



# Innovation in Irish Tourism

Researched by

Students from Mercy Mounthawk Secondary School, Tralee, Co. Kerry,  
Ireland

Co-Ordinated by Stella O'Shea

amadeus



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Innovation is this amazing  
intersection between someone's  
imagination and the reality in  
which they live

Ron Johnson, CEO, JCPenney<sup>1</sup>

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Board of Management of Mercy Mounthawk and Mr John O' Roarke, our school principal, for supporting our participation in this research project.

Thanks also to GTTP and all of the partners below for organising the research competition and for hosting their annual conference in Nice. We are most grateful for the assistance and support provided by their Irish representative, Natasha Kinsella.

We would also like to sincerely thank our Transition Year teacher Mrs. Stella O'Shea, for helping us throughout the course of this research project and Mr Ronan Redican, our transition year coordinator, for facilitating our participation in this GTTP competition.

This research project has been very enjoyable. It has been interesting to work together, to see how innovation in tourism is fostered in Ireland. Together we learned many new skills, both educational and personal. We have seen a new side to tourism in Ireland and we recommend all students of any tourism course to seize the opportunity to take part in future GTTP research competitions.

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."

~ William Butler Yeats (1865–1939)



# Introduction

Innovation or “nuálaíocht” in Irish, is the action or process of innovating. Innovation is crucial to the continuing success of any organization.<sup>1</sup> This project aims to show how innovation in Irish tourism is evident and how it is encouraged and rewarded.

One need not look any further than the GTTP partners to see how innovation, when effectively fostered, can lead to success and reward in any economic sphere. The scope of this study does not permit an examination of international innovation in tourism and while all GTTP partners are innovative in their own respective fields, during our research we have marveled at the innovative practice that has led these partners to become worldwide leaders in their respective fields.

- **Amadeus** has been a leading innovator in the global travel and tourism industry, whose share distribution worldwide, has, facilitated by existing innovation, increased steadily year on year from 2010 to 2016.<sup>2</sup>
- **American Express** is the third most popular credit card of 2017 in the form of *American Express Platinum Cashback Everyday Credit Card*.<sup>3</sup>
- **Marriott International** was recently named as the Forbes 2017 World’s Most Innovative Company.
- **Hertz** is currently the largest airport general use car rental brand globally.<sup>4</sup>
- **Carlson Family Foundation** is a business started in 1938 with an idea and a \$55 loan by entrepreneur Curtis L. Carlson and has to date, acquired dozens of additional businesses, including T.G.I. Friday's and Radisson Hotels.<sup>5</sup>
- **Dnata** is an innovative GTTP partner who has successfully tested the use of block chain technology.<sup>6</sup>

This is a random sample yet it is obvious that the GTTP partners are amongst the most innovative and inspirational pioneers in the global hospitality sector.

Tourism is one of Ireland’s vital industries. Up to 200,000 people work in the wider tourism and hospitality industry. Over 6.5 million overseas visitors are attracted annually, contributing €4.3 billion to the Irish economy. A further 7 million domestic trips generate €1.3 billion. When combined, the tourism industry generated €5.6 billion revenue in 2013. Of this amount, it is estimated that €1.4 billion directly benefits the exchequer through

taxation.<sup>7</sup> It is crucial that innovative ideas are brought to fruition in the tourism industry in order to meet the demands of a the tourist living in an ever evolving virtual world.

This research will use two case studies to show how two Irish visitor attractions have modified their visitor experience to satisfy the needs of their visitors having analysed how tourists like to “participate” in visitor attractions rather than simply visit them. Both use similar innovative methods in their venue. We shall examine how Irish tourism bodies foster innovation by educating second-level students in tourism related careers, by encouraging the development of new tourist experiences and by recognising best practice and rewarding excellence in the tourism sector. Finally, this research will outline the various challenges to the maintenance of innovation in the Irish tourism sector.

# Mercy Mounthawk Secondary School

Mercy Secondary School, Mounthawk is the largest school in Tralee and has approximately 1,200 pupils and 100 teachers. It is co-educational, was opened in 2001, and offers a wide range of subjects and excellent extra-curricular activities.

The Mounthawk campus provides the most modern of educational facilities. The Science Department has two general science labs and three more dedicated to physics, chemistry and biology. It also has a demonstration room and a science classroom. All classes are equipped with digital projectors and computer network. The school has three computer rooms, two fully equipped home economics rooms, a woodwork room, a specialised construction studies room, an engineering room and a specialized technical graphics room. It also has a library with lending facilities, three art rooms, a music and drama room and a dance studio. The school has invested in providing quality facilities including one of the finest school gyms in the country, a full sized Gaelic football and hurling pitch, two sand-based training pitches, five outdoor courts lined for tennis and basketball. A fitness suite was opened to mark the 10 year anniversary and is used by staff and students.

The school stages a musical theatre production every second year to tremendous acclaim and with huge student participation both on and off stage. On alternate years, Mercy Mounthawk stages a drama and celebrated two awards in the 2016 Bord Gáis Energy Student Theatre Awards: Best Set Category for its set design in the school's production 'Les Misérables' and also – Best Overall School Play for the school's production of 'The Plough and the Stars'.

Our school was one of the first in the country to participate in the Tourism Insight Initiative, recently shortlisted for The Education Awards 2018 and we were proud to represent Ireland at the GTTP Research Award in November 2017. Stephanie Keane and Marta Gacek, both transition year students, presented their findings on Bleisure Tourism in Ireland and began what the school hopes to be a continued body of research into the world of Irish Tourism in association with Tourism Insight and the GTTP.

## Project Authors



**Sarah Healy**. I am 16 years old and I am a fifth year student at Mercy Mounthawk Secondary School, Tralee, Ireland. I have always had a keen interest in travelling to different countries to learn about new cultures and to see new landscapes. I live next to the beach in the beautiful Ballyheigue on the Wild Atlantic Way and I am very appreciative of the natural beauty County Kerry has to offer. I am keen to travel the world after school and would like to pursue a career in the tourism industry. In completing this project, I have expanded my knowledge of “Innovation in tourism in Ireland”. I am delighted to present our school’s project at the annual GTTP conference and I shall embrace the opportunity it grants me to learn about other countries and cultures.



**Charlotte O'Halloran**. I am a 16 year old fifth year student in Mercy Mounthawk Secondary School, Tralee, Ireland. I was born in Tralee but my dad is Spanish. This has led me to have a huge interest in tourism and different cultures from a very young age. Travelling and learning about the tourism sector is something about which, I am really passionate. I have already learned so much from researching the topic of ‘Innovation in Tourism in Ireland’ and I have realised that it is something that really excites and interests me. I think this is such an important subject as both tourism and innovation are very important aspects of the Irish economy today. I am so grateful to have been given this fantastic opportunity and I look forward to meeting with new people in Nice and seeing what other students my age have discovered during their research around the globe.



## Project Team Members



Erin Griffin



Mairead Kearney



Michael Kerins



Ellie Mc Elligott



Lucy O Carroll



Alison O Leary



Jasmine Ryle

## Teacher's Note

I have been teaching at Mercy Mounthawk Secondary School since it opened in 2001. Our school is located on the outskirts of Tralee, a large town in Co. Kerry in southern Ireland. Tralee is a popular tourist destination and Tralee locals are very much aware of the importance of tourism to the local economy. During their holidays, many students from Mercy Mounthawk work in tourist-related employment. They realise from a young age, that tourism is something which continually changes along with the evolving needs of inbound tourists. Students have also seen how Fáilte Ireland innovatively changes its marketing strategy to attract different tourists from around the world. In recent years they have enticed millions of visitors from all corners of the world to be part of “The Gathering”, and to visit the “Wild Atlantic Way” and “Ireland’s Ancient East”.

I have been teaching tourism courses for several years and my students and I are delighted to submit our project for the GTTP Research Award Competition again in 2018.

This year, my transition year students have been enthusiastic and hard-working in their research and they have together, produced a fine piece of work. They have just begun their careers in tourism and I look forward to seeing how these unfold after they leave school.

This group has, through their research, learned valuable teamwork skills and I have enjoyed seeing their satisfaction as the project was completed.

This research demonstrates how innovation can begin with an idea by motivated people in a locality. It also details how an existing ancient attraction can be brought to life using interactive technology to enthral visitors who will no doubt endorse and recommend friends and family to visit. Our study shall also examine how Ireland initiates, encourages and rewards those tourism groups who strive innovatively forward to prosper from the enjoyment that visitors experience in Ireland. It demonstrates that the foresight shown by Fáilte Ireland in planning and fostering innovation in the Irish tourist industry, exemplifies good practice which, if adopted by other countries, would see a world-wide peak in innovative ideas by those working in tourism. The practice of rewarding this innovation, as the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation does, encourages future endeavour in an industry which is evolving as continually as the needs of the consumer. Ireland is indeed an excellent case study in best practice in “Innovation in Tourism”.

Stella O’ Shea

# Innovation in Irish Tourism

## Irish Tourism in 2017

According to the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation, more people than ever took an international trip worldwide in 2017. As tourism continues on an upward trajectory with year on year growth, the Irish tourism industry is now worth an estimated €8.7 billion annually.<sup>8</sup> This growth is directly linked to the innovation demonstrated by several tourism sectors from education to the hospitality industry. Up to 25,000 new jobs were created in the Irish tourism industry since 2015 and the tourism and hospitality sector now sustains 230,000 people in employment. In volume terms, 2017 was another record year for the number of visitors, with an estimated 8.9 million staying visitors, up almost 3% on 2016.<sup>9</sup> Indicators from businesses across the country suggest that most areas have enjoyed increased demand over the past 12 months. Dublin and key tourism destinations, including Galway, Killarney, and the western seaboard, have reported particularly strong demand and an increasing number of tourist attractions and a growing hospitality industry have responded to this. The Government decision to maintain the 9% VAT rate on tourism services, and the suspension of the Air Travel Tax, continue to help Ireland to remain competitive in the international marketplace on the back of efficiencies and better value offerings from tourism businesses.<sup>10</sup>

## Development in Irish Tourism

Fáilte Ireland is the National Tourism Development Authority which supports the tourism industry and works to sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourism destination. Fáilte Ireland seeks out new innovative tourism-related ideas from communities and helps to bring them to fruition.



They provides a range of practical business supports to help tourism businesses better manage and market their products and services. They work with state agencies and representative bodies, at local and national levels, in order to implement and champion positive and practical strategies that will benefit Irish tourism and the Irish economy. Fáilte Ireland also promotes Ireland as a holiday destination through a domestic marketing

campaign (DiscoverIreland.ie) and manages a network of nationwide tourist information centres that provide help and advice for visitors to Ireland.<sup>11</sup>

Fáilte Ireland has adopted an investment strategy for Tourism in Ireland following extensive consultation undertaken with a diverse number of stakeholders in the Irish Tourist Industry. Through this investment strategy Fáilte Ireland seeks to encourage the development of new experiences, and provide opportunities for creative and technology companies to engage with the visitor experience. Fáilte Ireland currently encourages applications for funding from partners and groups who propose innovative and creative ideas in the Tourist Industry. They host innovation workshops and webinars for partners and applicants to stimulate ideas and discussion and provide funding for technical assistance which bring project proposals through the design and development stages. They provide interested groups with market and consumer insights and trends to ensure that those interested in being innovative in relation to tourism have the up to date information required to ensure projects are evidence based and market driven.<sup>12</sup> This whole strategy will be a catalyst for the development of new tourism experiences in towns, villages, attractions and activities, and new opportunities within tourism.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Targeting innovative projects in Tourism.**

Interview on 22 April 2018 with Michael Keenan, Customer Support Team at Fáilte Ireland.

Many factors such as the geographical location or demographics of operators must be taken into account when engaging with groups who need support and guidance. Operators can approach Fáilte Ireland seeking help, support and advice. Fáilte Ireland can also approach the operators when they become aware of developing brand concepts or a particular current product or experience. They reach out to, offer assistance, and target many different services- from hotels, to someone starting in the accommodation sector to walking groups. These different services require different kinds of assistance and Fáilte Ireland works to support them several ways. Fáilte Ireland encourages innovative projects with financial, backing and support. This encouragement often happens through workshops and events around every aspect of the tourism journey. These could range from customer service support, to social media enhancement, to training workshops. They work to encourage various innovative projects and tackle both specific matters and general issues.<sup>14</sup>

### **Education for Irish Tourism**

Innovation in tourism is fuelled by young people who are familiar the social and economic value of tourism. This innovation can be tapped if educators target those students who already have an interest in the tourism and hospitality sector.

The establishment of a programme called **Tourism Insight** in 2016 has been instrumental in targeting students in transition year. This is a free interactive online programme providing valuable tourism insights to transition year students and other learners, informing them of career options within the tourism industry.<sup>15</sup>



This programme was developed by Natasha Kinsella ex CEO of the Irish Hospitality Institute, now Regional Skills Manager Dublin and Mary-Rose Stafford, Institute of Technology Tralee. It was co-founded by Fáilte Ireland, Irish Hospitality Institute, Irish Hotels Federation and the Technological Higher Education Authority and it promotes links with the GTTP. Tourism Insight has been nationally acknowledged for its educational excellence having been nominated for The Education Awards 2018. These awards have been designed to recognise, encourage and celebrate excellence among third level education providers across the island of Ireland, representing both state and privately funded institutions.<sup>16</sup> Tourism Insight, allows transition year students and other learners the opportunity to learn about the tourism sector and it presents the tourism sector as a potential career choice. Exposing young people to career opportunities in the tourism industry at second level, is instrumental in harnessing future innovation in the Irish tourism industry.

## Innovation Awards in Irish Tourism

The Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC) is the representative body of the Irish tourism industry. It works with government agencies, tourist boards, Tourism Ireland Limited, the EU, and other organisations whose activities impact on tourism. In particular, the focus is on research, case-making and influencing policies, which shape the future of Ireland's Tourism Industry. Every two years the ITIC hosts The Irish Tourism Industry Awards and these give recognition to and promote people, companies and organisations – overseas and at home – that have made significant contributions to developing, marketing, selling and delivering improved visitor experiences in Ireland and to increasing the number of visitors from overseas.<sup>17</sup>

Since its foundation in 1984, ITIC has become an integral part of the decision-making process on policies and procedures affecting tourism. ITIC is represented through its nominees on the Boards of Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and regional tourism forums. Representation by ITIC members on committee structures within the Tourism Recovery Taskforce enables ITIC to participate in the marketing planning process and to ensure complementarity with the industry's own major investment in overseas marketing.<sup>18</sup>

The Irish Tourism Industry Awards aim to:

- Publicly recognise and reward excellence
- Provide a benchmark for best practice
- Encourage the continuous raising of standards
- Provide better visitor experiences
- Emphasise the value of the tourism sector
- Promote a biennial platform of celebration
- Provide networking opportunities for operators and supporters.<sup>19</sup>

The winners of the 2017 Awards were:<sup>20</sup>

- Best International Access Initiative: Dublin Airport
- Best international Marketing Initiative: MCI Dublin for the World Buiatrics Congress
- Best Leisure Tourism Innovation (city): King John's Castle, Limerick

- Best Leisure Tourism Innovation (county): Westport House, Mayo
- Best Business Tourism Innovation: Green Light Events – Google Sales Conference
- Best Environmental Tourism Innovation: Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park, Co Kildare
- Best Local Authority Tourism Innovation: The Lough Derg Marketing Group (a joint initiative of Tipperary, Clare and Galway County Councils)
- Best Innovative Place to Stay: River Valley Holiday Park, Co Wicklow
- Best Festival/Event Experience (over 50,000 people): Bray Air Display
- Best Festival/Event Experience (under 50,000 people): Aer Lingus College Football Classic 2016
- Best Adventure Experience: Vagabond Tours of Ireland
- Best Food & Beverage Experience: Airfield Estate, Dundrum, Dublin
- Best Cultural Experience (over 100,000 people): GPO Witness History, Dublin
- Best Cultural Experience (under 100,000 people): Cnoc Suain, Connemara, Co Galway
- Special Recognition Award: Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme

These winners cover a range of excellence in many areas of the tourism industry and this research will focus on the two of the locations which won awards for innovation, King John's Castle in Limerick (Best Leisure Tourism in a city) and Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park in Kildare (Best Environmental Tourism Innovation).

## Case Study 1 :King John's Castle

King John's Castle is situated in the heart of medieval Limerick City. Visitors of all ages will find something to inspire and excite them at the brand-new visitor experience at King John's Castle. The stunning new exhibition at King John's Castle brings to life over 800 years of dramatic local history. This 13th Century Castle reopened in June 2013 following a



Maps : <https://www.google.com/maps>

multi-million euro investment (Failte Ireland provided €5.6 million).<sup>21</sup> Among the improvements were a brand-new visitor centre, opened in 2001, interactive exhibitions with computer generated animations, and a café and gift shop with views onto the courtyard and the Shannon river.

Although the site dates back to 922 when the Vikings lived on the Island, the castle itself was built on the orders of King John in 1200. One of the best-preserved Norman castles in Europe, the walls, towers and fortifications remain today and are visitor attractions. The remains of a Viking settlement were uncovered during archaeological excavations at the site in 1900. The massive twin gate towers still stand to their full height.



Picture sources: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King\\_John%27s\\_Castle\\_\(Limerick\)\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_John%27s_Castle_(Limerick))) and <https://www.dolans.ie/liveatthecastle/>





A visit to King John's Castle comprises a walk through the new interactive exhibition with its wide range of interactive activities merged with interesting displays, photos and historical facts, as well as exploring the actual castle itself which is pretty much as it would have looked in the 13th century, only cleaner and a lot safer then when it was built for King John, who never actually visited. There are incredible views high up on the battlements with a 360 panorama of the city and the River Shannon. Touch screen technology and a dazzling array of CGI animations and ghostly projections are all part of the experience.<sup>22</sup> Up to 30 staff are employed in high season and 12 to 15 in low-season. Shannon Group, in particular Shannon Heritage manages the attraction and 113,000 people visited in 2017. Most of these came from America, 75% with 20% from Ireland and the remainder from Italy, Spain and France.<sup>23</sup>

King John's Castle visitors this decade are much different to those of the last decade and the castle's marketing strategy innovatively tailors events to attract a large variety of visitors at different times during the year. Social media and technology have raised visitor expectation and management has realized that it is becoming more essential to impress and involve tourists in their visit to the castle. With this in mind, management has a commercial direction in their business and they listen carefully to feedback at the information desk and via email from their patrons while still maintaining a respect for the castle, its site and its history.<sup>24</sup> Facebook and Trip Advisor are the two main channels used by the marketing team.

King John's Castle has had to "move with the times" and their marketing strategy is flexible and ever changing. The Castle comes alive with Easter egg hunts, scare factories during Halloween and entry is free on St. Patrick's Day. In June 2018, the castle will morph into a cinema, screening two films on one day. This is most innovative.



The needs of the castle's visitors constantly changes and people can now visit the center while enjoying several different events organized during the year. The castle is one of Limerick's newest live music concert venues. Acts that have played live there are The Coronas, Imelda May, Hermitage Green and Gavin James. The castle makes an electric atmosphere and setting.

The 2017 ITIC Award which King John's Castle received for showing the Best Leisure Tourism Innovation in an Irish City, acknowledged the vision shown by the management team. This award has helped with publicity for the venue and it is no doubt encouraging for all involved with King John's Castle to see their innovation recognized nationally amongst their peers. Speaking at the awards event, Eoghan O'Mara-Walsh, Chief Executive of the Irish Tourist Industry Confederation acknowledged the hard work of the team at King John's Castle in recent years. This work, in the face of stiff competition has made it a world-class attraction.<sup>25</sup>



During our interview with with Fiona Kilderry, King John's Castle Operations manager on May 1 2018, Ms Kilderry explained that the key to innovation was "thinking outside the box." By taking inspiration from other venues like Malahide Castle, Bunratty Castle, Craggaunowen and the GPO, King John's Castle continues to be creative in an industry where the tourist expects more than to simply visit a castle. They recognize that

visitors want to “experience” the castle and to be “immersed” in an experience where they can imagine being back amongst the castle walls hundreds of years ago. When we visited we certainly felt that this was the case. We became “time travelers” for the day.

The interactive displays are varied and appeal to all ages. It is possible to try on a helmet and brandish a sword, fire a cannon ball from a cannon and look people from the period “in the eye” thanks to life-sized characters who come to life via television screens and overhead microphones. Costumed guides continue the historical conversation with working displays of weaponry, carpentry, masonry and coinage. One can even walk through the



ruins of the medieval banqueting hall and say a prayer in the newly constructed replica church. The Castle’s staff is mindful of visitors with special needs and caters for them so that they can experience the castle too.

King John’s Castle has been standing tall for 800 years and has witnessed events that have helped to shape modern day Ireland. Bringing together 21<sup>st</sup> century technology and the Castle’s remarkable archeology, <sup>26</sup> the castle will continue to deliver an impressive visitor experience which will no doubt update continually and delight many for several years to come.



## Case Study 2 : Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park

Lullymore is located 30 miles from Dublin between the villages of Rathangan and Allenwood in North West Kildare. Lullymore is a rural community intrinsically linked to peatlands and peat extraction and it was for many years, central to the industrial use of peat for briquette making and generating electricity. Peatlands or bogs in the area which have been harvested by Bord na Mona for energy since the 1940's, are now establishing themselves as a unique visitor experience and have become welcoming habitats for a wide range of flora and fauna.

Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park is helping Mother Nature to reclaim her old territory with its Biodiversity Boardwalk and Peatlands Exhibition. An abundance of wildlife is now flourishing in the park's peatlands since the park was established. The park has been recognized by the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation as a world-class tourist attraction situated in a unique and appealing to all ages by combining education and leisure to provide a unique insight into the Irish peatlands and biodiversity.<sup>27</sup>

Image sources: <http://www.lullymoreheritagepark.com/#> and Ray Stapleton at Lullymore



Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park was founded by the late Seán Judge (seen above) in 1993 and his was not an easy task to establish and develop this new amenity. The innovative founders had a vision of the future and saw what the locality was unable to see at the time. They had to change the local mentality that the bog, which had provided employment in peat extraction for generations, could have other functions. It was difficult to convince local supporters that it was important to return the bog to Mother Nature by blocking the drains and allowing the lakes to form (shown on the following page), as well as acknowledging the significance of peat extraction and the local history of the region. It is not easy to break a locality's mindset with tradition, yet this is exactly how Lullymore Heritage and Discovery

Park began, breaking with tradition and demonstrating innovation in an area where locals had

**DRAINS BLOCKED 04/08/2011**

09/08/2011



17/08/2011



25/08/2011



31/08/2011



15/09/2011



09/10/2011



Images courtesy of Ray Stapleton at Lullymore

to be convinced that the bog had more than the function to provide fuel. From an area which had its peat resources exhausted, has grown a park which employs 40 people including seasonal staff.<sup>28</sup> Manager Ray Stapleton, hopes that Lullymore will have a growing influence on tourism in the Irish midlands and help the area to change from being a transit zone for the most part, to being a destination in its own right.<sup>29</sup>

Lullymore is a special place – a rich, green island surrounded by Ireland’s largest peatland, the Bog of Allen. The Park encompasses 60 acres of meandering trails and exhibitions and is



truly the “Gateway to the Peatlands” for tourists wishing to discover more about one of Ireland’s finest natural treasures. The park tells the story of the Irish midland’s raised bogs and the rural communities living beside them. Visitors have an opportunity to discover how peatlands form, to see the flora and fauna living on them, to learn about past uses and future possibilities for the peatlands and even discover the gruesome secrets of bog bodies.



Little is known about Lullymore in pre-Christian times, but it is thought to have had significant settlements as numerous ancient Togher roads have been discovered leading across the bog to Lullymore. Here, with incredible 3D imagery, one can see a neolithic farmstead and “meet” a “New Stone Age” man.



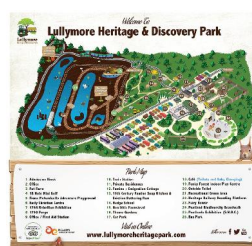
It is also possible to “meet” a Druid named Erc, who, in the fifth century, was the first bishop ordained by St. Patrick, Ireland’s patron saint. Bishop Erc was sent to Lullymore to set up a monastery which would last over a thousand years and become one of the biggest monasteries in the country. Saint Erc & Lullymore Monastery’s fascinating story is told in the Park’s early Christian Centre. Here it is possible to place your foot into St. Patrick’s



stone, a place where St. Patrick once stood! (Image of Lullymore Monastery below courtesy of Ray Stapleton at Lullymore).



The Peatlands Exhibition and Biodiversity Boardwalk at Lullymore are the first of its kind in Ireland. The Biodiversity Boardwalk meanders serenely through glassy lakes and rejuvenating peat land of birch, heathers and bog cotton. It tells the story of how the Irish midlands great raised bogs, 10,000 years in the making are at the dawn of a new era.



Map Source: <http://www.lullymoreheritagepark.com/terms-and-conditions/>

Vistors come to learn about the people of the Peatlands and how the bogs formed, what bogs are made from, the bog's historic secrets, its industrial past and also to discover the beautiful flora and fauna that thrive on peatlands. They can make their way via the longest ecoplastic

boardwalk in Ireland to the SNOC (Stilted Nature Observation Cabin) where they can look out for wildlife from the observation windows and see the forms dug by the hares for shelter, the tide of bog cotton reclaiming its past territory and from where they might also hear the cry of the curlew or songs of skylarks, lapwing and other birds of the bog.

The Peatland Heritage Railway, a new innovation launched in August 2016, offers a 15 minute trip through the scenic peatlands biodiversity area. Lullymore Heritage & Discovery park prides itself on being one of the top family attractions in Ireland. The park's unique rural scenic location and its state of the art play areas make for a refreshing and safe place for families and school tours to enjoy a day out together.



The 1798 Rebellion is also an important part of Lullymore's history. The Parks 1798 Exhibition retells the life story of Captain John Doorly, a native of Lullymore who was executed for his significant role in the uprising. There are many other heritage exhibits from



important eras in Ireland's past to enjoy in Lullymore – the state of the art Famine House constructed on site using traditional methods, Blacksmith's Forge, Hedge School, Fairy Bower and Theme Gardens are full of information which allow visitors to explore the richness of Irish folklore, culture and history.



During a visit one can climb down into the bog and cut some turf by hand using a **sleán**, (a traditional hand tool used for cutting turf) and learn how to **foot** (stack for drying) turf. One can also see the hand held carts used to transport the turf before modern technology and trains took over. There is also a pet farm on site with an unusual collection of pets such as sheep, bog ponies, Fallabella horses, rabbits, chickens, Pygmy goats, pot-bellied pigs and even Dali the Alpaca.



There is a large cafe / shop on site and lots of picnic areas for outdoor dining and parking.

Lullymore's website is unique in that it promotes the entire region as well as its own venue. It is this "openness" in a highly competitive tourist industry which has served Lullymore well over the past year having welcomed over 50,000 people in 2017.<sup>30</sup> Like King John's Castle, Lullymore also caters for themed events during the year, at Christmas, Easter and Halloween.



Pictures: <http://www.lullymoreheritagepark.com/halloween-happenings/>

On the evening when the park received its award from the Irish Tourist Industry Confederation, Eoghan O'Mara-Walsh, Chief Executive of the ITIC, said that "Lullymore Park's success shows that Irish tourism offers visitors something unique. Its setting and location, as well as its facilities, which showcase sustainability and biodiversity, make for a unique offering for tourists at home and abroad."<sup>31</sup>

During our visit in May 2018, we didn't simply visit a Heritage and Biodiversity Park. We "experienced" Lullymore, walked in the footprints of a saint, looked a new stone-age man in the eye, sailed on board a coffin ship and had a truly unique experience, not to be bettered until we return there again.



## Survey Methodology

- Initially a definition of Innovation was arrived at by brainstorming and on-line research. We concluded that for the purposes of our project, innovation is:  
“the action or process of innovating and that innovation is crucial to the continuing success of any organization”<sup>32</sup>
- We researched the topic of innovation in tourism, as recommended in the GTTP Research guidelines, via the following websites: [www.wttc.org](http://www.wttc.org), [www.travelmole.com](http://www.travelmole.com), [www.skift.com](http://www.skift.com), [www.gttp.org/partners/](http://www.gttp.org/partners/).
- We read Fáilte Ireland’s TOURISM DEVELOPMENT & INNOVATION A STRATEGY FOR INVESTMENT 2016-2022.
- We researched the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation and its Awards Programme.
- We narrowed our focus for this project to two case studies;
  1. Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park in Kildare (Winner for best Environmental Tourism Innovation)
  2. King Johns Castle in Limerick (Winner for Best Leisure Tourism in a city).
- We planned a trip to visit these two attractions. Our teacher planned the bus transport, booked our visits to the attractions and we arranged interviews with the managers on the day we planned to visit. Following this we decided on our interview questions and allocated jobs for the trip. One person would ask the interview questions, another would write the answers and another would take the photographs of the interview process. Other research team members would take photos of interest during our visit and collate these for use in the research project and potentially in the research presentation in Nice, in the event that our project would be successful.
- We interviewed Michael Keenan, Customer Support Team in Fáilte Ireland and wrote an analysis of how Fáilte Ireland seeks out operators who are innovative in their areas.
- During our visit to Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park in Kildare and King Johns Castle in Limerick, we interviewed managers at both attractions. Following this we analysed our findings, discussed them and reached our conclusions. We then wrote down our conclusions.
- Finally, our project was typed up and we presented it for consideration to the GTTP.

## Results

The exact impact of Brexit on Ireland's tourism industry has yet to unfold in its entirety. However, given the reduction of visitors from Great Britain this year to date, the continued devaluation of sterling and the impact that has on Ireland's competitiveness as a destination; it is important the industry assess the risks to their business, respond to the changes they are currently experiencing and plan for future eventualities.<sup>33</sup> The Irish Tourist Industry will struggle to halt the decline of demand from Britain, to boost the rate of growth from mainland Europe while capitalising on the strong growth from high spending tourists from North America and further afield.<sup>34</sup> This will require innovation from all Irish Tourism partners on a massive scale.

In a Europe where countries compete strongly to attract visitors from outside Europe, the continuation of the 9% VAT rate on tourism services is critical in safeguarding Ireland's competitiveness. It is crucial that the government protect this rate so that new endeavours in tourism will be cushioned from what is undoubtedly one of the most testing eras in Irish history as Great Britain exits the European Union. Innovation, as shown in both of our case studies generally runs hand in hand with foresight. Foresight in the planning and marketing of both venues will greatly prepare and protect these attractions from an uncertain future where Great Britain will become Ireland's greatest competitor in attracting the overseas foreign visitor.

Investment in destination marketing by the state over the past number of years has diminished global awareness of Ireland as a holiday destination in many markets. This will continue to happen unless adequate resources are made available for marketing Ireland internationally. While the industry continues to invest increasing resources in marketing, the level of investment by the state has been in decline.<sup>35</sup> King John's Castle has benefitted hugely from being a member of the The Shannon Castle & Banquets Heritage DAC Programme<sup>36</sup>, which markets 7 venues in the Shannon Region to an international clientele. Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park on the other hand had to go it alone for several years before Fáilte Ireland was in a position to advise and support. It is timely that Fáilte Ireland currently encourages applications for funding from partners and groups who propose innovative and creative ideas in the Tourist Industry. They now host innovation workshops and webinars for partners and applicants to stimulate ideas and discussion and provide

funding for technical assistance which bring project proposals through the design and development stages.<sup>37</sup> Although Fáilte Ireland currently supports Lullymore, there was a period during Lullymore's establishment, where Lullymore was desperate for advice and guidance from any state agency. They acknowledge that they could have well benefitted from assistance early on and it is clear to us that their determination and self-belief were two of the main factors in the establishment of their unique park. We hope that Fáilte Ireland's current initiative is prioritised and maintained by the Irish state in order to ensure that other communities like those in Lullymore have their innovative ideas fostered and supported.

It is also hoped that the government's 10 year capital plan, due to be published shortly, will signal increased investment in new tourism products.<sup>38</sup> Innovation in the visitor experience will be required in the future and it is crucial that the Irish tourist industry adapts innovatively to the changing demands of its visitors in order to sustain an industry that plays such an integral role in the Irish economy.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

As transition year students, we are new to the world of tourism. While we do not possess certified expertise in the tourism sector, we are the tourists of tomorrow. We are the innovators who will help to shape tourism in the twenties, we will both earn and spend in the tourism sector shortly. We know what the future tourist will wish to visit and how they will want to “experience” attractions.

Prior to our visit, both websites provided video and interesting information which made us really look forward to our visit and appealed to our young minds which are used to seeing state of the art advertising online. We did not anticipate that visiting a castle and a bog could be as exciting as both websites showed. Both websites also provided annual event details which meant that both attractions could be visited at any time of the year. We feel that this fact is important as many tourists like to plan their trip in advance and they also like to get a “taste” of what they might see and more importantly “experience” during their visit.

Our recommendations spring from an untrained and uncertified perspective but we do feel that both venues could further expand their visitor base. In the case of St. John’s Castle, this is already underway as they continue to attract more Irish visitors during their seasonal events. As we conclude research, there is great anticipation for the drive in movie experience later this month... this idea was genius, who would have thought that you could see a movie in an ancient castle? .. this is truly innovation in practice. In the case of Lullymore, their unique and historic perspective on what has been an intrinsic part of Irish history, the bog; should surely attract more than 15% of foreign visitors.<sup>39</sup> Marketing is crucial in both venues and the use of a skillfully designed social media campaign in both venues would increase visitor numbers. Given the innovative displays which we experienced during our visits, we can confidently assume that such campaigns are probably already underway. In fact during our interview, Ray Stapleton, manager at Lullymore told us that much of their future investment would be in advertising.<sup>40</sup>

We feel that improved signage for Lullymore, in both nearby towns in Co. Kildare and in the immediate locality, would help to advertise and access the park, bearing in mind that one of the main roads to the venue is inaccessible to larger buses due to a low bridge. Also the website for Lullymore is only hosted in English and this may be a barrier to those non- English speakers researching the park as a potential day trip destination.

We have learned much and enjoyed this research and we look forward to more innovative tourism projects being fostered and establishing themselves in the Ireland of tomorrow.

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Ronan Redican, Transition Year Co-ordinator, Mercy Mounthawk Secondary School Tralee, Co. Kerry

Ray Stapleton, Manager, Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park



# Appendices

## Appendix1 Interview Questions

1. When did your business open?
2. How many staff do you employ?
3. Is your business family run? Yes/No
4. How many visitors visited in 2017?
5. What percentage were Irish \_\_\_ European\_\_\_ American\_\_\_ Other\_\_\_
6. How have you marketed your venue?
7. You received an award in 2017 which awarded the excellence your venue has shown.  
What were the main areas where you feel you accomplished this?
8. Has the award resulted in the increase number of visitors? Can you quantify this?
9. Are there other attractions similar to your own in Ireland? Name some?
10. How do you intend to continue being **innovative** in the future?
11. In the past 5 years, how have your customers' needs changed?
12. How have you responded to these changes?
13. How do you evaluate customer satisfaction?
14. How has your use of social media changed in the past 5 years?
15. What National Agencies have supported your Innovation?  
Failte Ireland ☐ ITIC ☐ Other ☐
16. Did you approach these agencies for assistance or did they approach you?
17. Have you attended Fáilte Ireland's innovative workshops which form an integral part  
of their Investment strategy 2016-2022? If yes was this prior to winning the award?
18. Anything that you would like to add?



## Appendix 2 Glossary of Terms

**Bog:** An area of wet, spongy ground with soil composed mainly of decayed vegetable matter<sup>41</sup> (See Peat)

**The Gathering:** The Gathering Ireland 2013, referred to as The Gathering was a tourism-led initiative in Ireland. It aimed to mobilise the Irish diaspora to return to Ireland during 2013 to be part of specially organised local gatherings and events during the year. It was a government supported initiative driven primarily by Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority, and Tourism Ireland. The concept relied on grassroots initiatives of private individuals, and non-governmental organisations.<sup>42</sup>

**The Education Awards 2018.** These awards have been designed to recognise, encourage and celebrate excellence among third level education providers across the island of Ireland, representing both State and privately funded institutions.<sup>43</sup>

**Ireland's Ancient East** is a new campaign that offers visitors a view of a different Ireland. This guidebook showcases 100 sites across the region, from Carlingford in County Louth, through the Boyne Valley of County Meath, into the heartlands of Tipperary and Kilkenny before ending up at Blarney Castle in Cork.<sup>44</sup>

**ITIC** is the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation and it is the representative body of the Irish tourism industry. It works with Government Agencies, Tourist Boards, North and South, Tourism Ireland Limited, the EU, and other organisations whose activities impact on tourism. In particular, the focus is on research, casemaking and influencing policies, which shape the future of Ireland's Tourism Industry.<sup>45</sup>

**Peat** also called **turf**, is an accumulation of partially decayed vegetation or organic matter that is unique to natural areas called peatlands, bogs, mires, moors, or muskegs. Because organic matter accumulates over thousands of years, peat deposits provide records of past vegetation and climate by preserving plant remains, such as pollen. This allows humans to reconstruct past environments and study changes in human land use. Peat is harvested as an important source of fuel in certain parts of the world such as Ireland.<sup>46</sup>

**The Wild Atlantic Way** is a tourism trail on the west coast, and on parts of the north and south coasts, of the Republic of Ireland.<sup>47</sup>

**Tourism Insight** is a new initiative developed in 2016 in collaboration with Fáilte Ireland, the Irish Hospitality Institute, the Irish Hotels Federation, the Technological Higher Education Authority and the Institute of Technology Tralee. It is a free interactive online programme providing valuable tourism insights to transition year students and other learners, informing them of career options within the tourism industry.<sup>48</sup>

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