

TOURISM PROJECT TAKES THE CELTIC ROUTE

Three local authorities in Ireland and three in Wales have recently launched an innovative €1.9m tourism initiative. Wicklow County Council, Waterford City and County Council and Wexford County Council are collaborating with their colleagues in Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion in the Celtic Routes Project to jointly boost tourism in both regions, reports Deirdre O'Flynn.

The Celtic Routes Project, which brings together local authorities in the South East of Ireland and West Wales, covers the local authority areas of Waterford City & County, Wexford and Wicklow and three Welsh council partners in Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion. Co-funded by the European Territorial Co-Operation

Ireland Wales Project – known as Interreg (Ireland/Wales fund) – Celtic Routes aims to encourage visitors to explore new areas of South East Ireland and Wales, who are en route to their final tourist destination.

In Ireland, the lead partner is Wexford County Council with Carmarthenshire County Council fulfilling the same role in Wales.

Andrew Doyle TD, Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, and his colleague, Paul Kehoe TD, Minister with responsibility for Defence, along with representatives from the local authorities, tourism and business sectors attended the official launch of the project in Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford on 26 November 2019.



Courtown Woodland Walks in Wexford.



Pictured at the Celtic Routes launch in Enniscorthy on 26 November 2019 were (l-r): Minister of State at the Department of Defence, Paul Kehoe TD; Aileen Dowling, Failte Ireland; Oonagh Messette, Celtic Routes Project Director, and Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, Andrew Doyle TD.

Speaking on behalf of the Irish local authorities, Frank Curran, Chief Executive of Wicklow County Council, said: “This project is directed by co-operation, between the project partners, local authorities and the State agencies, and with all tourism providers – from glamping and camping, dining and dancing, experiences and escapades.”

He added that the project aimed to encourage tourists to stay a while in the three Irish and three Welsh counties – “this project is promotional and to get the message out there about areas that are less well known”.

The role of Celtic Routes is to complement Ireland’s Ancient East brand, to increase the time visitors spend in these regions and to capitalise on the opportunities to boost local economies and add value to the combined tourism offerings within the regions.

TAILORED AND TARGETED MARKETING
Welcoming the guests, including visitors from Wales, Cllr Michael Sheehan, Cathaoirleach of Wexford County Council, said that this tailored, targeted marketing and promotional

campaign was about “connecting Wicklow, Wexford, Waterford and Wales under one unifying brand”.

Speaking to ‘Local Authority Journal’, Michael Quinn, Deputy Chief Executive of Waterford City and County Council, agreed that this project was about addressing common challenges faced by the three counties in Ireland and Wales – with the goal of transforming less well-known areas

from transit zones to new touring sites.

“Years of preparatory work have gone into developing the project,” he said, referring to the customer research, trade events and workshops, and cross-border visits by businesses in Ireland and Wales, to bring together expertise and ideas that ultimately led to establishing the Celtic Routes brand.

Amongst the Welsh delegation was Cllr Emlyn Dole, leader of Carmarthenshire County Council. He said the Celtic Routes project was an opportunity to celebrate and share Ireland’s and Wales’ joint Celtic identity with the wider world. It was also a celebration of a shared heritage that was rooted in an appreciation of the natural world.

Nature and the outdoors is a key pillar of the project, which will include the development of new trails linking local culture, heritage and the natural environment itself.

PROMOTIONAL CAMPAIGN TAKES OFF
In operational terms, Celtic Routes is managed by Oonagh Messette (Wexford County Council) and Rhian Philips (Carmarthenshire County Council).

“We have a toolkit for stakeholders and businesses, as well as exclusive videos, content and photography,”



“ This tailored, targeted marketing and promotional campaign is about connecting Wicklow, Wexford, Waterford and Wales under one unifying brand” – Cllr Michael Sheehan, Cathaoirleach of Wexford County Council



The promotional project aims to get the message out there about areas that are less well known, according to Frank Curran, Chief Executive of Wicklow County Council.

according to Messette, the Irish project manager. “The promotional campaign will be directed at cultural explorers, active families, and active explorers in the 22 to 50-year-old age bracket in the UK, United States, Germany and France primarily, in addition to Belgium, Luxembourg and Holland, with a focus towards online promotion.”

With 69% of their main cohort of tourists relying on the Internet as their main source of information, the campaign will be rolled out through these avenues including Facebook and Instagram, she added.

“We will also target airports and ports, in addition to the print media – specifically publications such as the ‘Sunday Times’ magazine, ‘Explorer’ magazine (‘National Geographic’), ‘Discover Britain’, ‘Cara In-Flight’ magazine, and we will also create a limited number of leaflets and fliers.”

The one-year campaign, which runs until December 2020, will be promoted extensively in their main tourism markets.

A FOCUS ON HIDDEN GEMS

“We have created video content in various lengths, and have a very large catalogue of photography to fit in with

our brand, ethos and aims, and these will all be used for the promotional/marketing campaign,” she noted.

Welsh project manager Rhian

Philips told ‘Local Authority Journal’ at the launch that “the Celtic Routes project means so much to us in South Wales. It’s about demonstrating the strong bonds between the two regions and promoting that to the rest of the world”.

Graham Peake of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority added that the benefit of the project was its focus on hidden gems. “We have tourist hot spots like Tenby, so this is an opportunity to showcase new places,” he told ‘Local Authority Journal’, adding that the project was also a vehicle to strengthen connections between South East Ireland and Pembrokeshire.

SPOTLIGHT ON RURAL LANDSCAPES

Andrew Doyle TD, Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food, and Marine, applauded “the vast wealth of collateral that will be available from the Celtic Routes toolkit for all tourism bodies and businesses to use”. He said Ireland and Wales

CELTIC BRANDING THEMES

The branding covers the following three themes:

**Celtic Beacons are the more high-profile natural or built heritage destinations dating anywhere from 2,000 years ago to living memory (Irish examples include Wells House in Co. Wexford, Mount Congreve in Co. Waterford, or Glendalough in Co. Wicklow).*

**Celtic Moments highlight immersion activities, such as foraging in Co. Wicklow, St Declan’s Way in Co. Waterford, and Courtown Woodland Walks in Co. Wexford.*

**Celtic Discoveries showcases venues under the themes Celtic Lands and Sea, Celtic Adventure, and Celtic Heritage.*





STANDING (L-R): Ger Mackey, Project Partner, Wexford County Council; Michael Quinn, Director of Service, Economic Development & Planning, Waterford City and County Council; Graham Peake, Project Partner, Pembrokeshire National Coastal Path; Fred Verdier, Tourism Officer, Wicklow County Council; Sian Jones, Project Officer, Carmarthenshire County Council; Frank Curran, Chief Executive, Wicklow County Council; Rhian Philips, Project Lead, Carmarthenshire County Council; Billy Duggan, Project Partner, Waterford City and County Council; Michael Nicholson, Director of Service, Community, Cultural & Social Development Directorate and Project Partner, Wicklow County Council; John Carley, Director of Service, Housing, Community, Libraries, Arts, Emergency Services & Environment, Wexford County Council. SEATED (L-R): Aileen Dowling, Ireland’s Ancient East, Fáilte Ireland; Cllr Kathleen Codd-Nolan, Cathaoirleach, Enniscorthy Municipal District, Wexford County Council; Cllr Michael Sheehan, Cathaoirleach of Wexford County Council; Oonagh Messette, Project Officer, Wexford County Council, and Cllr Emlyn Dole, Chair of Carmarthenshire County Council.

had a “huge story to tell”, with huge potential in the Celtic Routes project to share the warmth and friendship of both countries.

Paul Kehoe TD, Minister with responsibility for Defence, highlighted how the Celtic Routes project was important for rural areas. “It will put a spotlight on areas that have not yet realised their tourism potential and it will promote authentic towns, villages, landscapes and coastlines.” He added that the South East of Ireland and West Wales and face similar challenges in attracting people into rural communities and sustaining them.

The combined effort to get tourists to slow down, to take detours and to draw them off the beaten track is at the heart of the project. With full support of the local authorities in both regions, the hope is that this bespoke campaign will reach visitors, animate tourism providers, and help to stimulate sustainable tourism and economic development along those roads less travelled.

For further information and updates visit www.celticroutes.irish. Businesses can get involved in the project by ‘Getting Pinned’ on the map on the Celtic Routes website. For more details contact Oonagh.Messette@wexfordcoco.ie.

(Photography at the launch of the ‘Celtic Routes’ tourism project by Maura Hickey)



Voted one of Ireland’s favourite attractions, the iconic Hook Head Lighthouse, situated at the tip of the Hook Peninsula in Wexford, is one of the oldest lighthouses in the world.