tourism development is the private sector which is committing €2.5 billion on new aircraft, ferries, attractions and hotels by 2021 alone as it invests in its capacity to meet projected demand. Examples of such investment include Aer Lingus's transatlantic expansion plans, two new ferries under construction by Irish Ferries, 6,000 new hotel bedrooms planned, attraction expansions such as Guinness Storehouse and Westport House's plans, and the development of the new Center Parcs visitor experience in Longford. ITIC also welcomed the recent announcement of the new Beijing to Dublin flight scheduled to commence in June with Hainan Airlines.

O'Mara Walsh points out though that state investment in new product developments is also vital and expressed disappointment that within the recent National Development Plan tourism was only allocated €300 million from an exchequer envelope of €91 billion. The ITIC strategy points to the need for development of visitor attractors of scale and international appeal such as a coast to coast Greenway from Dublin to Galway, iconic experiences in the Midlands and North-West, a world-class attraction to celebrate Ireland's literary heritage, or a Wild Atlantic Way observatory to enjoy the "Dark Skies" on the edge of Europe.

O'Mara Walsh says: "There are many options to add to Ireland's tourism experiences but the State must be proactive and take the first steps – hotels, restaurants and tour operators will all follow but, like the shining example of the Wild Atlantic Way, the Government must make the initial move with capital investment budgets to help create iconic attractors."

The ITIC strategy highlights the importance of maintaining the quality of Ireland's environment and advocates that €50 million more per annum should be committed to tourism state agencies to increase overseas marketing and industry supports. The 40 recommendations within the strategy will be reviewed by ITIC on an annual basis to monitor progress and ensure goals and objectives are on track.

ITIC also proposes a National Tourism Day - already marked in the USA, Canada, England as well as the EU and the United Nations - to raise the profile of the industry and celebrate the importance of tourism in Ireland. ITIC Chair Maurice Pratt says that “tourism employs 1 in 10 people nationally, contributes billions to the economy in taxation, and impacts positively on communities and cities throughout the country. There are 20,000 businesses involved in tourism and the sector crucially can’t be out-sourced or off-shored. It is high time that Ireland elevated tourism within the national debate and shone a spotlight on the sector for a day of the year to discuss opportunities and challenges”.