

ECOTOURISM IRELAND A LEITRIM BASED COMPANY RECEIVES GLOBAL RECOGNITION

Bláithín Gallagher

ECOTOURISM IRELAND have been recognised by the Global Sustainability Tourism Council (GSTC) as meeting the GSTC standards. This means that they have demonstrated commitment to using the GSTC Criteria—the first and only global framework for defining a sustainable travel benchmark. Organisations recognised as meeting the GSTC standards have shown that sustainable tourism is an important component of their business practice and that the widespread adoption of sustainable tourism standards is relevant. The objective of the program is to recognize and reward genuine practitioners of sustainable tourism, which in turn builds confidence and credibility with consumers.

Ireland has the potential to become one of the top ecoTourism destinations in the world, and should not under-estimate the value of 'being green'. Twenty eight Irish companies now carry EcoTourism Ireland certification. Speaking at the official launch on October 4th of EcoTourism Ireland, an organisation based in County Leitrim, which aims to develop the Irish ecoTourism industry, Mike Read of the Global Sustainability Tourism Council (GSTC) said the impact of tourism can be immense, benefitting the economy, creating jobs, and preserving destinations. However he said tourism can also be bad leading to climate change, disrupting communities, and consuming precious resources. "We need to treasure and protect our natural resources and use them to attract visitors but in a responsible and sustainable way".

Currently, the Irish tourism industry is worth 5 billion euro annually to the economy, with an estimated five per cent of this figure,



Mary Mulvey & Michael McGarrigle EcoTourism Ireland with Mike Read Global Sustainable Tourism Council (centre)

or 250 million euro, spent on ecoTourism experiences. According to Mary Mulvey EcoTourism Ireland CEO, ecoTourism is highly suited to development in unspoilt, rural locations and can create jobs and income without destroying or degrading the natural or cultural assets the visitors have come to see.

"In Ireland, we have bog and wetland experiences, farms, marine and ecology, craft and food that can be developed as serious visitor experiences. International and domestic travellers care more and more about the environment and are looking for unique, authentic experiences that are sustainable. Rural Ireland is perfectly suited to the creation of sustainable networks of rural businesses by people passionate about their natural resources".

Fáilte Ireland's Visitor Attitudes Surveys show that Ireland's nature, tourism, and heritage offering, is a key determining factor for visitors when choosing Ireland as a holiday destination. In 2010, 91% of holidaymakers rated 'beautiful scenery' as an important factor in visiting Ireland, 82% rated our natural environment, and 81% rated the range of natural attractions. Nature, wildlife and flora have a particular resonance with mainland European visitors, especially those from Germany.

EcoTourism Ireland runs a certification

programme which is focused on nature-based experiences. Certification can result in cost savings and act as a product development tool. EcoTourism Ireland training projects are currently being supported by the Clare Local Development

Company network in Burren and Loop

Head, IRD Duhallow in North Cork, North & East Kerry Development, and the Meath Partnership. Ms Mulvey states "The EcoTourism Ireland Certification programme brings Irish tourism closer to ecological and social sustainability. The principles of supporting conservation by these experiences is a new concept here which we need to embrace".

For more information: www.ecotourismireland.ie

ROSALEEN KEEHAN Age 11
Ardvarney NS

My Dog

Most dogs like to walk in the bog,
My dog likes to write a blog.

Some dogs love the smell of poo,
My dog likes to clean the loo.

Most dogs love to chew a bone,
My dog likes to chat on the phone.

Some dogs like to eat the mail,
My dog would rather a glass of ale.

Most dogs love to chase a ball,
But my dog loves me best of all!

T J FALLON Age 10
Creevelea NS

Farmer

Fresh cut grass.
Amazing animals.
Red tractor mowing.
Mooing cows hungrily.
Eating fresh cut grass.
Ready for work!