



# tourism spotlight october 2009

what's happening in tourism  
- issue 3

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## welcome...

### are you visitor inspired?

NITB's Visitor Inspired Showcase at Titanic's Dock and Pump House on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October attracted more than 600 tourism professionals from across Northern Ireland.

The interactive showcase highlighted all of the work that has been carried out over the past 18 months in partnership with the industry to improve the visitor experience in Northern Ireland. The event was also a chance to take stock of everything that we have to be proud of in Northern Ireland... the people, the landscape, the heritage, the arts and the food which combine to make this such a special place.

### pilot projects

NITB has been working to improve the experience at key touch points in the visitor journey, identifying important areas where a positive impact can be made. These included important areas such as the airport, transport, accommodation, events and food; key elements of any holiday or short break.

One initiative recognised the key role that taxi drivers play in welcoming visitors and delivering a positive experience. They can often be the first point of contact for visitors as they arrive in Northern Ireland, so drivers have a vital role in providing a warm welcome, sharing their valuable knowledge and bringing the experience to life through stories and local humour. NITB engaged in a training and product knowledge programme with taxi drivers to produce a DVD hosted by Tim McGarry (pictured).

Other partnerships have resulted in an improved welcome for visitors who arrive at Belfast International Airport through the installation of images which showcase great things to see and do throughout Northern Ireland. Security staff were also involved in Welcome Host training to help them reach standards of excellence in customer service.

### 16 steps

A practical 'how to' guide has been produced outlining "16 simple steps to becoming visitor inspired". This guide offers practical advice on how to anticipate and surpass the needs of visitors. Suggested steps include:

**"Sell the story":** give your visitors a chance to create a memory every step of the way. Use every chance you get to tell your story.

**"Set high standards":** surround yourself with a team of motivated, skilled people who share your passion for tourism. Set challenges that will push everyone to their limits and create something exceptional.

**"Embrace the next generation of technology":** let your visitors access information in the way they prefer – whether they want to read a brochure, call you on the phone or receive an ezine.

To see the rest of the 16 steps or for further information on how to be Visitor Inspired go to [www.nitb.com/visitorinspired](http://www.nitb.com/visitorinspired).

A range of presentations and video footage is available from the showcase along with updates on the rest of the pilot projects. We'd also love to hear some of your ideas on creating 'Visitor Inspired' experiences.

By listening to visitors and placing their needs at the heart of everything we do, we will offer truly unique experiences and establish Northern Ireland as a leading edge destination.



## snippets

- 260 of NI's finest buildings opened their doors to the public at the recent European Heritage Open Days. Around 50,000 people took advantage of buildings that would usually be closed to the public.
- The newly refurbished Belfast City Hall has reopened after a £1m facelift. Hilary Clinton performed the official opening after a whistle-stop tour of NI.
- As part of BVCB's Conference Ambassador Programme, ambassadors had a sneak preview of City Hall and the Ulster Museum. The Programme encourages professionals and academics to use their influence in bringing association conferences to Belfast.
- Work will commence on the SS Nomadic in the spring, thanks to funding from Belfast City Council, Belfast Harbour, Titanic Quarter Ltd., Ulster Garden Villages, Better Belfast Project and NITB.

## new hotels planned

- Plans have been submitted to build a £50m hotel in the Castle Street/King Street area of Belfast. The building will boast a striking glass facade and will include 144 serviced apartments, leisure and conference facilities and will provide around 300 jobs.
- Work will commence on a new £14m hotel in Downpatrick in January. The 80 bedroom hotel is expected to provide 75 full time jobs.
- Two new Ibis Hotels will open in Belfast in the next month. One will open in Queen's Quarter and the other in the Castle Street area.

## praise indeed

- At the recent Association of Town Centre Management Awards, Belfast City Council's unique visitor signage scheme won the 'Centre Move' category.
- Tall Ships 2009 received the Tourism & Hospitality Project of the Year at the recent Business Eye Awards
- The Lough Erne Golf Resort, Enniskillen has won a prestigious 'Good Food Ireland Award' for being the top regional member in Northern Ireland.

## untapped tourism potential

For the second time this year UK industry leaders have called for change in the way tourism is handled by government. In February, travel business leaders wrote to the Prime Minister requesting responsibility for tourism to be transferred from the UK government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to Lord Mandelson's Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS) in order to fulfil potential for UK tourism.

A second report 'Backing UK Tourism: Destination Recovery' has since been submitted by the British Chambers of Commerce and hotel chain Travelodge, claiming the tourism industry is currently being held back by government mismanagement and Whitehall differences and is preventing the industry from reaching its full potential. The report recommends that tourism responsibilities should be moved from DCMS, a junior department in Whitehall which has influence over less than £50m of tourism's £350m budget.

Currently the tourism industry is the fifth largest in the UK, employing 1.4m and generating £86bn a year. However it is expected to grow with Visit Britain estimating it could create 164,000 jobs and grow into a £113bn industry by 2018.

## cbi unveils blueprint for success

The CBI has unveiled a blueprint for working with Government and has identified tourism as an area for exploitation and development.

The plan was launched at the end of September by its Chairman Brian Ambrose at the CBI Northern Ireland annual lunch at Culloden Hotel & Spa.

Key recommendations included more structured and scheduled meetings with key ministers and the Business Alliance around an agreed set of priorities.



Pictured at the CBI Lunch Susan Kinane, ESBS Independent Energy; Regional Development Minister, Conor Murphy and CBI Northern Ireland Chairman, Brian Ambrose

## environment

### blue book goes green

Ecotourism is a sector which is gaining significant importance within the industry with an increasing number of industry stakeholders embracing green principles in their business. Ireland's Blue Book members have been given the opportunity to work towards achieving the EU Flower Eco-label, a prestigious accreditation awarded to accommodation providers that show signs of conducting green practices.

Belle-Isle Estate recently achieved the prestigious award for their environmental policy.

Commenting on the EU Flower, Mr Plunkett, Manager of the estate said " Belle Isle is on an island in Upper Lough Erne which is an Area of Special Scientific Interest, a Special Area of Conservation and within an Environmentally Sensitive Area all designated by the EU. Therefore it was important that Belle Isle should have a sound environmental policy."

"Already we have seen a reduction in energy and waste costs through the co-operation of our visitors and our staff. Many Europeans are ahead of us in eco-tourism and it has become an important factor for them when considering their holiday accommodation."

### launch of first eco-tour

The UK's first ever urban eco tour, Green London was recently launched. Seen as London's answer to the Eden Project, the aim of the tour is to provide a crash course in environmental issues including an insight into traffic problems, modern housing and food issues, organic gardening and climate change.

With the increasing awareness of eco-tourism, this is a great opportunity for the tourism industry in Northern Ireland to benchmark and learn from this exciting new initiative.



Belle-Isle Estate

## 'res-capers' go globe-trotting

One in five Britons made redundant in the credit crunch are heading off on an extended holiday and over a quarter are using at least some of their redundancy pay to fund their 'res-cape' according to a survey by Ebookers, one of Europe's leading online travel companies.

It emerged that Australasia is the most popular destination for res-scapers to head to with over half of travellers heading to Sydney to sample the sites and a third going to Fiji for relaxation.

## follow the sun

After disappointing summer weather, many holidaymakers who stayed at home either because of the current economic climate or the promise of good weather, have booked or are planning to book a holiday abroad for next summer. According to leading tour operator Falcon Holidays, 94% of Northern Irish holidaymakers are following the sun for 2010.

This trend could be a challenge to the domestic market for next year further emphasising the need to create value for money experiences and encouraging close to home markets to discover the huge range of things to see and do on their doorstep.

## business men and ladies of leisure

Recent research conducted by Visit Britain revealed that in 2008, eight in every ten business visitors to the UK were male. Men were also likely to spend £20 per night more than women. However the figures reveal that more women are travelling on leisure trips to visit family and friends.

Having this kind of information about your target market is an invaluable tool when it comes to implementing targeted campaigns to encourage more visitors and higher spend.

## political update

- David Sterling has been appointed as Permanent Secretary at DETI.
- Catherine Bell has been appointed as Acting Perm Sec at DEL.
- The DUP has nominated Gregory Campbell, David Simpson and Stephen Moutray as their three replacements to sit on ETI Committee.
- SDLP searches for new leader to replace Mark Durkan who will step down after next General Election.

## online trends

### are hotels reacting to online reviews?

An increasing number of consumers are checking online reviews before booking and then sharing their experiences online. However as user generated review sites continue to flourish, are hoteliers and restaurateurs monitoring and responding to reviews about their venue?

Market Metrix has been tracking the rising popularity of user generated reviews and the results show that the industry has been slow to adapt and exploit the potential of this word of mouth medium.

Although hoteliers recognise the impact that user reviews have on their business, the results show that 85% of hotels have no guidelines for monitoring, responding to or acting on guest reviews, and only 4% of negative reviews receive a response.

There is evidence that the hospitality industry is still figuring out how to master the potential of social media, but with constantly changing consumer trends, it is important to adapt and embrace new technologies.

Key staff can be identified with good online skills and the ability to use social media while monitoring key web sites to learn what customers are saying and respond to feedback... whether it is positive or negative.

### tourism on twitter

Opportunities for new sales and promotional mediums continue to emerge as social media becomes more established in daily business. Online hotel provider Inogo recently unveiled a Twitter based hotel booking engine for travellers seeking last minute accommodation. The booking engine allows technologically-savvy holidaymakers to take advantage of previously unavailable offers.

Budget hotel group Travelodge has also joined the growing list of brands using Twitter to communicate with its customers, and is celebrating by offering a £10 discount to followers. Other examples include Malmaison who have been offering special offers exclusively to Tweeters.

### cooling off period online air bookings?

A passenger watchdog has renewed a call for airlines to improve the process of booking tickets online. The Air Transport Users Council wants more carriers to introduce a 24-hour 'cooling off' period to allow passengers to change bookings or get a refund if necessary.



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- **Airline losses continue to rise** - According to IATA airlines worldwide lost more than £3.7bn in the first half of 2009. Despite signs of a global economic recovery, the airline industry is still being hit by higher oil and fuel prices.
- **Aer Lingus job losses** - Aer Lingus is planning to remove its US base at Shannon airport with the loss of 102 cabin crew jobs. The airline is proposing to end the direct Shannon -New York route early in the New Year as 70 per cent of its €93 million loss for the first six months came from the airline's long haul operation. The airline's cost cutting plan is seeking to cut 676 jobs and save €97 million.
- **Industry responds to collapse of SkyEurope** - SkyEurope Airlines, the Slovakian-based budget airline lost its battle against bankruptcy on 2 October 2009 leaving many passengers stranded. As a result, other low cost airlines including Wizz Air, Ryanair and Easyjet are considering expanding into Slovakia and offering special fares.
- **BMI to reduce number of flights** - From the end of October BMI will reduce the number of flights between Belfast and London from eight to seven a day.
- **Increase in Ryanair fees** - Ryanair is increasing its fees for checking in luggage. Passengers will now have to pay a €15 charge when they check in a bag online, or €30 at the airport.
- **Easyjet to reduce Belfast crew base** - Easyjet has entered into a consultation period with Belfast crew as 40 jobs may be lost at the base. However Easyjet claim this will not affect the number of aircraft and routes flying in to Belfast.
- **Easyjet to move route to George Best Belfast City Airport** - Easyjet is to move one of its routes from Belfast International Airport to George Best Belfast City Airport. A twice-daily service to London Luton will commence from early January 2010.

## enterprise passengers drop by 60%

Passenger numbers on the cross border Enterprise train service between Belfast and Dublin have dropped by 60% since part of the track collapsed in August.

Rail commuters have been taking the train as far as Drogheda before transferring to buses for the remainder of their journey to Connolly Station in Dublin. As a result disruption there has been an indication that passengers who would have taken the train are now opting to travel by car. Additionally commuters have been opting for hourly bus services between the two cities, despite the longer journey time.

In a bid to bring passengers back Translink have promised to drop cross-border rail prices. A Translink spokesperson said; "We acknowledge there has been a downturn in Enterprise figures, we have assurances from Irish Rail that the line should be re- opened in November. We look forward to getting passengers back on board with headline grabbing fares. We are confident the train is less hassle and more relaxing."



It is estimated that passengers seeking alternative modes of transport will cost both Translink and its southern counterpart Iarnród Éireann between £1- £2 m in revenue. Repairs to the line are expected to be completed by the end of November.

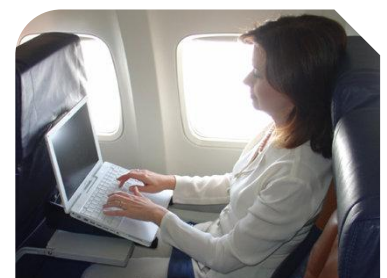
While impacting commuters, NITB research shows that the vast majority of visitors from ROI travel here by car, with many visitors taking advantage of improved road links which have significantly cut journey times. However it is important that we offer as many transport options as possible so that our visitors can continue to arrive here in even greater numbers.

## wireless is key for business travellers

Business travellers are prepared to sacrifice onboard services including meals, free movies and even change their travel plans in order to access Wi-Fi on the go, according to a recent study by the Wi-Fi Alliance and US-based Wakefield Research.

Leisure travellers would also take advantage of in-flight Wi-Fi access, enabling them to check emails, browse online, watch videos, play video games and visit social networking sites.

US no-frills carrier Southwest Airlines plans to install Wi-Fi across its fleet in the first quarter of next year. The research highlights the importance of offering wireless internet connections for visitors, especially business travellers.



## • tourism intelligence exchange

NITB held the first Tourism Intelligence Exchange meeting in September with a cross-sectional group of industry representatives in using the opportunity to share information and discuss issues facing the industry. The aim of the meeting was to debate and discuss the most relevant tourism trends in Northern Ireland and to exchange collective experiences and learnings.

Feedback from the meeting suggests that Northern Ireland is performing well when compared to other regions in the UK. Accommodation in border towns is specifically performing well, benefiting from shoppers travelling from ROI and staying overnight.

Additionally the number of domestic short breaks and weddings bookings are also holding up occupancy and rates.

For full details of the discussion you can download minutes from the meeting at [www.nitb.com](http://www.nitb.com). The next meeting is scheduled to take place in December.



accommodation providers in border areas are benefitting from ROI shoppers staying overnight

## what others are doing...

### tourism ireland

- Tourism Ireland has launched a £14m Autumn campaign in overseas markets to promote value offers as well as the great things to see and do.
- Tourism Ireland has announced that Shane Clarke has been appointed as the new Director of Corporate Services and Policy. He will be based in the organisation's Dublin office.

### great britain

- VisitBritain has received a prestigious Gold Award from the Pacific Asia Travel Association, in recognition of successful partnership work with British Airways.
- VisitBritain has launched a new campaign ahead of the release of the film The Golden Age this autumn. It is expected that the appearance of British locations in the film will encourage many more visitors to visit them.
- VisitScotland is promoting tourism to Scotland with its new Autumn Moments campaign. Various promotions are being run to encourage tourists to capture their own autumn moment in Scotland.
- VisitWales is continuing its successful 'Holidays Unpackaged' marketing campaign to invite potential visitors to discover Wales.

### republic of ireland

- Dublin has launched a new cycling scheme to encourage people who are travelling short journeys to cycle rather than drive.
- Fáilte Ireland has launched a new Autumn Initiative with the publication of a new holiday supplement. Each supplement will include a special offer cheque worth €50 to potential visitors for use in selected venues in Ireland. The campaign is part of ongoing work to target the staycation market.

### australia

- Tourism Australia and Emirates have launched a £2m integrated advertising campaign to encourage Britons to visit Australia.

### new zealand

- Tourism New Zealand has launched a marketing campaign 'The Great Kiwi Invite' to encourage New Zealanders to become ambassadors for their country. It encourages them to get in contact with friends and family overseas and invite them for a visit, with an added incentive of the chance to win return Air New Zealand flights.

### france

- Action has been taken by the Parisian Tourist Board as a result of an 11% decrease in tourism to the capital.  
  
The plan is for shops and restaurants to open on Sundays; waiters, waitress and shopkeepers will be encouraged to be more friendly; and a marketing campaign will target the American market.

For further information contact:  
Joanna Black  
Communications Officer  
Tel: 028 9044 1644

Viki McCabe  
Insights Officer  
Tel: 028 9044 1693

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