

November 2017

The Connemara Coast & Aran Islands

Visitor Experience Development Plan



Fáilte Ireland
National Tourism Development Authority



WILD ATLANTIC WAY
SLÍ AN ATLANTAIGH FHIÁIN

THE CONNEMARA COAST & ARAN ISLANDS VISITOR EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

VISION: Extend the season and attract visitors to engage with the true essence and story of the Connemara Coast & Aran Islands without compromising the environment or culture of the region.

TARGET MARKETS: Culturally Curious
Great Escapers

DESTINATION PROMISE: Feel the wind and the sea mists, hear the Call of the wild, explore the “savage beauty”, experience the spontaneity of the Gaelic spirit – and be inspired.

THEMES: Wilderness, Tradition & Innovation
Inlets & Islands
Resilience & Rebellion
Inspired by Connemara & the Aran Islands

- EXPERIENCES:**
1. Engage with Bens, Bogs and Beaches
 2. Discover Extraordinary Endeavours
 3. Take to the Waves
 4. Islands of Stone
 5. Tranquillity and Retreat
 6. Survival on the Edge
 7. Renegades & Revolutionaries
 8. Discover Vibrant Gaelic Culture
 9. Distinctive Flavours of Land & Sea
 10. Encounter ‘Savage Beauty’ through the Arts

The Connemara Coast stretching from Galway Bay to Killary Fjord, the Aran Islands and Inishbofin in County Galway lie at the heart of Ireland’s Wild Atlantic Way. The region is a land of contrasts – its backdrop of the Twelve Bens and its extensive bog complex, its multiple peninsulas and inlets, and its unique islands, all steeped in age-old Gaelic culture and tradition symbolise the essence of the Wild Atlantic Way and have inspired writers, artists and musicians over the centuries. The Coast and Islands are renowned for stories and folklore that highlight the unique landscape attributes, the resilience and vibrancy of coastal and island life, and the ways in which this area has been a source of artistic inspiration for centuries. Today, the opportunity exists to find new ways of using this backdrop to continue inspiring the visitor – reinvigorating those seeking authentic connections with local Irish culture and the Gaelic language, rewarding the contemplative mind and challenging those in pursuit of adventure.

The stories and destination themes form the basis of the experiences presented in this Plan. They provide cohesion to the Visitor Experience of the Connemara Coast and Aran Islands, they add depth to existing activities, they allow visitors to emotionally connect to the destination, and they ensure that visitors leave with strong memories. This Plan is designed to encourage all operators and organisations involved in delivering a tourism product to reinforce and add value to the experience through aligning with these stories and themes.

The focus is on strengthening the value of tourism to the local economy. To be effective, Fáilte Ireland has identified two primary target markets that are highly interested in what the Wild Atlantic Way has to offer – the Culturally Curious and Great Escapers.

CULTURALLY CURIOUS TRAVELLERS	GREAT ESCAPERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want to learn about Irish culture, customs and traditions • Looking for authentic local experiences • Interested in history being brought to life by storytelling and re-enactment • Seek to venture off the beaten track – often by hiking, walking or biking • Curious to explore natural landscapes and seascapes, small towns, villages castles, ancient sites and historic houses • Seek quality, fresh, well-prepared local food • They want to hear the insider perspective through local stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel connected to nature – travel in Autumn and/or Spring when nature is going through a transformative phase • Seek value for money • Rural touring holidays with a promise of local, authentic communities and activities • Meeting authentic local people to learn about the Irish way of life • Little interest in formal cultural artefacts e.g. museums • Seek an urban-rural experience, but will want to experience the less touristy parts of the cities

Visitation to the Connemara Coast and the Aran Islands is growing, with pressure being felt strongly in some areas while other areas perceive themselves as being left behind. Although quantitative data is difficult to access for the destination, feedback from businesses suggest 2016 has been the best season ever with an overall growth in visitor numbers to Ireland and County Galway. Looking at the current situation, it is possible to identify a number of challenges that are impeding growth and a number of opportunities that can be leveraged.

CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The perception of a north-south divide within the tourism industry in Connemara, and a similar divide between the mainland and the Aran Islands A lack of industry awareness of existing experiences across the destination and limited appreciation/use of key stories Limited collaboration and cross-destination referrals Visitors generally unaware of the protected nature or scientific qualities of the landscape Growing conflict between sense of place and mass tourism on Inis Óírr and Inis Mór – potential to undermine its sustainability Limited ‘reception’/wet weather facilities on the Aran Islands Limited accommodation in the southern half of Connemara Perceived issues in product development related to planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landscape diversity and ‘savage beauty’ (Oscar Wilde) Strong traditions in the literary arts and music – significant association with famous names Strength of the Gaelic culture – language, literature, song, dance Iconic elements that contribute to some degree of international brand awareness – the Connemara pony, the Galway Hooker, the Aran sweater The people – the welcome, the craic, the spontaneous hospitality, the storytelling Quality of outdoor activities – growing demand for adventure High-end ‘resort’ experiences Film connections – e.g. Quiet Man Themed trail opportunities – writers, language, mountains, literature, art Wealth of underlying stories Commitment of broad cross-section of agencies to collaborate

The way forward for the Connemara Coast and Aran Islands is through strong partnerships, the delivery of compelling experiences, and a focus on getting the story to the visitor – inspiring them to travel off-season, stay longer and enjoy the essence of this stretch of coast.

To help achieve this, ten Catalyst Projects have been identified, along with a range of supporting recommendations and Enablers of Success. The implementation of the Visitor Experience Development Plan rests primarily with trade and the proposed Connemara Coast and Aran Islands Tourism Networks. Trade need to embrace the stories, connect with other products to create Hero Experiences, and share their stories with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland, who will in turn share them with the world. This Plan does not guarantee future funding, and is designed to encourage businesses to be proactive in creating unique experiences.

Vital to the success of the Plan will be the support of Galway County Council, the involvement of industry development partners such as FORUM Connemara Ltd, Údarás na Gaeltachta and Galway’s Local Enterprise Office (LEO), and key stakeholders including OPW and NPWS.

CATALYST PROJECTS:

1. Assess the feasibility of a range of potential projects Connemara National Park in line with the National Park Interpretation Framework to enhance the visitor experience and strengthen shoulder and off-season visitation.
2. Assess the feasibility of developing new coastal and inland looped walking trails and promote walking and cycling trails as part of a network.
3. Assess the feasibility of establishing a Leenane-Killary Fjord Adventure Hub.
4. Complete the Connemara Greenway and investigate possible future opportunities
5. Assess the feasibility of promoting and expanding the Connemara Coast Blueway network.
6. Assess the feasibility of delivering and/or improving tourism facilities at piers/harbours for example on Inis Óírr, Inis Meáin and Inis Mór, including island facilities for orientation/information, toilets and shelter.
7. Assess the feasibility of developing the Killary Famine Trail as a designated loop walk in collaboration with relevant landowners.
8. Assess the feasibility of creating a Gaelic Experiential Trail.
9. Assess the feasibility of developing a network of cultural heritage centres throughout Connemara and the Aran Islands, and establish new mechanisms to support existing centres.
10. Support existing and create new innovative food festivals.

Note: For the above when proposals are progressed to feasibility stage consultation with relevant interested parties will take place.

ENABLERS OF SUCCESS

A series of actions relating to:

1. Coordination and collaboration
2. Enhancing visitor awareness of Connemara Coast and Aran Islands experiences
3. Animating the destination through festivals and events
4. Inspire and create confidence in sharing stories
5. Management of visitor infrastructure that enhances visitor experience
6. Responsible tourism and visitor impact monitoring

<i>Introduction</i>	3
1. UNDERSTANDING THE CUSTOMER	10
<i>Who Is Coming Now?</i>	11
<i>What Motivates Their Travel Patterns?</i>	12
2. AN EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK	13
<i>What is Experience Development?</i>	14
<i>The Experiences of Ireland</i>	15
<i>The Wild Atlantic Way</i>	16
3. THE CONNEMARA COAST & ARAN ISLANDS – DESTINATION THEMES	17
<i>The Connemara Coast & Aran Islands Story</i>	18
<i>Themes & Experiences</i>	19
4. LOCALITY EXPERIENCE SUMMARY	24
5. EXPERIENCE DELIVERY	33
<i>The Way Forward</i>	34
<i>Recommendations</i>	35
<i>Enablers of Success</i>	45
<i>Measures of Success</i>	51
6. APPENDIX	52



Disclaimer

The following Visitor Experience Development Plan has been prepared on behalf of Fáilte Ireland by a project team comprised of Team Tourism and Rethink Tourism. (The wider team includes EarthCheck Pty Ltd and Boland Marketing). Any representation, statement, opinion or advice, expressed or implied in this document is made in good faith but on the basis that this project team is not liable (whether by reason of negligence, lack of care or otherwise) to any person for any damage or loss whatsoever which has occurred or may occur in relation to that person taking or not taking (as the case may be) action in respect of any representation, statement or advice referred to in this document.

Images sourced from Fáilte Ireland Content Pool, with thanks to Terry O'Toole and authors' own.

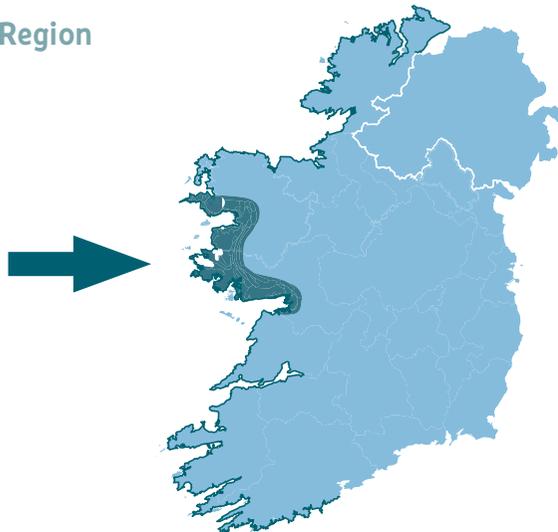
The Connemara Coast stretching from Galway Bay to Killary Fjord, the Aran Islands and Inishbofin lie at the heart of Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way. The region is a land of contrasts – its backdrop of the Twelve Bens and its extensive bog complex, its multiple peninsulas and inlets, and its unique islands all steeped in age-old Gaelic culture and tradition symbolise the essence of the Wild Atlantic Way and have inspired writers, artists and musicians over the centuries.

Today, the opportunity exists for tourism businesses to create and deliver visceral experiences that will inspire, challenge and reinvigorate the visitor who has come to explore this ancient landscape and its artistic traditions. This stretch of coastline that has long been recognised as the real emerald of Ireland, portrays 'untainted' qualities that the visitor is seeking to discover. Whether an operator is in the business of adventure, or food and hospitality, or whether the focus is on bringing the area's contemporary culture and past history to life, this Visitor Experience Development Plan provides a framework to assist the tourism sector in developing experiences that celebrate the unique attributes and underlying themes of the area. This will strengthen the positioning of the Connemara Coast and the Aran Islands in the international marketplace, and will increase the area's appeal for its overseas target market segments.

Connemara & Aran Islands Region



Source: Google Maps



The Plan has been guided by a project Working Group and has been prepared by Fáilte Ireland in alignment with their Guidelines for Experience Development Plans, which are based on a best-practice approach of collaboration, research, planning and activation. It has been written to inspire and assist tourism businesses and stakeholders to deliver new and improve existing visitor experiences.

EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The key objectives of the Connemara Coast and Aran Islands Visitor Experience Development Plan are to develop compelling experiences for this stretch of the Wild Atlantic Way that will:

- Motivate visitors **to stay longer and spend more;**
- **Extend the length of the season;**
- Align to the Wild Atlantic Way **brand and target markets;**
- Promote the concept of **slow travel;**
- **Sustain and increase job creation** in the local area; and
- **Protect the special environmental, cultural and linguistic character** of the region.

The Plan is supported by recommendations required to create an **internationally recognised visitor experience.**

In addition to these objectives, the delivery of the Visitor Experience Development Plan aims to:

- Encourage and **engage businesses and local partners;**
- Maintain **business engagement beyond the project** lifetime; and
- **Build lasting links** between national and regional partners and local tourism experiences.

A successful Visitor Experience Development Plan should not only be aligned to the Wild Atlantic Way brand and its target markets, but it should also seek to address the underlying challenges facing the destination and find ways of building on new opportunities.

CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The perception of a north-south divide within the tourism industry in Connemara, and a similar divide between the mainland and the Aran Islands • A lack of industry awareness of existing experiences across the destination and limited appreciation/use of key stories • Limited collaboration and cross-destination referrals • Visitors generally unaware of the protected nature or scientific qualities of the landscape • Growing conflict between sense of place and mass tourism on Inis Oírr and Inis Mór – potential to undermine its sustainability • Limited ‘reception’/wet weather facilities on the Aran Islands • Limited accommodation in the southern half of Connemara • Perceived issues in product development related to planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscape diversity and ‘savage beauty’ (Oscar Wilde) • Strong traditions in the literary arts and music – significant association with famous names • Strength of the Gaelic culture – language, literature, song, dance • Iconic elements that contribute to some degree of international brand awareness – the Connemara pony, the Galway Hooker, the Aran sweater • The people – the welcome, the craic, the spontaneous hospitality, the storytelling • Quality of outdoor activities – growing demand for adventure • High-end ‘resort’ experiences • Film connections – e.g. Quiet Man • Themed trail opportunities – writers, language, mountains, literature, art • Wealth of underlying stories • Commitment of broad cross-section of agencies to collaborate



CONNEMARA COAST & THE ARAN ISLANDS



PURPOSE & SCOPE OF THE PLAN

It is important to fully appreciate that the purpose of the Plan is to identify and bring to the fore the stories and destination themes of Connemara Coast and the Aran Islands in order to strengthen the value of tourism to the local community.

The Plan is not in itself a feasibility exercise nor an instruction for the delivery of future opportunities and experiences.

This document provides an organised starting point for the owners or stakeholders of this Plan to further assess the feasibility of possible future opportunities which will be practical for the purpose of improving existing and delivering new visitor experiences for the area.

SPECIFIC PROJECTS

Where specific projects are referenced in this Plan one of three scenarios will present itself:

Scenario 1: The Project is set out as an example only to demonstrate how a story or experience may be brought to life.

Scenario 2: The project has already been initiated and has completed required environmental assessment.

Scenario 3: The project has not yet been progressed but has been provided for by other Statutory Policies, Strategies, Plans and Programmes that have been adopted/approved and subjected to appropriate levels of SEA and/or AA, as relevant.

Where Scenario 3 applies no re-interpretation of the projects has been undertaken and no detail on these projects additional to that included in the other Plans/Strategies has been added.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of this Plan shall be consistent with and conform with the provisions of all adopted/ approved Statutory Policies, Strategies, Plans and Programmes that have direct influence on this Plan (e.g. Galway County Development Plan, 2015- 2021).

This includes provisions for the protection and management of the environment, including land designated as Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas.

The progression of opportunities identified in this plan by the relevant stakeholders will firstly under go feasibility analysis and if considered favourable will be progressed to proposed projects, which will be subject to planning regulations and to Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as required by the related Directive.

PRODUCTS & EXPERIENCES REFERRED TO BY THIS PLAN

Hero Product and Supporting Experiences referred to in this document are examples of such products opportunities only and are not intended to be an exclusive list. It is envisaged that others can and will be added during the lifetime of this plan

RESPONSIBLE & SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

This Plan has been produced with responsible and sustainable tourism as a foundation. To this end the implementation of the following guiding principles are key to the success of the Plan;

- Assessing the feasibility of developing and implementing visitor management plans and monitoring the quality of visitor experiences and local social/cultural impact at key sites;
- Encouraging the adoption of a responsible tourism approach with ongoing monitoring of environmental impacts;
- Encouraging tourism related businesses to engage in the Leave No Trace Programme;
- Ensuring Connemara and the Aran Islands visitor experiences are accessible to all where possible; and,
- Introducing and implementing minimum sustainable standards for tour guides.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES & ASSURANCES

Having regard to environmental issues and assurances, this Plan recognises that certain types of future opportunities that may progress to feasibility for the Connemara Coast and Aran Islands region may require environmental assessment. The table aims to group such opportunities and expand further on the potential environmental consequence if not assessed at feasibility and or planning stage.

PROJECT TYPE	POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT, INCLUDING	ENVIRONMENTAL ASSURANCES, INCLUDING
New-build interpretive & visitor centres and associated facilities.	Associated traffic movement, parking, landscape change, noise, water resource & waste, ecology.	Ensure screenings - and full assessment(s), if necessary - for AA, EIA and/or SEA are undertaken as relevant. Also ensure any necessary licences are applied for and granted.
Visitor facilities at mooring points, piers, landing/embarkation points.	Associated traffic movement, parking, landscape change, water resource & waste, noise terrestrial, fore shore & aquatic ecology.	
Food Kiosks at discovery points.	Associated traffic movement, parking, water resource & waste, ecology.	
New signage and interpretive structures.	Associated traffic movement, parking, landscape change, ecology.	
Newly built walks, trails, loops.	Associated traffic movement, parking, landscape change, waste, ecology, anti social behaviour, health & safety.	

Given that such opportunities are at pre-feasibility stage (i.e. may not reach realisation) it is not yet practical or possible to undertake full and adequate environmental assessment. Furthermore, requirements relating to Strategic Environmental Assessment do not apply (see below) and the Plan does not require Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment (see below also). However it is important to recognise that if certain projects are considered feasible and if such projects are brought to fruition by relevant stakeholder, these initiatives will require relevant and appropriate levels of environmental assessment at that juncture.

The following sections provide further detail on environmental compliance of this Plan.

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (SEA)

This Plan has been examined for the need to undertake Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). SEA requirements apply to the plans and programmes of public authorities that, inter alia, set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annexes I and II to European Directive 85/337/EEC. The Plan does not create such a framework, therefore requirements in relation to SEA do not apply.

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT (AA)

An AA Screening determination, informed by an AA Screening Report, has been made by Fáilte Ireland regarding this Plan. It has been determined that further AA is not required as no effects on the integrity of European sites will result from the implementation of the Plan, either on its own or in combination with other plans, programmes or projects.

FUNDING

Fáilte Ireland provides funding for sustainable tourism projects. As of the date on which this Plan was published, none of the projects referred to within the Plan have secured funding from Fáilte Ireland. Reference made to projects in this Plan does not guarantee funding. While funding is provided to certain projects, Fáilte Ireland is not the developer. Developers are required to comply with relevant legislation and the provisions of Statutory Policies, Strategies, Plans and Programmes, including those relating to environment and planning.

1

UNDERSTANDING THE CUSTOMER Ag Tuiscint an Chustaiméara

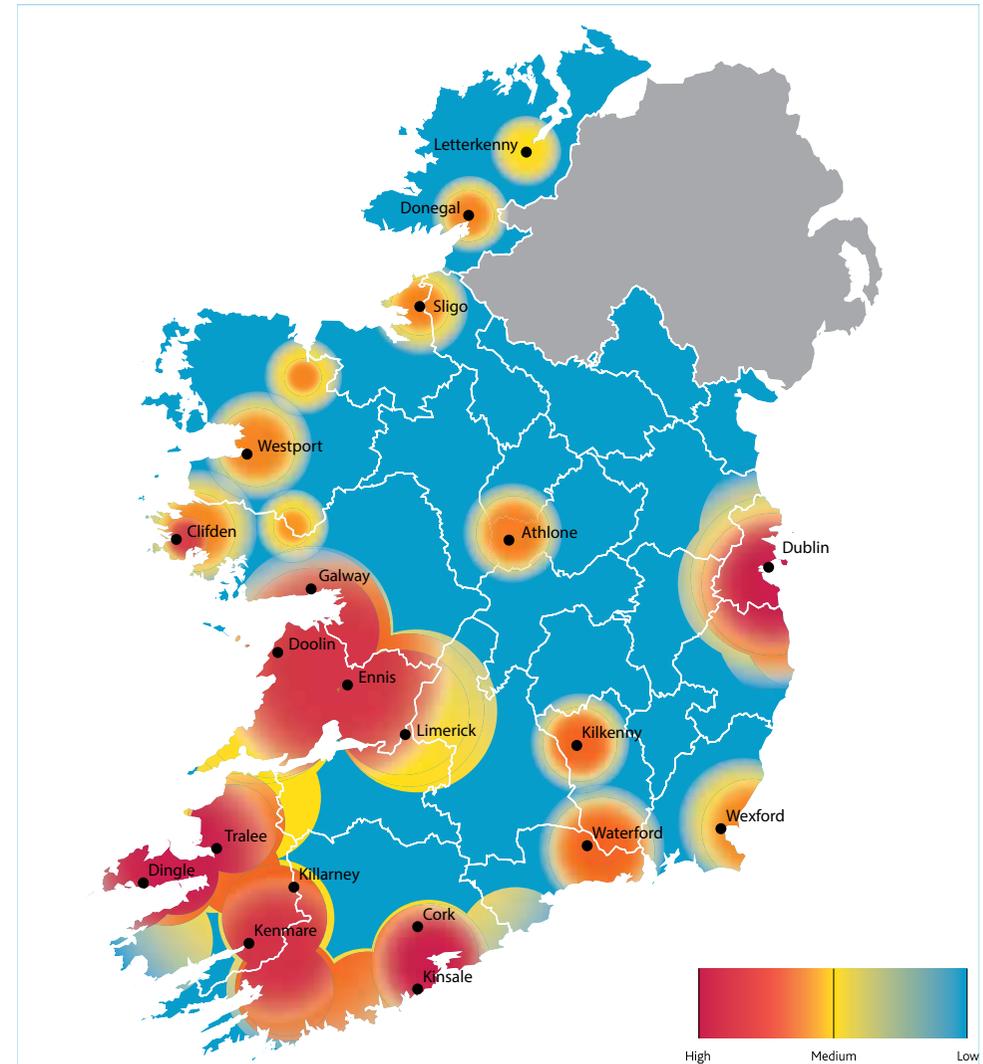


People want to experience an off the beaten track experience that genuinely immerses them in multiple ways so that they feel stimulated, energised and uplifted.

The latest data from Fáilte Ireland indicates County Galway receives 2.2 million visitors (of which 64% are international) and €669 million in visitor spend (of which 71% is from international visitors). Looking at these international visitors, 18% are from Britain, 46% from Mainland Europe, and 27% are from North America. It is interesting to note that the visitor spend from the North American visitors amounts to 41% of total international visitor spend. At present, there is little data available which specifically relates to the Connemara region or the Aran Islands. Data for County Galway as a whole has been used as an indicator of visitor patterns within the area.

- The main reasons for a visit to the West (Galway, Mayo and Roscommon) are for a holiday (70%) or to visit friends and relatives (20%)
- One-third of visitors to the West are couples and 41% of visitors travel alone.
- Almost half are first time visitors to the region
- Visitors to Galway and Mayo source their pre-travel information through the internet (82%)
- International visitors to Galway spend on average €351 per person and domestic visitors spend an average of €217 per person
- 44% of international visitors and 35% of Irish residents visit during the months of July, August and September
- The Net Promoter Score for Galway and Mayo is 62% (measures the intention to recommend a travel destination and is an indicator of overall satisfaction with the travel experience).

HOTSPOT MAP OF OVERSEAS VISITORS TRAVELLING FOR A HOLIDAY



Source (including image):
 Fáilte Ireland, Regional Tourism Performance in 2015, October 2016
 Fáilte Ireland, Visitor Survey, 2015
 Fáilte Ireland, Holidaymaker Survey - Galway and Mayo, 2013
 Fáilte Ireland, Brand Tracker Visitor Experiences, 2015

Having a detailed understanding of what motivates visitors to travel to Ireland, not just their needs, can help to grow market share through more effective targeted marketing.

Recognising the benefits of global consumer market segmentation, Fáilte Ireland has recently undertaken significant research on the country’s key consumer segments, including their travel motivations, lifestyle, values, interests, and travel information sources.

Through this research, two key market segments have been identified for the Wild Atlantic Way – the **Culturally Curious** and the **Great Escapers**.

The following tables highlights what these segments are seeking from a holiday in Ireland.



CULTURALLY CURIOUS: are very independently minded and are interested in places of historic and cultural interest.

CULTURALLY CURIOUS

- Want to learn about Irish culture, customs and traditions
- Looking for authentic local experience
- Interested in history being brought to life by storytelling and re-enactment
- Seek to venture off the beaten track – often by hiking, walking or biking
- Curious to explore natural landscapes and seascapes, small towns, villages, castles, ancient sites and historic houses
- Seek quality, fresh, well-prepared local food
- They want to hear the insider perspective through local stories



GREAT ESCAPERS : want to get away from it all, renewing family bonds and spending time together in a beautiful place.

GREAT ESCAPERS

- Feel connected to nature – travel in Autumn and/or Spring when nature is going through a transformative phase
- Seek value for money
- Rural touring holidays with a promise of local, authentic communities and activities
- Meeting authentic local people to learn about the Irish way of life
- Little interest in formal cultural artefacts e.g. museums
- Seek an urban-rural experience, but will want to experience the less touristy parts of the cities

WHAT THEY NEED?

- Friendly, hospitable people
- A secure and safe destination
- Beautiful scenery with a range of natural attractions
- Plenty of things to see, do and experience
- Interesting history and culture
- Relaxed and easy pace
- Value for money

Source: Fáilte Ireland, Global Segmentation Toolkit, 2016 & 2017
Fáilte Ireland, Visitor Attitudes Survey – Main Markets, 2015

2

AN OVERVIEW OF EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Forléargas ar Fhorbairt Eispéiris



Setting the right scene and providing the right environment is important to trigger the right emotions within visitors.

- National Experience Development Framework

Developing an experience requires a shift away from the traditional product versus price mentality. It's about delivering life-changing moments that inspire visitors to not only share their experience with others, but also makes them want to return.



Experience Development is the art and science of delivering a consistent message that inspires consumers throughout their travel experience – providing something that not only motivates visitors to become ambassadors for your destination, but also gives them the tools to help tell your message.

The concept of experience development extends beyond just simply providing an enjoyable experience for visitors. To achieve international cut-through in today's 'sharing economy', experiences need to utilise thematic interpretation techniques that evoke a positive emotional response in visitors, making them want to brag about their experience with family and friends and to experience it again and again. By embedding an experience with the unique selling features, or 'signatures', of a destination, visitors will associate that experience specifically with the destination and become advocates for these experiences with others.

DESTINATION PROMISE: The expectation that is created amongst potential visitors about the experience(s) that they will enjoy in the destination (i.e. a promise of what they will receive based on what is being delivered)

KEY PROPOSITION/OVERARCHING THEMES: This is what sets your destination apart

DESTINATION EXPERIENCE THEMES: The stories your customers can connect with that showcase your key proposition

HERO PRODUCTS: The customer accesses these experiences through the Hero Products

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES: What each business does to bring the signature experience to life

ANCILLARY EXPERIENCE MIX: How the wider tourism offering supports the regional themes

IRELAND'S UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITIONS

Sitting underneath the Brand Ireland pillars are three key propositions (or experience brands) which represent the country's areas of strategic importance. These three areas are:



Wild Atlantic Way – “Experience one of the wildest, most enchanting and culturally rich coastal touring routes in the world. Wherever you travel along the Wild Atlantic Way you’ll find magic, adventure, history and beauty in abundance.”



Ireland's Ancient East – “When you explore Ireland's Ancient East, you wander through 5,000 years of history. In these lush, green lands, tales of feuding dynasties hide behind crumbling Gothic architecture; ghostly tombs predate the pyramids; and knights, kings, monks and Vikings loom large in incredible stories.”



Dublin A Breath of Fresh Air – “Visiting Dublin is like taking a great big breath of fresh air. Always invigorating, this Viking city is at once modern and historic, exciting and relaxing.”

WHAT IS AN EXPERIENCE BRAND?

Ireland's *Experience Brands* are at the heart of ‘Tourism Brand Ireland’. They bring it to life, create the motivation for visitors to visit the Island of Ireland by defining its diverse character in a way potential visitors can understand. The Experience Brands provide the competitive advantage that separates us from our competitors.

An Experience Brand therefore must be unique enough to stand out in the international marketplace and stimulate demand. Each Experience Brand must have a clear consumer lead proposition which ensures that a consistent approach is taken to the identification and development of memorable tourism experiences within these brands. Each Experience Brand must be distinctive in the international marketplace and differentiate itself from other Experience Brands within the Island of Ireland and in other destinations.

An Experience Brand must:

- Be **grounded** in the consumer (travel values, social values, behaviours)
- Be **motivational** for international visitors
- Be **of scale** – made up of a critical mass of related attractions and supporting experiences which are purchasable and accessible – supported by appropriate tourism infrastructure
- Be **more than one experience**, and usually a combination of supporting experiences which underpin one or two lead experiences
- Be **unified by a compelling story** – one which has international relevance
- Be capable of **increasing dwell-time** and/or driving **economic benefit**
- Have a **consumer led** proposition, values, and theme(s).
- Be **market-led** and tested



The Wild Atlantic Way on Ireland's west coast leads you through one of the world's most dramatic coastal landscapes, a landscape on the edge of Europe that has shaped the development of its people, communities and settlements, a landscape that has inspired its own particular language, literature, art, song and dance. It's a place of many natural features – seascapes, sea-life, cliffs, mountains, glens, loughs, trails and pathways. It's a place to experience nature at its wildest; a place to explore the history of the Gaels and their religion; a place to experience great events, great food and drink, great music and the craic.

The Wild Atlantic Way is the over-arching proposition for the Connemara Coast and the Aran Islands and delivers the Brand Ireland pillars.

WILD ATLANTIC WAY BRAND PROMISE

The Wild Atlantic Way on Ireland's Western Coast off the Western Edge of Europe, captivates you with its wild landscape that continuously shapes its living history; and engages you with its creative and vibrant communities, whose stories and culture stimulate you, so you are freed up to relax, enjoy and leave feeling refreshed, renewed and uplifted.

This brand promise is delivered through three themes which highlight the unique features of the Wild Atlantic Way. Key to the success of the Wild Atlantic Way as an Experience Brand is that we deliver on the brand promise at every point of interaction with the visitor. The promise needs to be:

- **Real** – based on genuine and authentic assets. It needs to be truly delivered by the tourism businesses included in the brand. The industry needs to buy-into the brand and 'live it' to truly deliver on its promise.
- **Relevant** – developed with the potential visitor in mind and able to satisfy their needs and motivations.
- **Related** – to the other Experience Brands on the Island of Ireland but unique enough to stand out alongside them individually.

WILD ATLANTIC WAY THEMES

Life Shaped by the Atlantic – you can get up close and personal with traditions and spiritual Gaelic Ireland and immerse yourself in the real Ireland where the traditions of the past are very much alive in the music, the song, the dance, storytelling, games and the Irish language.

Where Land Meets Sea – on the very edge of Europe, the ocean's force has carved a coast of wild, raw beauty. Huge Atlantic rollers crash and churn, shaping jagged ocean crags, islands and the sheer granite of Europe's tallest sea cliffs. It provides a breathtaking backdrop for active exploration of untamed land and seascapes. Enjoy up close encounters with the elements.

Connectedness – the feeling of connecting to the people and the landscape, of being a part of something 'bigger'. Feeling renewed and energised by the place, its people and its story. Your reward from a journey of discovery, challenge and being immersed in an ancient landscape.

If the potential visitor to the Island of Ireland is offered a clear menu of distinctive but equally appealing Experience Brands, the likelihood of them choosing to visit for longer is increased.

It's up to each business to embrace the themes of the Wild Atlantic Way and strengthen the overall appeal of the Experience Brand.

3 THE CONNEMARA COAST & ARAN ISLANDS DESTINATION THEMES



'Be different or be dead. Memorable experiences are about creating value. Value is the defining factor. When there is no difference in value people buy on price alone. You can only compete on price for so long but you can compete on value forever.'

Connemara Coast and the Aran Islands: a landscape of ethereal and “savage beauty” and a people of resilience and spontaneity that inspire and enchant writers, artists, musicians and travellers alike yesterday, today and tomorrow....

THE CONNEMARA COAST:

*Nothing can compare with the Connemara coast,...
The beauty of this place and the echoes deep inside,
Make me think we're only just a moment in time.*

Chris de Burgh

THE ARAN ISLANDS:

*Did sea define the land or land the sea?
Each drew new meaning from the waves' collision.*

Seamus Heaney

The Connemara Coast and the Aran Islands are evocative landscapes that have inspired writers, artists, and musicians down through the centuries. The “savage beauty” of the area highlighted by Oscar Wilde and the ethereal qualities that shimmer in the ever changing light give the region a mystical appeal that befits its stories of ancient geological landscapes, myths and sea lore, resilience, and the inspirational pride of its people. This is a region of Ireland where time seemed to stand still for so many centuries, where change was slow, and where its traditions and inherent spirituality uniquely blend with today’s modern way of life. So many writers and poets have sought to capture this romantic rawness, while maintaining a deep reverence for this sense of timelessness. Perhaps, none more so than Tim Robinson who has dedicated much of his life to revealing the hidden qualities and deep beauty of this stretch of coast and its islands. In discussing his earlier writings and the way in which his experience of visiting the islands of Fínis and Inis Bearacháin in Na hOileáin impacted him, he writes ‘I did not identify the two islands for fear of disturbing the melancholy tranquillity of two islanders, each of them virtually the sole remnant of a vanished community...’

Today the tranquility of this area; its juxtaposition of mountains and ocean and the stories of bygone feats in the face of adversity; the deeply embedded Gaelic culture and language within Ireland’s largest Gaeltacht region; the unique geography and traditions of islands and inlets with their beaches of white sand and turquoise seas; the stark and elemental appeal of the Aran Islands that appear to be carved out of stone; the churn of the Atlantic against cliffs where forts have safeguarded the locals for millennia; the resilience of place and people that has evolved from living life on this dramatic edge; the spontaneous hospitality and distinctive flavours of land and sea; and, the rich backdrop of contemporary arts and culture which itself has been shaped by time immemorial continue to attract and seduce modern travellers, and to inspire ongoing stories of the unique rapport that visitors experience with the Connemara Coast and the Aran Islands.

Whether one comes for adventure, quiet contemplation, artistic inspiration, or seeking connections with the past, today’s visitor has the capacity to be enchanted and reinvigorated through an emotional connection that can touch their very soul.

*Children of the Gaeltacht
Sing your rowdy songs
Remind me once again
Of that night in Ballyconneely
When I was one of you
That night you turned me Irish*

Thomas Horton

Feel the wind and the sea mists, hear the call of the wild, explore the “savage beauty”, experience the spontaneity of the Gaelic spirit – and be inspired.

THE CONNEMARA COAST & ARAN ISLANDS

A landscape of ethereal and “savage beauty” and a people of resilience and spontaneity that inspire and enchant writers, artists, musicians and travellers alike yesterday, today and tomorrow....

Wilderness, Tradition & Innovation

A geological story of 600 million years gives us mountain peaks that once stood the height of the Himalayas, and a unique blanket bog that overlays the ‘knock-and-loughan’ topography left by glaciers. This ‘wilderness’ has been shaped by centuries of tradition from turf cutting to sheep farming, and has provided the backdrop for extraordinary endeavours that continue to impact modern life.

Experiences

Engage with Bens, Bogs and Beaches
Discover Extraordinary Endeavours

Inlets & Islands

The coastal life of the inlets, islands and peninsulas lies at the heart of the Gaeltacht region. It is a life that has been shaped by geology and the Atlantic Ocean, where the cultural impact of travellers along the coast dates back to 4000 BC. The intellectual and spiritual influence from North Africa seen in the early Celtic Christian relics, the ongoing seafaring traditions symbolised by the Galway Hooker, and the adrenalin from today’s coastal adventure all speak to the passion inspired by life on the edge.

Experiences

Take to the Waves
Islands of Stone
Tranquillity & Retreat

Resilience & Rebellion

Sustaining life on the edge is a story of survival against the odds. The themes of resilience and rebellion are common to many aspects of the region – its ecological diversity, the stories of famine and emigration, the folklore attached to Grainne O’Malley and her defense of Inishbofin against enemy ships, the local resistance to Cromwellian troops, the life of Patrick Pearse as a nationalist and political activist, and the stories today of fishing, farming and making a livelihood.

Experiences

Survival on the Edge
Renegades & Revolutionaries

Inspired by Connemara & the Aran Islands

Creativity is a hallmark of this part of Ireland and is evident in the literature, art, music, and craft that have been inspired over the centuries. The writings, songs and artwork have accentuated the ‘savage beauty’ and ethereal qualities of the landscape. This emphasis on artistic expression and the rich underlying Gaelic culture continue to have a magnetic appeal for visitors – an appeal that is now enhanced through authentic culinary flavours of land and sea.

Experiences

Discover Vibrant Gaelic Culture
Distinctive Flavours of Land & Sea
Encounter ‘Savage Beauty’ through the Arts

ENGAGE WITH BENS, BOGS & BEACHES

To experience this landscape is to hike its trails and feel the adrenalin from pursuing the many adventure activities it offers, while taking the opportunity to be reinvigorated by the sheer beauty of a “wilderness” that has been shaped by centuries of Gaelic tradition and culture.

HERO PRODUCTS

- Climb Connemara National Park’s Diamond Hill Trail for spectacular sea-views, or a guided hike around the Twelve Ben’s Glencoghan Horseshoe.
- Have an adventure on land (hill-walking, zip-lining, mountain-biking, archery, giant swing, adventure races such as Gaelforce and Eile Mental Activity Park) or sea (kayaking, surfing, coastering, SUP, water-skiing) at Delphi Adventure Centre and Killary Adventure Centre.

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- Take a loop walk along the coast with views of sea and mountain such as the Gorumna Loop (Luibín Gharumna), Moyrus Trail (Luibín Mhaírois), the Westquarter Loop on Inishbofin and the Aran Islands loop walks and enjoy the aspects of Gaelic culture around you.
- Take a day-long guided beach and bog walk with Connemara Wild Escapes, including foraging in Connemara National Park.
- Watch sheepdogs at work at Killary Sheep Farm overlooking Killary Fjord.
- Go to Clifden’s Connemara Pony Festival and the Omeý Island beach race.
- Visit the Sheep and Wool Centre at Leenane for a history of sheep farming, and watch wool being spun into yarn and woven into cloth.
- Get creative with bog wood/stone carving.
- Visit Blue Flag and Green Coast beaches such as Trá an Dóilín and Cill Mhuirbhígh
- Go to the popular Bog Week and Sea Week festivals at Letterfrack.
- Cycle the Sky Road scenic route for views of islands, coast and sea.
- Take on the challenge of golf from the 9-hole Connemara Isles course to the Connemara Championship Golf Links

EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

The focus will be on enhancing the visitor experience at Connemara National Park and assessing the feasibility of providing facilities to encourage greater levels of visitation in the shoulder season; exploring the opportunities of creating an Adventure Hub at Leenane-Killary Fjord; facilitating the identification of trailheads, walking and cycling routes; enhancing and supporting experiences

DISCOVER EXTRAORDINARY ENDEAVOURS

In the midst of this sometimes stark and seemingly isolated landscape you will discover stories that highlight extraordinary endeavours. Whether these relate to technological innovations that continue to impact modern life or architectural design that was inspired by passion – the impact of these endeavours is still striking today.

HERO PRODUCTS

- Visit Kylemore Abbey and Victorian Walled Gardens and discover how Mitchell Henry’s vision transformed the landscape, creating one of Ireland’s finest houses and gardens.
- Walk the boardwalk at Derrigimlagh Signature Discovery Point and learn about Marconi’s first transatlantic radio signal, and Alcock & Brown’s first transatlantic flight.
- Cycle or walk the Connemara Greenway from Clifden to Galway along the former rail line and learn the story of the railway (currently being developed).

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- Hire a bike and cycle the Ballyconneely Road from Clifden to Roundstone via Derrigimlagh Signature Discovery Point (proposed).
- Cycle the Connemara Greenway from Clifden to Leenane via Connemara National Park & Kylemore Abbey (proposed).

EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

- There is potential to strengthen the link between Clifden and the Derrigimlagh site, both through a physical cycle route connection and through the use of street art and street names using the Marconi, Alcock & Brown themes.
- The Connemara Greenway (Galway to Clifden) is seen as a project with significant potential to enhance the visitor experience and encourage more visitors to come to Connemara. There are opportunities to assess the feasibility of developing this concept further through for example linking Clifden with Derrigimlagh (and Roundstone) and Clifden with Leenane, and through further possible development of the Derrigimlagh site e.g. utilising the former Social Club as a café & focal point.
- The feasibility of creating themed heritage trails that tell the story of Marconi and Alexander Nimmo will help bring their achievements to life. The Nimmo theme could be linked with other locations along the Wild Atlantic Way, such as Valentia Island.

TAKE TO THE WAVES

Explore the inlets and islands from the sea and discover the unique intricacies of this stretch of coast, including Ireland's only fjord. Follow tradition and experience life on a Galway Hooker, or descend to the depths for a completely different perspective

HERO PRODUCTS

- Take a cruise with Killary Fjord Cruises and enjoy the flavours of Killary Fjord mussels and Connemara Oysters on board, and even see a dolphin!
- Take a tour on a Galway Hooker followed by a visit to a local pub to enjoy local food and traditional music with Wild Atlantic Adventures.

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- Go sea kayaking around the caves at Cleggan or fly-fishing at Spiddal (An Spidéal).
- Engage in water sports – wild swimming, snorkelling, scuba-diving, coasteering, coastal tours, Blueway tours and beach/coastal guided walks where visitors can learn more about the marine environment.
- Take the ferry to Inishbofin and see dolphins on the way.
- Learn to sail a Galway Hooker with Galway Hooker Sailing School
- Take a currach tour to a deserted island for a picnic with local food.
- Watch Galway Hookers; Púcáin and Gleoiteogs race at Roundstone, Ros Muc and Cashel Bay on Regatta Day.
- Forage for food at sea and onshore at the Islands' Seaweed Festival in Leitir Mealláin (proposed)

EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

- The focus for this theme is to increase visitor awareness of and opportunity to engage with water-based activities along the Connemara Coast & the Aran Islands. Priorities include assessing the feasibility of promoting and enhancing the Blueway initiative, building capacity of activity providers, and promotion of festivals.

ISLANDS OF STONE (THE ARAN ISLANDS)

Discover a landscape of limestone pavement or Karst that is 350 million years old – a relic of the ancient shallow tropical seas and vast array of marine life. Having been shaped and moulded during the Ice Age, pummelled by the sea, and now supporting an intricate lacework of stonewalls, the Aran Islands of today have an incredible story to tell.

HERO PRODUCTS

- Visit the spectacular Dún Aonghasa on the cliffs of Inis Mór and feel the relentless power of the Atlantic – contemplate life back in 1100 BC.
- Take a scenic flight to an island from the Connemara Coast.

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- Walk the lanes of Inis Mór lined with more stone walls than you have ever seen and listen to a self-guided audio.
- Participate in traditional wall building – the Festival of Stones on Inis Oírr.
- Rent a bicycle or go with a local guide to learn about island life on each of the islands and discover how fields have been created from rock.

EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

- The focus on the Aran Islands is on assessing the feasibility of providing visitor facilities and orientation; creating itineraries to enhance the visitor experience and awareness of the offer, promoting the cultural traditions, and encouraging overnight stays; and developing opportunities to engage with the Irish Language

TRANQUILITY & RETREAT

The islands and inlets have provided spiritual solitude and have been regarded as sites of pilgrimage since the 6th century. Whether visitors are following in the paths of saints or seeking their own form of revitalisation and enrichment, the opportunities to do so are diverse.

HERO PRODUCTS

- Treat yourself to a spa weekend at Delphi Adventure Centre.
- Stay overnight on Inishbofin and watch the sun go down. Be amazed at the dark skies, and wake up to the sunrise in peace and tranquility.

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- Enjoy a saltwater seaweed bath at Leenane Hotel or a yoga and massage experience in Letterard.
- Explore the numerous early Celtic Christian sites and holy wells along the coast and islands and follow pilgrim paths at Maumeen, and Mac Dara's Island (July).
- Switch off and relax on peaceful and tranquil Islands
- Walk the islands of Fínis or Muighnis near Carna.
- Spend a weekend of mindfulness and yoga at the Naduir Centre at Furbo

EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

- The priorities are to strengthen Connemara & the Aran Islands as a destination offering wellness tourism and relaxation, and to tie this modern day theme to the spirituality of the past

SURVIVAL ON THE EDGE

Experience the joys and sorrows, and the risks and dreams of being challenged to survive on the edge. Whether it is the story of the Famine, the region's ecology, shipwrecks, or creating a livelihood today, this part of the coast offers a poignant story and an opportunity to reflect on one's own ability to face challenge.

HERO PRODUCTS

- Visit the exhilarating prehistoric fort at Dún Aonghasa on the cliff edge of Inis Mór
- Tread in the footsteps of the past with a view of the spectacular Killary Fjord on the Killary Famine Trail (proposed).
- Book Delphi Lodge's Killary Fjord Historical Famine Outing to visit a famine village and learn about the impact of the famine.

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- Visit the Diaspora & Emigrants Centre, Carna (under development).
- Take a foraging tour at Dogs Bay or collect seaweed on Inis Mór.
- Visit Ionad Árann Heritage Centre on Inis Mór (proposed) and Áras Éanna Cultural Centre on Inis Oírr to find out about the story of island life and survival.
- Consider the lives of those saved from the Plassey Shipwreck on Inis Oírr,
- Hear the stories of surviving recent frightening storms on Inishbofin.

EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

- The Famine story in this area is one of significant contrasts from the absence of the potato blight on the Aran Islands to the devastation of Clifden and the tragedy of Doolough Valley. Assessing the feasibility of upgrading the Killary Famine Trail would assist in raising its profile. The proposed Emigrants & Diaspora Centre at Carna has potential appeal but only if the interpretative offer is well planned and of sufficient quality to enable overseas promotion.
- As many visitors are fascinated by the story of everyday life on the Aran Islands, there is an opportunity to consider re-use of existing indoor spaces for interpretive/cultural events particularly on Inis Meáin, and to enhance the telling of the story through short high quality looped videos.
- Many themes are designed to have overlaps and there is an opportunity to bring in the food story, and how the flora and fauna have adapted to the climate and geology of the area within this theme – e.g. building on the work of the Aran-LIFE project.

RENEGADES & REVOLUTIONARIES

Discover the colourful legends of the past and events of recent times that display the tenacity of the local people, their fighting spirit, and their determination to hold onto embedded values and aspirations. Whether it is ancient folklore, the 'edgy' stories of Pirate Queen Grainne O'Malley, the extortionist activities of the O'Brien Clan on the Aran Islands to protect shipping routes for the City of Galway, the efforts to hold out against Cromwell, or more recent stories of Daniel O'Connell and Patrick Pearse – there is no shortage of stories to bring this theme to life.

HERO PRODUCTS

- Visit Pearse's Cottage and the Pearse Cultural Centre, Connemara to learn about this nationalist hero of 1916.
- Visit Inishbofin and walk the Cromwell's Castle Trail (accessible at low tide) – the last place in Ireland to be conquered by the Normans (proposed).

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- Walk the Clifden Historic Town Trail to find out about Daniel O'Connell's Monster Meeting to repeal the Act of Union, attended by over 100,000 in 1843.
- Walk the Smugglers Trail on Killary Fjord – (the story line for this experience needs to be strengthened).
- Unpack the legends associated with the castles at Renvyle, Clifden, and Bunowen.
- Visit Dún Formna and the fortified tower house built by the O'Brien Clan on Inis Oírr, and follow the story of how possession of the islands passed into the hands of the O'Flahertys before being annexed by the Crown.

EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

- The focus for this theme is on reinforcing the connection in the visitors mind that Connemara and the Aran Islands is a place apart – a land of rebels and heroes. The new Pearse Cottage visitor centre provides world class interpretation and further events can take place at this venue.
- Investigate the feasibility of a looped walk to Cromwell's Barracks on Inishbofin – the last place in Ireland to be conquered by the Normans and formerly the home of the pirate Don Bosco.
- Bring to life the smuggling story and increase its appeal to the family market.

DISCOVER VIBRANT GAELIC CULTURE

The Gaeltacht offers an immersive experience in the Gaelic culture and language that make this area truly unique. The Gaelic language is spoken all around you and the road signs remind you that you are in a distinctive area. The traditional music, song, storytelling, and Sean-Nos dancing that can be readily found, the spontaneity of life and the warmth of the hospitality sets this experience apart.

HERO PRODUCTS

- Visit the Pearse Cultural Centre and Pearse's Cottage to find out about this inspirational champion of Irish language and literature
- Learn to make baskets at Ceardlann Craft Village, Spiddal; or try basket making and weaving at Áras Eanná Arts Centre on Inis Meáin

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- Learn to play and sing Irish music at Cuan Music Centre, Spiddal (proposed).
- Take part in an 'Irish Nights' event, learn sean-nós dance or song, relax with locals in a pub, experiencing an authentic session with music & storytelling.
- Visit Cnoc Suain Cultural Retreat for a Day or Residential Experience
- Take an Irish language course in the Gaeltacht.
- Visit the new Centre for Gaeltacht Heritage and Culture (proposed).
- Take a tour of the Inis Meáin knitwear factory (proposed) or watch an Aran sweater being hand-knitted on Inis Mór.
- Enjoy lively local music song and dance at Clifden Traditional Music Festival.

EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

- Provide new opportunities for visitors to learn the Irish language, engage with Irish culture, traditions and craft, particularly on the Gaelic Coast.

DISTINCTIVE FLAVOURS OF LAND & SEA

Whether it is Connemara lamb, goats' cheese, local mussels, salmon, oysters or the flavours of seaweed, or whether it is craft breweries – a kaleidoscope of flavours awaits the visitor in pubs, restaurants, on food tours, at festivals, on picnics and right where the products are prepared.

HERO PRODUCTS

- Watch how local salmon is smoked at Connemara Smokehouse.
- Take the kids to meet kids at Aran Goat Farm and buy some goats cheese.
- Taste Marty's Killary Mussels and McGeogh's air dried Connemara lamb

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- Taste the mussels at Leenane and meet mussel farmers at Killary Fjord.
- Book the Ballynahinch Castle Islands and Lobster Experience – tour Roundstone harbour, lift lobster pots, walk deserted Inishlacken, and see the seals and seabirds.
- Do Connemara Wild Escapes' 'Taste Connemara & Aran Island Pub Tour'.
- Take a tour with Connemara Food Tours.
- Delphi Lodge Special Experience Days e.g. 'Seafood & Farming Traditions'.
- Go to the annual Connemara Mussel Festival at Renvyle or experience unique island flavours at Bia Bo Finne on Inishbofin.

EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

- Promote local signature dishes and provide visitors with further opportunities to buy local produce and take part in food related activities. Street food, local markets, food festivals and story-telling on restaurant/bar menus are all ways of enhancing this theme.
- Focus on developing greater cooperation and knowledge sharing among food producers and food service operators
- Identify and further investigate by-laws to license local artisan foods

ENCOUNTER 'SAVAGE BEAUTY' THROUGH THE ARTS

The creativity that this landscape has inspired over the centuries is held in high regard. Talent continues to be unleashed and visitors have unique opportunities to explore the 'artist within' and to enjoy the artistic expression of those who have left their mark on the destination.

HERO PRODUCTS

- Visit the annual Clifden International Arts Festival – one of Ireland's exceptional events.
- Follow the Connemara & Aran Island's Writers Trail and discover what inspired these literary greats (proposed).

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- Go to the Inishbofin Literary Festival and Arts Festival.
- Sit in JM Synge's Seat on Inis Meáin.
- Follow the Letterfrack Poetry Trail.

EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

- Continue to explore innovative ways of promoting the rich literary and arts traditions such as establishing a new Writers Trail and itineraries associated with literature, photography and art.

4 LOCALITY EXPERIENCE SUMMARY

Achoimre ar Eispéireas Dúiche



When you customise an experience to make it just right for an individual...you cannot help changing that individual.

The destination themes have been developed to resonate across the entire Connemara Coastal area and the Aran Islands. These themes are designed to ‘pull’ the experiences together and to give the destination a sense of cohesion. The visitor leaves with easy to recall memories of unique experiences delivered against a backdrop of strong themed stories, and has a strong sense of having ‘connected’ with the landscape, its people and its traditions. The table shows the relationships between themes and localities. The darker check marks represent a greater prevalence of the theme in a locality.

Connemara Coast and Aran Islands Localities	DESTINATION THEMES									
	Wilderness, Tradition & Innovation		Inlets & Islands			Resilience & Rebellion		Inspired by Connemara & the Aran Islands		
	Engage with Bens, Bogs and Beaches	Discover Extraordinary Endeavours	Take to the Waves	Islands of Stone	Tranquility & Retreat	Survival on the Edge	Renegades & Revolutionaries	Discover Vibrant Gaelic Culture	Distinctive Flavours of Land & Sea	Encounter ‘Savage Beauty’ through the Arts
Leenane & Delphi	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
Renvyle & Letterfrack	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Inisbofn	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Clifden area	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓	✓
Roundstone / Ballyconneely	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Gaelic coast	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Aran Islands	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓



Killary is Ireland's only fjord and extends 16km from the Atlantic to Aasleagh Falls, forming the border between Galway and Mayo and offering some of the most spectacular scenery in the country. The deep fjord is renowned for its mussels which can be found in nearby restaurants. The picturesque village of Leenane lies at the eastern end of the fjord and hosts several festivals through the year. Surrounded by mountains, the area is famous for adventure activities and related events such as Gaelforce and the Connemarathon, as well as hill-walking and fly-fishing.

RELEVANT EXPERIENCES

- Engage with Bens, Bogs & Beaches
- Take to the Waves
- Tranquillity & Retreat
- Survival on the Edge
- Distinctive Flavours of Land & Sea
- Encounter 'Savage Beauty' through the Arts

HERO PRODUCTS

- Killary Fjord Cruises
- Delphi Adventure Centre (adventure activities and spa)
- Killary Adventure Centre
- Delphi Lodge – Special Experience Days e.g. 'Seafood & Farming Traditions' (boat on Killary Fjord, meet mussel farmers, go to sheep farm/turf-cutting/sheep dogs, and lunch by the fjord) or 'Historical Day' (visit to and tour of famine village) or opportunities to try fly-fishing and hill walking
- Killary Sheep Farm (sheepdog demonstrations, sheep shearing, turf cutting demonstrations, walks on a working farm)
- Sheep & Wool Centre, Leenane (history of sheep farming, live displays of wool being spun into yarn and woven into cloth, interactive displays and historical exhibits, children's activities, gift shop & café)

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- The recently designated Killary Fjord Blueway
- Salmon and sea trout fishing at Delphi and Erriff
- Meeting mussel farmers at Killary Fjord
- Leenane Hotel saltwater seaweed baths
- Restaurants and cafés using local produce
- Current events:
 - Autumn Food Festival, Leenane
 - Leenane Mountain Walking Festival (including guided archaeology and geology walks and cycle/mountain-bike tours)
 - Adventure races (Gaelforce, Connemarathon)

EXPERIENCE GAPS

- Leenane Hill walking hub (hillwalking trailheads and routes)
- Hill walking routes from Delphi Adventure Centre
- Killary Famine Walk (potential hero product)
- Opportunity to taste mussels from road-side food outlet
- Public transportation services to Leenane



Renvyle Peninsula has been described as ‘the most beautiful landscape on earth’, and with spectacular sunsets it easily meets expectations. The peninsula offers visitors a chance to unwind in a country house such as Renvyle House and a range of activities and events such as the Mussel Festival. Coastal cruises and sea-angling trips can be taken from Ballinakil Harbour. The Wild Atlantic Way Route continues south to Letterfrack. Letterfrack was founded by Quakers and is now a thriving village, home to the Connemara National Park visitor centre and an educational hub for both the Irish language and furniture restoration. Kylemore Abbey and Victorian Walled Gardens lie to the north of Letterfrack

RELEVANT EXPERIENCES

- Engage with Bens, Bogs & Beaches
- Discover Extraordinary Endeavours
- Take to the Waves
- Survival on the Edge
- Renegades & Revolutionaries
- Discover Vibrant Gaelic Culture
- Distinctive Flavours of Land & Sea

HERO PRODUCTS

- Connemara National Park (exhibition, AV show, children’s playground, nature trail, picnic areas, Connemara ponies, Diamond Hill Walk)
- Kylemore Abbey and Victorian Walled Garden (tour of the house, forest walks, walled gardens, tea-rooms, gift shop)

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- Glass bottom boat tours from Letterfrack Harbour
- Adventure activities – Connemara Wild Escapes, and Wild.
- Renvyle Seisiún
- Scubadive West
- Teach Ceoil Traditional Arts Centre, Tully (Irish music, dance, song)

- Salmon and sea trout fishing at Kylemore Abbey and Lough Inagh

- Current events:

Sea Week (long running festival around Connemara’s marine heritage including music, art, concerts, talks, walks and children’s activities – the highlight is the ‘After the Light’ parade – myth, magic, madness and mayhem)

Bog Week (music, dancing, children’s events, poetry, guided walks, adventure activities, art)

Connemara Mussel Festival, Tullycross (a celebration of food people, culture and heritage)

Halloween Festival of Light

EXPERIENCE GAPS

- Walking trail/Greenway between Connemara National Park and Kylemore Abbey
- Kylemore farm buildings (restoration and events)
- National Park to Kylemore shuttle bus
- Irish language courses for visitors
- Kylemore boat trips



Inishbofin, the island of the White Cow, is located 11km off the coast, accessed by ferry from Cleggan. The first Irish island to be awarded for eco-tourism, this tranquil and unspoilt island is a haven for those who relish peace and relaxation during the day and traditional music, craic and good food by night. With a range of looped walks, spectacular beaches, a seal colony, and water-sports – including its own dive centre, equestrian centre and bike hire, there is something to appeal to all. Inishbofin is renowned as a centre for traditional music with many visiting musicians. There are a number of festivals through the year, including the Arts Festival and Walking Festival in May, and the Bia Bo Finne Food Festival in October.

RELEVANT EXPERIENCES

- Engage with Bens, Bogs & Beaches
- Take to the Waves
- Tranquillity & Retreat
- Survival on the Edge
- Renegades & Revolutionaries
- Distinctive Flavours of Land & Sea
- Encounter ‘Savage Beauty’ Through the Arts

HERO PRODUCTS

- Westquarter Loop Walk
- Blueway (snorkelling and kayaking)

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- Inishbofin Heritage Museum
- Inishbofin Equestrian Centre – pony trekking
- Inishbofin History Tour – Connemara Wild Escapes
- Writing and Creative Activity Holidays
- Pottery classes
- Cycling/walking/birdwatching (Corncrake)
- Traditional music in local pubs

- Kayaking/SUP/wild-swimming/sailing
- St Colman’s monastic site
- Existing events:
 - Inishbofin Island Walking Festival
 - Inishbofin Arts Festival
 - Inishbofin Regatta
 - Bo Finne Food Festival
 - Inishbofin Literary Festival, June

EXPERIENCE GAPS

- Coastal Walks – Cromwell Castle Loop Walk (potential to interpret story of Inishbofin as last place conquered in Ireland), island circuit walk – blowholes and sea stacks
- Wild swimming
- Inishbofin food trail on more dates
- Potential to interpret the prehistoric landscape – the remains of Neolithic and Bronze age field systems and stone hut circles; remains of promontory forts on Dun na hIníne and Dún Mor.
- Potential to further highlight ‘survival on the Edge’ theme – an island that supported a thousand residents in 1898 to one that still battles the Atlantic storms with the recent loss of the old curing station.



The historical town of Clifden is considered by many to be the ‘capital’ of Connemara. Founded by John D’Arcy in the 1820’s, the town has an almost alpine feel and a wide range of visitor accommodation, bars restaurants & retail.

The Derrigimlagh Signature Discovery Point, 6km to the south, celebrates the first commercial transatlantic message transmitted in 1907 from Marconi’s Station to Glace Bay, Newfoundland, Canada and the first transatlantic flight on 15 June 1919 by Alcock and Brown. The Connemara Greenway will run from Clifden to Galway along the former rail line route. Cleggan, 9km to the north of Clifden, is the centre of the north Connemara sea-fishing industry and the ferry port for Inishbofin Island.

RELEVANT EXPERIENCES

- Engage with Bens, Bogs & Beaches
- Discover Extraordinary Endeavours
- Survival on the Edge
- Renegades & Revolutionaries
- Distinctive Flavours of Land & Sea
- Encounter ‘Savage Beauty’ Through the Arts

HERO PRODUCTS

- Derrigimlagh Signature Discovery Point and 5 km looped board trail within the Derrigimlagh bog complex – telling the story of the achievements of Marconi in transmitting the first wireless message to North America, and Alcock and Brown’s crash landing after completing the world’s first transatlantic flight
- Clifden Arts Festival
- Connemara Greenway (when completed)

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- Sky Road scenic route and Discovery Point
- Clifden Historical Town Trail
- Clifden Traditional Music Festival
- Station House Museum
- Deep sea fishing from Cleggan
- Connemara History & Heritage Centre/Dan O’Hara’s Homestead (restored pre-

famine cottage with turf-cutting/bread-making/sheep-herding/multi-lingual AV show, reconstructions of a crannóg, ringfort and clochaun, gift-shop and restaurant)

- Kayaking the sea caves at Cleggan
- Errislannan Equestrian Centre
- Restaurants and cafés using local produce e.g. Oliver’s Seafood Bar & Restaurant, Cleggan (Cleggan crab claws)
- Bike Electric Connemara – bike tours
- Clifden Traditional Music Festival and Trad in the West
- Existing events

Clifden Walking Festival

Connemara Pony Show, Clifden (August, pony racing, dog show, art competition, Irish dancing)

Omey Island Horse Show

Clifden Irish Nights

EXPERIENCE GAPS

- Clifden-Derrigimlagh Greenway
- Visitor facilities at Derrigimlagh including café and toilets
- Clifden Cultural Centre with Alcock & Brown replica and history of town
- Opportunity for visitors to discover Clifden’s role in the Irish civil war
- The story of rail travel



Ballyconneely is a place of serene tranquillity between Clifden and Roundstone, a peninsula stretching out into the Atlantic that is ringed by beaches of exceptional beauty such as Coral Strand and Mannin Bay. Ballyconneely is also famous for the Connemara Pony, many of which can be seen in the fields nearby.

Roundstone Bog complex is one of Ireland's last great wild and natural areas and is of international ecological and historical importance. The Bog Road from Clifden to Roundstone passes across it and is ideal for cycling. The village of Roundstone is one of the oldest fishing villages on the west coast. It enjoys unparalleled views of the Twelve Bens and the Ocean, and is famous for seafood and Galway Hooker races.

RELEVANT EXPERIENCES

- Engage with Bens, Bogs & Beaches
- Discover Extraordinary Endeavours
- Take to the Waves
- Survival on the Edge
- Renegades & Revolutionaries
- Discover Vibrant Gaelic Culture
- Distinctive Flavours of Land & Sea
- Encounter 'Savage Beauty' Through the Arts

HERO PRODUCTS

- Connemara Smokehouse
- Galway Hooker tours with Wild Atlantic Adventures

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- Roundstone Music and Craft shop
- Restaurants and Cafés using local produce
- Galway Hooker Race
- Foraging tours, Dog's Bay
- Country dancing – year-round once a week
- Ballynahinch Castle Islands and Lobster Experience
- 5 km looped walk on Inishnee

- Deep sea fishing from Roundstone
- Existing events
 - St Patricks Day Festival
 - Roundstone Irish Nights – once a week during the summer

EXPERIENCE GAPS

- Roundstone Cultural Centre (village history, events, and gallery)
- Coastal Walks – Errisbeg Hill loop walk (currently permissive use)
- Roundstone Conversations – building on the legacy of Tim Robinson
- Cooking traditional food at Roundstone community kitchen
- Photography/painting/writing courses – potential for artists' studio trail; opportunity to create new events
- Roundstone-Derrigimlagh-Clifden cycle route (Bog Road)
- Events during Clifden International Arts Week
- Learning to fillet and cook salmon at Connemara Smokehouse
- Winter experience; smuggling story; story of Alexander Nimmo who founded the village and developed the carriage road from Oughterard to Clifden; story of the former fishing industry



The Gaelic Coast refers to the vibrant area between Roundstone and Bearna and to the south of the N59. Within this area, where many people can trace their families back generations, age-old traditions co-exist with modern living. From scenic coastal villages such as Carna and Cill Chiaráin, through inlets and islands to Ceantar nOileán – visitors can experience one of Ireland’s most vibrant Gaeltacht regions where Gaelige is the everyday language of its people. There is a strong link with the Aran Islands from this coast with ferries from Ros an Mhíl and light plane service from Inverin. An Spidéal to the east has an array of good restaurants, lively nightlife and sandy beaches.

RELEVANT EXPERIENCES

- Engage with Bens, Bogs & Beaches
- Discover Extraordinary Endeavours
- Take to the Waves
- Tranquillity & Retreat
- Survival on the Edge
- Renegades & Revolutionaries
- Discover Vibrant Gaelic Culture
- Distinctive Flavours of Land & Sea
- Encounter ‘Savage Beauty’ Through the Arts

HERO PRODUCTS

- Ionad Cultúrtha an Phiarsaigh, Conamara – Pearse Cultural Centre, Connemara (1916 story and literary connection)
- Cnoc Suain Cultural & Creative Retreat
- Ceardlann Craft Village and Builin Blasta Café
- Eile Mental Activity Park

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- Traditional music, dance, singing and folklore nights
- Basket weaving at Ceardlann Craft Village
- Traditional boat racing festivals along the Gaelic Coast
- Leitir Meallain Heritage Centre
- Abalone Farm
- Blue Flag Beaches

- Watersports – kayaking, sea-angling / game angling (Cashel)
- Gorumna Loop Walk (Luibín, Garumna) in Ceantar na nOileán and Moyrus Trail in Carna
- Walk the islands of Finish or Mweenish, Carna
- Deep sea and shark fishing (Spiddal & Rossaveal); salmon and sea trout fishing at Costello/Fermoyle
- Yoga and massage
- Existing events: Féile Traidphicnic/Traidphicnic Festival, An Spidéal (July) - music arts and culture

EXPERIENCE GAPS

- Irish language activities/weekends
- Connemara writers/artists/film trail
- Cuan Music Centre, An Spidéal (learn to play/sing Irish music)
- Diaspora and Emigrants Centre, Carna (requires high quality interpretation, potential hero product)
- Centre for Gaeltacht Heritage and Culture
- An Garraí Glas – see the lazy beds and pull your own potatoes, guided tours of historic landscape
- Events celebrating seaweed
- Cill Chiaráin food festival – native oysters and scallops – link with St MacDara’s on 16th July
- Experiences, festivals and/or events around the existing timetable of Traditional Boat racing festivals that take place throughout summer
- Insufficient leveraging of one of Europe’s most significant collections of folklore



The beautiful Aran Islands of Inis Mór, Inis Meáin and Inis Oírr are located at the mouth of Galway Bay, linked by language to Connemara and by geology to the Burren. While the islands differ in size and character, all are united by the gentle hospitality of the people, a strong sense of tradition, and unique natural and cultural heritage. The islands have a range of accommodation and, with a settlement history that dates back several millennia, one day is not enough to fully enjoy all they have to offer. Visitors can walk, hire a bike, take a bus tour or pony and trap to view the incredible stone walls and Atlantic seascapes. After the sun sets out west, the islands come alive with traditional music and a vibrant pub life.

RELEVANT EXPERIENCES

- Engage with Bens, Bogs & Beaches
- Take to the Waves
- Islands of Stone
- Tranquillity & Retreat
- Survival on the Edge
- Discover Vibrant Gaelic Culture
- Distinctive Flavours of Land & Sea
- Encounter 'Savage Beauty' Through the Arts

HERO PRODUCTS

- Dún Aonghasa, Inis Mor
- Aran Goat Farm, Inis Mor
- Áras Éanna Arts Centre (Ireland's only offshore arts centre, weaving, basket making), Inis Oírr
- Dún Chonchúr, Inis Meáin

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- Stone wall building festival and courses, Inis Oírr
- Bike hire and pony trekking, Inis Mór
- Flight to the Aran Islands (scenic view) from Inverin in Connemara
- Watch an Aran sweater being knitted on Inis Mór
- Seal viewing (Inis Mór), birdwatching and wildflowers on all islands
- Visit stone forts at Dún Dubh Chathair, Dún Eochla, Dún Aonghasa and Dún Eoghanachta

on Inis Mór, O'Briens' Castle on Inis Oírr

- Sit on Synge's Chair on Inis Meáin and be inspired
- Seaweed collecting
- Existing events:
- Ted Fest
- Red Bull Cliff Diving 2017
- Vintage Car Rally

EXPERIENCE GAPS

- Cultural hub/information centre/shelter for visitors on each island
- Inis Meáin knitwear factory tour
- Water-based activities (tours, angling, kayaking, scuba-diving, stand-up paddle-boarding, coasteering, wild swimming)
- Guided tours on the Aran islands – field-making, island life, flora and fauna, birdwatching, forts
- Cill Mhurbhig (Kilmurvey) Blue Flag Beach, Inis Mór
- Greenway to Dún Aonghasa
- JM Synge Cottage, Inis Meáin
- Interpretation (Plassey shipwreck, field-making, flora, built heritage)
- Photography/painting/writing courses e.g. on Inish Meáin (JM Synge), Inis Mor (Liam O'Flaherty)
- Stargazing – Dark Skies accreditation being pursued

5

EXPERIENCE DELIVERY Eispéireas a Chur ar Fáil



*The world is shaped by two things – stories told and
the memories they leave behind.*

-Vera Nazarian, author

The recommendations detailed below are those with the greatest potential to deliver the vision of the Visitor Experience Development Plan. This plan does not guarantee future funding, and is designed to encourage businesses to be proactive in creating unique experiences.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To ensure the successful implementation of the Connemara Coast & Aran Islands experiences, the following Guiding Principles have been established to guide certain recommendations and projects listed in this section.

- **All projects are self-sustainable**, meaning they do not solely rely on funding to be achieved or maintained.
- **All projects connect to the broader region** as they deliver benefits to more than one place in the Connemara Coast & Aran Islands.
- **All projects are on-message** with the Connemara Coast & Aran Islands experiences and aligned to the broader mission of the Wild Atlantic Way.
- **All projects focus on setting the region apart** from its competitors.
- **All projects add value to the region** and provide a direct and demonstrable link to either extending visitor length of stay, extending the length of the tourist season or developing a new market.
- **Principles of responsible tourism development** (see Appendix 2) are embedded in each action, creating better places to live in and to visit.

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Implementation of the Visitor Experience Development Plan and delivery of the experiences requires each stakeholder agency or organisation to make a shift on how they tell their story and in selecting what projects and initiatives gain support moving forward.

However, each new or enhanced visitor offering needs to do more than just ‘tell a story’. It needs to provide visitors with an opportunity to experience the elemental qualities of the region, to encounter the true essence of Connemara & Aran Islands culture, and to leave feeling inspired. It is the responsibility of each agency, product provider and business operator to embrace this approach and to put themed experiences at the top of the list of the things we share with our customers.

What that means for each organisation is:

Fáilte Ireland – will focus on working with the trade that deliver the ‘signature experience’, and will help those businesses not currently doing so to start delivering and sharing their unique story.

Tourism Ireland – will focus on telling the stories connected to the experiences as a priority in their marketing, social media, and publicity.

Galway County Council – will play a key role in industry and destination development through the implementation of the GCC Tourism Strategy

FORUM and Údarás na Gaeltachta – will support implementation through funding and fostering economic, social and cultural development, including through mentorship and group support designed to encourage businesses to embrace an experience and deliver it.

Office of Public Works – as their primary responsibility includes the maintenance, ownership, presentation and upkeep of buildings in state care, they should continue their role of management and development of these sites with a strong emphasis on a visitor-centric approach.

Educators – as educators in tourism, GMIT should assist tourism operators in creating and delivering experiences.

NPWS – as a statutory agency with responsibilities for development that may impact on nature conservation, it will have a key role to play in the development of Connemara National Park as an enhanced visitor facility, for recreation and education.

Galway City Museum – can offer a role in relation to outreach sites that provide visitors a gateway to the heritage of the area.

Local tourism groups – need to work together with the new tourism networks (see Enabler E1.1 and E1.2) to share their experience stories with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland, and work with businesses to help them find and share their experience under the common themes established in this plan.

Individual businesses (trade) – need to find which experience theme they best deliver, develop new or enhance existing experiences, and encourage their customers and the marketing agencies to share that story with the world.

Inland Fisheries Ireland – remit includes promotion of angling

PARTNER ACRONYMS

AA – Aer Aerann
BB – Bord Bia
CCC – Clifden Chamber of Commerce
CCI – Crafts Council of Ireland
CAITN – Connemara & Aran Islands Tourism Network (proposed)
DCHG – Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
DoE – Department of Education
DTTAS – Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
ECOC – European Capital of Culture
FI – Fáilte Ireland
FO – Ferry Operators
FORUM – FORUM Connemara Ltd
GCC – Galway County Council
GDC – Gaeltacht Local Development Groups
GM – Galway Museum
GMIT – Galway Mayo Institute of Technology
GRETB – Galway Roscommon Education Training Board
HC – Heritage Council
IDC – Inishbofin Development Company
IFA – Irish Farmers Association
IFI – Inland Fisheries Ireland
KA - Kylemore Abbey
LC – Local Communities
LEO – Local Enterprise Office
LDA – Leenane Development Association
MI – Mountaineering Ireland
NPWS – National Parks & Wildlife Service
NUI Galway
NTO – National Trails Office
OPW – Office of Public Works
RRO – Rural Recreation Officer
TIL – Tourism Ireland Limited
UnaG – Údarás na Gaeltachta

FUNDING

Fáilte Ireland provides funding for sustainable tourism projects. As of the date on which this Plan was published, none of the projects referred to within the Plan have secured funding from Fáilte Ireland. Reference made to projects in this Plan does not guarantee funding. While funding is provided to certain projects, Fáilte Ireland is not the developer. Developers are required to comply with relevant legislation and the provisions of Statutory Policies, Strategies, Plans and Programmes, including those relating to environment and planning.

TIMING

Short-term – Year 1

Medium-term – Years 2 and 3

Long-term – Year 4+

ALIGNMENT WITH EXISTING PLANS

This plan has been aligned with all agency plans (GCC, Údarás, FORUM Connemara Ltd and NPWS), including the GCC Tourism Strategy – see Appendix for the list of plans and strategies reviewed. In doing so, it both supports existing plans and seeks to gain leverage from their strategies and actions.

NOTE: Recommendations listed do not guarantee funding and will have to go through the same application process for all projects. Seek out what agencies are offering funding as new streams of funding may become available during the life-time of this Plan.

IMPLEMENTATION OF FEASIBILITY PROJECTS

This Plan identifies examining the feasibility of a range of projects. Where proposals for new initiatives are progressed to feasibility stage, consultation with relevant interested parties will take place.

EXPERIENCE 1: Engage with Bens, Bogs & Beaches

Actions	Timeframe	Lead	Partner
<p>1.1 Catalyst 1: Examine the feasibility of pursuing potential projects for Connemara National Park in line with the National Parks’ Interpretation Framework to enhance the visitor experience and strengthen shoulder / off-season visitation. Where proposals are progressed to feasibility stage, consultation with relevant interested parties will take place. Key projects to assess the feasibility could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation and parking: extending the car park to reduce on-road parking; providing a seasonal shuttle bus service between the Park and Kylemore Abbey to facilitate safety of movement between two hero products; improving the carpark as a staging area for trail use through refurbishing the car park information booth; • Trail experiences refreshing trail signage; upgrading Diamond Hill Trail; developing new Farm Loop Walk and highlighting the farming story; creating a greenway between the Park and Kylemore Abbey. • Interpretation & information: revitalising interpretive displays, printed map materials and video content, and exploring the use of new AV technology; extending the seasonal availability of personal services and developing new themed experiences; • Buildings: assessing feasibility of upgrading visitor centre toilet facilities and educational facilities. 	Medium Term	NPWS	FI, GCC, CAITN, NTO, FORUM
<p>1.2 Catalyst 2: Investigate the feasibility of developing new coastal and inland looped walking and cycling trails and promoting these trails as part of a network. Examples of this might include the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing existing loop walks and trailheads • Reviewing/piloting the feasibility of the Connemara Cluster Pathfinder Project proposal, which is exploring potential routes from Clifden to Leenane (via Letterfrack/Connemara National Park) to link the Galway Greenway to the Western Way; from Pearse’s Cottage to the Greenway through Coillte Cappaghooish; and the potential to connect Slí Chonamara and the Greenway with cycling/walking routes through the Galway Wind Park. • Examining the feasibility of developing priority list of further walks / trails, such as: Cromwell Castle Loop (see also 7.1), Killary Famine Trail (see 6.1), an island circuit on Inishbofn and an Errisbeg Hill Loop; and carry out resource audit/mapping of old roads, bridleways and pathways. • Identifying and assessing the feasibility to develop links/loops from the Connemara Greenway (see 2.2) to towns and villages on the Gaelic Coast, for example Ceantar Na nOileáin and Iorras Aithneach • Producing loop walk pocket trail maps/guides using similar format to Burren. • Introducing Connemara Trails app with walking and cycling trails (including the Blueway trails) and associated services and facilities. 	Medium Term	Forum RRO	FI, RRO, OPW, IDA, FORUM, UnaG, IFA, LC NPWS Coillte, Údarás na Gaeltachta, SSE & GCC
<p>1.3 Catalyst 3: Assess the feasibility of establishing a Leenane-Killary Fjord Adventure Hub</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the possibility of prioritising Leenane area for inclusion under Pilot Mountain Access Scheme to assist in formalising access to and on existing and future hillwalking routes. Examine potential to extend to other upland areas. • Promote hill-walking businesses, and mobilise adventure providers to establish a co-operative network. 	Short Term	GCC	FI, CAITN, LDA, FORUM, MI, TI, IFA
<p>1.4 Coordinate existing and develop new walking festivals, such as Leitir Meallain and Cill Chiaráin, so that they each take place on similar dates to enable promotion of a Connemara Walking Festival Calendar, while retaining their individual identities. This would enable overseas promotion as an event of scale.</p>	Short Term	CAITN	FI, RRO, GCC, TI

EXPERIENCE 3: Take to the Waves

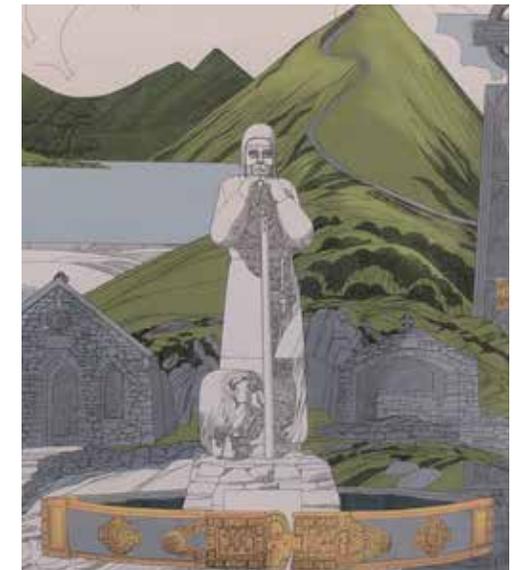
Actions	Timeframe	Lead	Partner
<p>3.1 Catalyst 5: Assess the feasibility of promoting and expanding the Connemara Coast Blueway network. Example of initiatives may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting the existing Mannin Bay, Inishbofin and Killary Blueways to international markets. • Encouraging operators to maximise the opportunities of suitable Blueway locations. • Holding Blueway ‘Taster Days’ and ‘Turn up and go’ events, particularly during the shoulder seasons. • Considering new Blueway locations at Wild Atlantic Way Discovery points, including on the Aran Islands. 	Medium Term	GCC + RRO	FI, CAITN, LC (IslandsWest Dive Centre, Real Adventures, Dephi Adventure Centre, Killary Adventure Centre, Scuba Dive West, Connemara Wild Escapes, Wild Atlantic Adventures), TI NPWS
<p>3.2 Encourage water sports providers in Connemara and on the Islands to examine the feasibility of establishing new activity-based experiences, that positively contribute to sustainable economic development and environmental conservation. Examples could include sea tours, angling, kayaking, scuba-diving, stand-up paddle-boarding, and coastering.</p>	Medium Term	FORUM / FLAG	UnaG, CAITN, LC, FI, GDC, IFI
<p>3.3 Promote existing festivals associated with the sea including Sea Week, the Galway Hooker Regatta, and local Galway Hooker and currach races.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore opportunities to add other related activities to the boating festivals (food, craft, seaweed, music) 	Short Term	FI GCC	CAITN, TI UnaG, Cumann Húiceirí na Gailimhe
<p>3.4 Examine the feasibility of developing and expanding game, sea and course angling experiences.</p>	Medium Term	IFI	CAITN, TI
<p>3.5 Define and promote packages and itineraries associated with water-based activities in conjunction with food, music, Irish language, and guided tours which include folklore and the natural environment. This could include multi-island saleable experiences.</p>	Short Term	FI	FI, GCC

EXPERIENCE 4: Islands of Stone

Actions	Timeframe	Lead	Partner
<p>4.1 Assess the feasibility of updating and implementing the Aran Islands Interpretation Plan as a means of providing an integrated approach to visitor awareness of the three islands and extending visitor stay.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the proposed themes within the context of this Plan, and assess the feasibility of implementing relevant signage proposals. • Produce the proposed published and online material including the Aran Pack (Visitor Guide), Aran Map, Aran Map App, brochures and specific theme booklets. • Work with local trade to ensure availability of print material to visitors. <p>The priority must be upon ensuring the experience remains authentic so visitors do 'not feel like they are experiencing interpretation, but are rather experiencing the islands'.</p>	Short Term	GCC OPW	FI, CAITN, CnO, LC
<p>4.2 Catalyst 6: Assess the feasibility of delivering and/or improving tourism facilities at piers/harbours. As an example this could apply to Inis Oírr, Inis Meáin and Inis Mór including facilities for island orientation/information, toilets and shelter. The aim of these facilities would be to promote visitor awareness of the island offer, enhance the visitor experience and encourage increased length of stay. Recommendations in the Aran Islands Interpretation Plan for visitor management at these locations should be assessed for feasibility.</p>	Short Term	GCC OPW	FI, CAITN, CnO, LT, FO, UnaG
<p>4.3 Investigate opportunity to work with current owners of Teach Synge (JM Synge's cottage) on Inis Meáin to facilitate its enhancement as a visitor attraction.</p>	Medium Term	CAITN	CnO, UnaG, FI, GCC
<p>4.4 Support existing events associated with stone walls such as the stone wall building festival.</p>	Short Term	FI GCC	CAITN, CnO
<p>4.5 Assess the feasibility of completing the greenway loop on Inis Mór between Killronan and Dún Aonghasa to enhance the visitor experience of self-guided cycle tours.</p>	Short Term	Forum / RRO	FI, CAITN, CnO, GCC
<p>4.6 Define and promote a range of packages and itineraries for photography, painting and writing courses on the Aran Islands.</p>	Short Term	CAITN	CnO, FI, TI
<p>4.7 Define and promote guided tours on the Aran islands – field-making, island life, flora and fauna, birdwatching, forts.</p>	Short Term	CAITN	FI
<p>4.8 Investigate the opportunity to achieve Dark Skies accreditation for the Aran Islands.</p>	Medium Term	CAITN	GCC

EXPERIENCE 5: Tranquillity & Retreat

Actions		Timeframe	Lead	Partner
5.1	Define and promote packages and itineraries based around the theme of Connemara and the Aran Islands as places to relax, unwind and escape, including spas, yoga, seaweed baths, meditation, fresh air and island life.	Short Term	CAITN	FI, TI
5.2	Promote Connemara & the Aran Islands as a place for therapy and wellness, including massage therapy, therapeutic riding, and art therapy.	Short Term	CAITN	FI, TI
5.3	Define and promote small group and individual tours and packages based around pre-Christian sacred sites and Celtic Christian sites including Holy Wells and churches. Develop experiences that highlight the 'Islands of Saints and Scholars'.	Medium Term	CAITN	FI, TI
5.4	Seek to address issues that are impacting on the quality of recreational angling in Connemara including salmon farming and water-course pollution. Aim to increase revenue from angling tourism in the Connemara area.	Short Term	GCC IFI	FI, Coillte
5.5	Investigate the opportunity for Dark Skies accreditation for the Islands and pursue astro-tourism.	Short Term	CAITN	FI, TI



EXPERIENCE 6: **Survival on the Edge**

Actions		Timeframe	Lead	Partner
6.1	Catalyst 7: Assess the feasibility of developing the Killary Famine Trail to a designated loop walk in collaboration with relevant landowners. This will require careful consideration of parking options. Use the trail to highlight the variations in the famine story across Connemara and the Aran Islands.	Short Term	RRO	GCC, FI, CAITN, LC
6.2	Undertake an evaluation of the effectiveness of the new Emigrants & Diaspora Centre at Carna in communicating the story of the famine era to overseas visitors. The initiative will require professional input to develop the visitor experience concept and the design and content of the interpretation to ensure that it will resonate with international markets. If the interpretation is of international standard this centre has the potential to be a hero product within this theme.	Short Term	UnaG, FI	FI, CAITN, GDC
6.3	Show short videos of island life and history on a loop at a reception/wet weather venue on each of the Aran Islands. There is opportunity to consider reuse and adaption of empty buildings.	Medium Term	CAITN UnaG	CnO, LC
6.4	Promote the unique flora and fauna of the Aran Islands through continued distribution of the Aran Life brochures to visitors and through the promotion of specialised guided walks. These experiences should highlight themes of adaption, survival and unique biodiversity. Walks must be promoted in accordance with principles of Leave No Trace.	Short Term	CAITN GCC NPWS	CnO, UnaG, LC

EXPERIENCE 7: **Renegades & Revolutionaries**

Actions		Timeframe	Lead	Partner
7.1	Assess the feasibility of developing a new Cromwell's Barracks Trail loop walk on Inishbofn – the last place in Ireland to be conquered by Normans. As part of the initiative, consider assessing the feasibility of creating a rope bridge across the current gap to aid accessibility at high tide, and review the stability of the heritage monument.	Short Term	RRO	OPW, CAITN, FI, FORUM, IDC
7.2	Introduce talks and events linked to 1916 at Pearse's Cottage Visitor Centre.	Short Term	OPW	FI, CAITN
7.3	Explore opportunities for creating a smuggling themed event on Inishbofn and for highlighting the Gráinne O'Malley story. This could include themed events in the pub. Similarly, look at using the smuggling theme in other communities such as Roundstone.	Medium Term	IDC LC	GCC
7.4	Any review of interpretative facilities in Clifden should look for ways of creating a link between the Daniel O'Connell story in Clifden and his larger story in the Skellig Coast.	Medium Term	GCC	CCC
7.5	Explore opportunities to highlight the events of 1916 and the Civil War, including the burning of Clifden, the burning of the Marconi Station, and the activities of the Black and Tans.	Medium Term	GM	Forum

EXPERIENCE 8: Discover Vibrant Gaelic Culture

Actions	Timeframe	Lead	Partner
<p>8.1 Catalyst 8: Create a Gaelic Experiential Trail with an emphasis on workshops for visitors to learn the Irish language, including experiences that integrate the language with music, arts, crafts, and photography courses – using trails along existing routes to existing developments.</p>	Short Term	CAITN UnaG	GCC, FI, CAITN, LC
<p>8.2 Catalyst 9: Assess the feasibility of a network of cultural heritage centres throughout Connemara and the Aran Islands and establish new mechanisms to support existing centres. For most of the sites indicated below its is recommended a study be carried out to consider how these can be part of an outreach centre (offsite museum) programme run by Galway City Museum. Example of centres which could be assessed could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leenane Cultural Centre (can also be interpretative centre for Joyce Geopark) – community run (proposed); • Inishbofin Heritage Museum (supporting existing centre) – community run; • Clifden Cultural Centre (including replica of Alcock & Brown plane) – in partnership with the private sector (proposed); • Roundstone Cultural Centre (photographs and social history of village, folklore, emigration stories, Tim Robinson, Nimmo, religious history, fishing life) – community run (proposed); • Centre for Gaeltacht Heritage and Culture – this could include material from the Ionad Oidhreachta Leitir Mealláin Heritage Centre (proposed); • Áras Éanna on Inis Oirr (exhibitions, courses, music, videos of island life, trade) (support existing) • Ionad Árann Heritage Centre on Inis Mor (information hub to include arts and craft workshops and demonstrations, history and artefacts of the islands, interpretation and videos telling the literature, arts, crafts, folklore, island life and Aran sweater stories, Tim Robinson maps, and language workshops) (proposed). 	Medium Term	GM GCC CAITN UnaG	CnO, FORUM, GDC, HC, LT, FI
<p>8.3 Work with the Connemara Breeders Association to explore ways of growing and establishing the Connemara Pony Show as a major international event with food and music as key components.</p>	Medium Term	FI, GCC	CCC, FORUM, CAITN, TI
<p>8.4 Include pub music and dance nights on the Fáilte Ireland Events listing to be promoted through the Discover Ireland website. Relaunch the Connemara Music Trail Concept.</p>	Short Term	FI, CAITN,	FORUM, LC, GDC, UnaG
<p>8.5 Increase the profile of Teach Ceoil Traditional Arts Centre in Tully as a centre for Irish music, dance and story-telling, and work with Cuan Studios in An Spidéal in developing new experiences in music.</p>	Medium Term	FI	
<p>8.6 Create new and promote existing packages and itineraries based around Irish traditional culture to encourage overnight stays and marketable experiences.</p>	Short Term	FI	FORUM, LC, UnaG, GDC CAITN
<p>8.7 Work in harmony with the recently launched Irish Language Plan for the region to ensure visitors’ interaction with the Irish language, and that the Irish speaking community’s role in this interaction is positive and memorable. Develop training within existing workshops on using the Irish language within a business</p>	Ongoing	UnaG	FI

EXPERIENCE 9: Distinctive Flavours of Land & Sea

Actions		Timeframe	Lead	Partner
9.1	Further assess the feasibility of reviewing the by-laws in relation to the operation of seasonal local food kiosks at select Discovery Points e.g. mussels at Leenane. This provides visitors with an opportunity to buy local food, engage with local people and receive recommendations about other places to go – significantly enhancing their experience of the area.	Short Term	GCC	FI, CAITN, BIM
9.2	Encourage food related businesses in the Connemara and Aran Islands to use Fáilte Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way food story toolkit to help promote their business in overseas markets.	Immediate	FI	CAITN, UnaG
9.3	Catalyst 10: Support existing and create new innovative food festivals. Existing food festivals combine local food with music, dance and guided walks and showcase the area – such as the Connemara Mussel Festival in Renvyle and Bia Bofinne – these should be supported and given the opportunity to grow. Opportunities to develop new food festivals to be investigated, such as a Cill Chiaráin Seafood Festival based around native oysters, scallops and traditional music. This could be linked to St. Macdara's Day on 17th July.	Medium Term	GCC	FI, CAITN, GDC, BIM, UnaG
9.4	Explore opportunities to link existing aquaculture, farm and fisheries producers with tourism experiences and food businesses.	Medium Term	BIM, UnaG	FI, CAITN, GCC
9.5	Work with Connemara and Aran Island accommodation providers and restaurants to put local food on menus and celebrate local produce through highlighting the local stories and using the Irish language. This may require development of a network of local providers to reduce costs for purchasers.	Short Term	GCC	FI, CAITN, BIM, UnaG
9.6	Encourage and facilitate seasonal food markets e.g. coastal markets.	Medium Term	GCC	FI, CAITN, BIM
9.7	Support community kitchens in villages in delivering cookery courses and 'learn how to days' – e.g. how to make wheaten bread.	Medium Term	GCC, CAITN	FI BIM
9.8	Create saleable experience package and itineraries based around cookery courses. Consider creation of a Connemara Food Trail with signature dishes.	Short Term	CAITN FI	GCC BIM
9.9	Promote food festivals and local food as part of the 'Taste the Atlantic' brand and the 'Galway West of Ireland – European Region of Gastronomy' with consistent labelling and marketing. Implement the objectives of the 'From the Ground Up – Feeding our Future' programme.	Medium Term	GCC, CAITN	FI, TI, BB, BIM, LC, UnaG

EXPERIENCE 10: Encounter ‘Savage Beauty’ Through the Arts

Actions	Timeframe	Lead	Partner
10.1	Continue to support and expand the Clifden International Arts Festival. This highly successful event has the potential to be further developed to include events during the same period in Roundstone and Letterfrack.	Short Term	FI GCC CCC, LT, FORUM
10.2	Relevant stakeholders could investigate the opportunity to purchase JM Synge’s cottage on Inis Meáin and assess the feasibility to upgrade as an enhanced visitor attraction. This could include purchase of a neighbouring building as the primary visitor centre. There is potential to also consider similar use of Liam O’Flaherty’s cottage on Inis Mor.	Medium Term	CAITN FI, GCC, UnaG
10.3	Promote ‘Made in Galway’ brand for crafts and promote craft makers throughout the area. Establish a craft trail with appropriate signage, marketing and promotion.	Short Term	FI, GCC CCI, UnaG, CAITN, LT, CnO, FORUM
10.4	Assess the feasibility of establishing a Connemara and Aran Islands Writers Trail with associated signage, promotional literature, online stories and events. This could include ‘talking’ signage. Promote in overseas markets.	Short Term	CAITN UnaG, FORUM, FI, GCC
10.5	Hold literary events at Padraic Pearse’s Cottage Visitor Centre.	Short Term	OPW UnaG, CAITN
10.6	Establish a Connemara and Aran Islands Artists Trail to provide visitors with the opportunities to connect with local artists and artisans. This could be on set dates involving ‘open studios’, rather than a permanent trail.	Short Term	GCC, UnaG CAITN, FORUM
10.7	Expand on the existing concept of a Connemara and Aran Islands Film Trail (see Discover Ireland)	Medium Term	Galway Film Centre
10.8	Create saleable experience packages and itineraries based around writing, photography and art.	Short Term	FI, CAITN FI
10.9	Explore opportunities to develop the traditional music festival TradPhicnic in An Spidéal and Féile Joe Einníú in Carna .	Medium Term	UnaG CAITN
10.10	Investigate a way in which the books and maps of Tim Robinson can be celebrated and exhibited, and explore building on his concept of Roundstone Conversations.	Medium Term	CAITN LT, NUI Galway

The remainder of this chapter looks at “Enablers of Success”. These are measures and initiatives that need to be undertaken or put in place to ensure the successful implementation of this plan and the development of experiences that can provide compelling reasons to stay longer in Connemara and the Aran Islands.

ENABLER 1: Coordination & Collaboration

Actions		Timeframe	Lead	Partner
E1.1	Establish a Connemara & Aran Islands Tourism Network (CAITN) , made up of representatives of each of the local tourism groups working together and meeting every four months. This group needs a set of clearly defined roles and responsibilities and terms of reference to assist in implementation of this Plan.	Immediate	LC Tourism Groups	FI, FORUM, GCC, UnaG, NPWS
E1.2	Formation of an Implementation Group with representatives from the agencies and two representatives from the Connemara & Aran Islands Tourism Network to identify the ideal model to resource and implement the actions in the Connemara Coast & the Aran Islands Plan.	Immediate	CTN AITN	FI, FORUM, GCC, UnaG, CAITN, NPWS
E1.3	Through a facilitated workshop agree on the roles of the Implementation Group of agencies for future funding of actions related to the Plan.	Immediate	FI	FORUM, GCC, UnaG, CAITN, NPWS
E1.4	Disseminate information on business supports. This will involve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing access to guidance material such as Fáilte Ireland tools for visitor experience development, sales and digital marketing, mentoring, trade fair supports and business development training; legal requirements; tourism trade performance; marketing, finance and auditing; environmental resource management; retaining authenticity; and opportunities for innovation; Supporting the development and improvement of product offerings, supporting sustainability, and adopting the Wild Atlantic Way Brand Charter; Building capacity for cross promotion among businesses; Exploring social enterprise models which would deliver micro enterprise artisan products to customers, and develop incubators. 	Ongoing	FI GCC	FORUM, CCC, UnaG, FCLTC, CAITN, NPWS

ENABLER 2: Enhancing Visitor Awareness of Connemara Coast & Aran Islands Experiences

Actions		Timeframe	Lead	Partner
E2.1	Undertake a review of the positioning and current branding of Connemara & Aran Islands within the context of the Wild Atlantic Way and this Visitor Experience Development Plan.	Short Term	CAITN, GCC	FI, FORUM, UnaG
E2.2	Encourage all Connemara and Aran Islands tourism businesses to make sure they are represented on the Wild Atlantic Way website . Continue to promote these information channels.	Ongoing	CAITN	FI
E2.3	Organise a series of familiarisation trips for tourism trade within Connemara and the Aran Islands so that in-area referrals become common place and perceived barriers are minimised.	Ongoing	CAITN	FI
E2.4	Introduce familiarisation training for Fáilte Ireland Tourism Information Officers in Galway so they can recommend hero products and experiences from first hand experience.	Ongoing	FI	CAITN, GCC
E2.5	Prioritise promotion of events and trails which promote Connemara as a cohesive destination including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connemara Walking Festival (1.4) • Connemara Greenway (2.1) • Made in Galway (10.3) • Connemara Food Trail (9.7) • Connemara and Aran Islands Writers Trail (10.4) • Connemara and Aran Islands Artists Trail exhibitions and courses (10.6) 	Ongoing	FI, TI	CAITN, GCC

ENABLER 3: Animating the destination through festivals and events

Actions		Timeframe	Lead	Partner
E3.1	Support existing festivals and investigate opportunities for new events where these promote the themes and experiences identified in this plan. Of particular interest will be those festivals and events that encourage a sense of cohesion and collaboration within both the Connemara and Aran Islands areas. These efforts should be in the context of GCC's goal to promote Galway as 'the Capital of Festivals' with signature events that will attract international visitors.	Short Term Ongoing	FI GCC	CAITN, FORUM, UnaG, Diaspora
E3.2	Strengthen Signature Festivals for Galway through extending relevant events into Connemara and the Aran Islands.	Ongoing	GCC	CAITN, FORUM, UnaG
E3.3	Develop guidelines to assist communities in hosting festivals, including providing advice on waste management and resources to improve the greening of festivals through the development of 'Greening Galway's Festivals and resource management' pack; and, capacity building in demonstrating event-friendliness and hosting. Review festival and event hosting capabilities in towns and villages for European Capital of Culture 2020 (i.e. auditing and mapping resources such as GAA grounds, town squares, fields, temporary venues, road access, parking and associated costs including remediation and environmental risks).	Short Term Ongoing	GCC	FI, CAITN, LNT, ECOC
E3.4	Continue to support the emerging trend toward the development of integrated activities within events, such as food festivals and trails.	Ongoing	GCC	CAITN, FORUM, UnaG
E3.5	Ensure that all festivals are promoted within GCC's Annual Events Calendar. Use festivals and events to extend the tourism season and expand visitor and community experiences.	Ongoing	GCC	CAITN
E3.6	Develop community capacity to monitor and report the economic impact of festivals and events.	Short Term Ongoing	FI GCC	CAITN, FORUM, UnaG

ENABLER 4: Inspire and Create Confidence in Sharing Stories / Tabhar Spreagadh agus Cruthaigh Muinín i dTaobh Scéalta a Roinnt

Actions	Timeframe	Lead	Partner
E4.1 Rollout of the Workbook and hard copy training and support materials for operators to use in their everyday business operations that make it easier to get involved in sharing their piece of the Connemara Coast & Aran Islands story.	Short Term	FI	CAITN
E4.2 Undertake Connemara Coast & Aran Islands Business Support delivered by the agencies to help deliver the Visitor Experience Development Plan. Business Support requirements to be led by a training needs analysis.	Short Term	FI, FORUM, UnaG	CAITN
E4.3 Take five Connemara Coast & Aran Islands operators to promote at overseas trade and consumer shows – i.e. Meitheal, telling the Connemara Coast & Aran Islands Stories.	Short Term	FI	CAITN, TI, Trade
E4.4 CTN and AITN will work closely with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to encourage and support both press and trade familiarisation visits. There will be a particular focus on season extension, events, business and high spend visitors, and visitor dispersal around the county.	Short Term	CAITN	FI, TI, FORUM, Trade
E4.5 Through the Connemara Coast & Aran Islands Visitor Experience Implementation Group, continue to align the Business support activities of key agencies to assist businesses to deliver the Visitor Experience Development Plan, and build awareness and understanding of the importance of embracing the Plan within their business, upskilling themselves and their businesses.	Medium Term	FI, FORUM, UnaG	CAITN, GCC., OPW/ DAHRRGA, Trade
E4.6 Continue to support Fáilte Ireland's Food Ambassador and Wild Atlantic Way Ambassador Programmes which will educate and develop awareness among every Galway business and their staff of the importance of tourism to Galway.	Medium Term	FI, FORUM, UnaG	CAITN, GCC
E4.7 Support the provision of educational support, training workshops and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) within the outdoor recreation and adventure industry to enable those involved to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance their adventure products, including incorporating stronger storytelling; Identify and incorporate relevant best practices; Enhance their awareness of Irish heritage, culture and the environment; Highlight opportunities to provide inclusive services and allow access for all. 	Medium Term	FORUM, CAITN, FCLTC, Tourism Groups	FI, GCC, GRETB, GMTI, NUI Galway

ENABLER 5: Management of Visitor Infrastructure that Enhances Visitor Experience

Actions	Timeframe	Lead	Partner
<p>E5.1 At key destinations (e.g. Discovery Points and urban areas) consider reviewing management requirements for visitors travelling via bus, rail, car, e-car, RVs, bicycle, boat/ yacht, or with caravans, including lay-bys/ passing bays (e.g. at Recess), interpretation sites, parking and charging, locations to stay over-night (camping/ caravan/RV sites), beach facilities, and storage facilities for canoes and bicycles – and assess the feasibility of responding to these requirements.</p> <p>Determine route way capacities – pinch points and carrying capacity at peak visitor periods, and assess the feasibility of implementing route/ traffic management options (e.g. at Letterfrack and Doolough).</p>	Short Term	GCC	FI, DoT, NRA, LT NPWS
<p>E5.2 Carry out a feasibility assessment on the introduction of a Galway-Clifden-Leenane-Westport shuttle bus. There is strong demand for such a service from the local community in the Leenane area. It is thought that the introduction of a service would greatly enhance the viability of local tourism related businesses and would offer an enhanced service and experience for those visitors without a car. It also has the capacity to reduce vehicular traffic and will improve accessibility for international travellers.</p>	Short Term	GCC, MCC	DoT, NPWS
<p>E5.3 Seek clarity from ferry operators regarding ferry times to the Aran Islands and request that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optimise timetables to enable an increase in overnight stays, particularly during the shoulder and summer seasons. Avoiding an early morning departure will also improve the experience. Enable visitors to engage in ‘island hopping’, which is currently not feasible. 	Short Term	CAITN	FO, AITN, GCC
<p>E5.4 Assess the feasibility of upgrading the Connemara Loop off the Wild Atlantic Way, including upgrading of existing viewpoints in line with the <i>Connemara Infrastructure & Interpretation Plan</i>, where appropriate.</p>	Medium Term	FI	GAA, CTN

ENABLER 6: Responsible Tourism & Visitor Impact Monitoring

Actions	Timeframe	Lead	Partner
<p>E6.1 Assess the feasibility of developing and implementing visitor management plans, and monitor the quality of visitor experiences and local social/cultural impact at key sites. Implement necessary controls to prevent reduced visitor experiences, environmental damage, and negative host community impacts. Inis Oírr and Inis Mor are key sites to monitor and manage as a priority. Such a Plan may be required to be subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment, Appropriate Assessment screening and full assessments where relevant.</p>	Short Term	GCC MCC	FI, LT
<p>E6.2 Consider the introduction of a compulsory visitor payback scheme for all ferry operators accessing the Aran Islands. Visitor management costs money, and it is a normal part of many tourist areas to run a visitor payback scheme. Options could entail a euro of the boat fare going towards visitor management. This revenue could come from the GCC portion and would form a fund for visitor management and could also be used for match funding for grants. The co-operatives would appear to be the obvious organisations to manage a visitor payback scheme. Lough Lomond and the Trossachs in Scotland have recently introduced a visitor payback scheme that might be a useful model to review.</p>	Medium Term	CAITN	FO, FI, GCC
<p>E6.3 Encourage the adoption of a responsible tourism approach with ongoing monitoring of environmental impacts. The quality of the environment in Connemara and the Aran Islands underpins the visitor offering and must be protected. The outcomes of environmental monitoring (e.g. via the Wild Atlantic Way Monitoring Programme) will be critical to maintaining the integrity of the experience and the environment. Businesses should be encouraged to minimize impacts with regards to water, waste and energy, and through supporting Galway County Council's Greening Galway Festivals initiative. Water management issues on Inis Oírr may need to be addressed through implementing a minimum two-night stay requirement in peak season.</p>	Short/Long Term	GCC	DoT, FI
<p>E6.4 Encourage tourism related businesses to engage in the Leave No Trace programme.</p>	Ongoing	LNT	
<p>E6.5 Ensure Connemara and the Aran Islands visitor experiences are accessible to all where possible – (accepting that some attractions such as Dún Aonghasa preclude this).</p>	Medium Term	GCC	CAITN
<p>E6.6 Introduce and implement minimum standards for tour guides (including minibus and jarvey operators) on the Aran Island. Avoid promoting those that do not comply with minimum standards of provision of a quality and safe experience.</p>	Short Term	GCC FI	CAITN, LC

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

As a part of implementing the framework for developing memorable visitor experiences, Fáilte Ireland has committed to pursuing the principles of Responsible Tourism as set out in the Cape Town Declaration (2002). As such, the following measures of success have been established around the four key components of Responsible Tourism: that is a balance between visitors, industry, community and the environment. These measures are to serve as key performance indicator areas which should be reported on annually to help ensure that responsible and sustainable tourism growth is achieved in the Connemara Coast and Aran Islands region.



Performance Indicator	Measure	Source
Visitors		
Increase average length of stay	Visitor Nights, Numbers	FI Statistics
Improve brand / proposition awareness	Website Traffic	Google Analytics
Improve visitor satisfaction	Visitor satisfaction Survey	Holiday Maker Survey
Extend the length of the season	Off-peak Visitation	FI Statistics
Increase visitor take-up of key messages	Use of Hashtags	Social Media
Industry		
Increase visitor expenditure	Visitor Spend	FI Statistics
Increase tourism related jobs	Number Employed in Tourism Related Sectors	Central Statistics Office
Increase industry take-up of key messages	Use of Hashtags	Social Media
Community		
Assess community impact and improve community perceptions of tourism	Community Survey	To be designed
Community Association involvement in Tourism Committees	Local Tourism Committees with Community Representation	Tourism Committee Reports
Increase community involvement	Event Participation	Event Organisers
Environment		
Effective management of the environment, including natural, cultural and heritage assets	Environmental Impacts of Key Sites	FI Wild Atlantic Way Environmental Monitoring Programme
Trade adoption of the principles of Leave No Trace	Number of Trade Adopted	Trade Websites

6

APPENDIX



A wide range of stakeholders were consulted during the course of the preparation of this plan.

Individual organisations and agencies include:

- Clifden Chamber of Commerce
- Coiste Forbartha an Spidéal, Inverin
- Comhar na nOileán CTR
- Comhairle Ceantar na n-Oileán, Leitir Móir
- Fáilte Ireland
- Forbairt Chonamara Lár Teo Carna
- FORUM Connemara Ltd
- Galway County Council
- Inishbofin Development Company
- Inis Mór Cooperative
- Kylemore Abbey
- Leenane Development Association
- National Parks & Wildlife Service
- Rural Recreation Officer
- Údarás na Gaeltachta

The views of local communities along the Connemara Coast and islands and on the Aran Islands were of fundamental importance in the development of the plan.

Public meetings were held in nine locations and were attended by 330 people over a 10-day period during January 2017.

TEAM Tourism would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who attended these meetings and met on-site – for their input, advice and generous hospitality.

In addition to the consultation, a significant number of plans and strategies have informed this plan. These include:

- Tourism Development & Innovation – A Strategy for Investment 2016-2022, Fáilte Ireland
- Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme 2015-2019, Fáilte Ireland
- Galway County Development Plan 2015-2021
- Galway to 2025 – Draft Tourism Strategy for Galway
- New Directions for Tourism in the West, ITIC
- Aran Islands Interpretation Plan, URS 2012
- Connemara Infrastructure and Interpretation Plan, the Paul Hogarth Company, 2012
- FORUM Connemara Ltd – Local Development Strategy 2014-2021
- FORUM Connemara Ltd – Local Development Strategy Area Profile
- Recreational Trail Assessment - Connemara National Park, National Trails Office 2015
- Study of Outdoor Recreation in the West, Border, Midland & Western Regional Assembly, 2014
- Connemara Greenway – Clifden to Oughterard – Natura Impact Statement, RPS 2012
- Leenane Killary Fjord Adventure Hub Feasibility Study, 2013
- Economic Baseline Summary Overview – Galway County
- From the Ground Up - Feeding our Future
- Report on the – Blueway Pilot 2014

Email communication regarding strategies in development from:

- Údarás na Gaeltachta
- National Parks & Wildlife Service – Connemara National Park

Responsible travel takes many forms and, while different destinations and stakeholders will have different priorities, all will pursue the following common elements:

- Minimising negative economic, environmental and social impacts;
- Generating greater economic benefits for local people and enhancing the wellbeing of host communities, improving working conditions and access to the industry;
- Involving local people in decisions that affect their lives and life changes;
- Making positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, to the maintenance of the world's diversity;
- Providing more enjoyable experiences for visitors through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues;
- Providing access for physically challenged people;
- Engendering respect between tourists and hosts - culturally sensitive, and building local pride and confidence.

Responsible Tourism can be regarded as behaviour. It is more than a form of tourism as it represents an approach to engaging with tourism, be that as a tourist, a business, locals within a destination or any other tourism stakeholder. It emphasises that all stakeholders are responsible for the kind of tourism they develop or engage in. In the context of tourism development in Connemara it is essential that any such development take place in accordance with proper planning and environmental procedures, and does not negatively impact the local environment.

Whilst different groups will see responsible tourism in different ways, the shared understanding is that there should be an improvement in tourism. The 'industry' should become 'better' as a result of the responsible tourism approach. Within the notion of betterment resides the acknowledgement that conflicting interests need to be balanced. However, the objective is to create better places for people to live in and to visit.





“People will forget what you said, they will forget what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel”

“Déanfaidh daoine dearmad ar cad a dúirt tú, déanfaidh siad dearmad ar cad a rinne tú, ach ní dhéanfaidh siad dearmad riamh ar chonas a mhothaigh siad de bharr tusa.”

- Maya Angelou



Fáilte Ireland

National Tourism Development Authority



WILD ATLANTIC WAY

SLÍ AN ATLANTAIGH FHIÁIN