

Tourism Ireland Board Meets in Waterford City



Enjoying a tour of the Waterford Museum of Treasures prior to Tourism Ireland's June board meeting in the Tower Hotel were Shane Clarke (Tourism Ireland); Fiona McHardy (Waterford Viking Triangle); Des O'Flynn (Waterford Airport) and Dr Howard Hastings (Chairman of Northern Ireland Tourist Board).

The Tower Hotel held the June board meeting of Tourism Ireland on Thursday last, where board members took the opportunity to meet with local operators to discuss the 2014 season.

They also outlined Tourism Ireland's extensive promotional programme to highlight Waterford and the South East around the world, including Waterford's 1100th anniversary thanks to a presentation by Eamon McEneaney of Waterford Treasures.

They learned about the Viking Triangle development, the quality of the heritage product in Waterford as well as the Copper Coast and other local attractions.

Said Niall Gibbons, CEO of Tourism Ireland: "We were delighted to be in Waterford for this month's board meeting and to have the chance to meet with representatives of the tourism industry from Waterford and to hear directly how business is shaping up for the upcoming peak season.

"It also afforded us the opportunity to discuss the extensive promotional programme which Tourism Ireland is undertaking around the world this year, to build on the success of 2013 and continue to grow visitor numbers to Waterford and Ireland in 2014.

"Priority markets are Great Britain, the United States, Germany and France, which together deliver almost threequarters of all our overseas visitors; but our promotions are also continuing in 18 other markets across the world - including Northern Europe, Southern Europe, Australia and New Zealand, as well as new and emerging markets like China and India."

These will also be promoted on a north/south basis abroad. Mr Gibbons said the Waterford product has a strong proposition and they are going to do an 'East Coast' promotion as an alternative to the Atlantic Way, where heritage and scenery would be key elements for the culturally curious and those that want weekend breaks.

Waterford city and county, its events, history, heritage, gardens, outdoor and other activities, the Viking Triangle, the Copper Coast, as well as many other aspects of the area, feature prominently in Tourism Ireland's promotions around the world.

The board noted a sense of cohesion about Waterford operators with hoteliers, museums, Waterford Treasures, Bishops Palace, Waterford Crystal visitor centre all working together.

Tourism Ireland profiles Waterford extensively on its global suite of websites, Ireland.com, which appears in 11 different language versions for over 30 individual markets around the world, attracting over 13 million unique visits each year.

A visitor experience to Waterford should be positive and be expressed widely and loudly, he said – good news should be upbeat.

In 2013, Tourism Ireland generated over €24 million worth of positive publicity for Waterford and the South East in key markets around the world, through press releases, e-newsletters and various media events.

The restoration of the London air route is a key objective for Waterford Airport. Niall Gibbons, the Tourism chief did say that if the route returns again to London they would assist in marketing the region in a joint promotion.

Niall Gibbons said that London and the UK's south east was doing well economically and visitor numbers to Ireland are growing by air and sea, Sterling strength and a more competitive price in Ireland is attracting the English back. Some 78 per cent of them come by plane so that air route is vital.

The Queen's visit and the Irish President's return state visit had all enhanced Irish / UK relations positively and tourism numbers between both countries are rising. Niall had been in the Albert Hall at the music night and saw of feeling among emigrants and English for Ireland, they like us and have affection for the country where there are so many close connections with family and friends.

Tourism Ireland promotes at the World Travel Market in November and in Birmingham in a show the best of Britain and Ireland, with south east trade participants also set to attend.

The Newfoundland air route to Ireland will shortly be launched and Niall Gibbons feels there is strong scope for Waterford and south east to benefit.

Canada is a growing market and he has been there before. He's aware of the close connections locally, the St John's twinning project (see News 17) and was once on a delegation there.

He also knows Loyola Hearn the Canadian Ambassador and his Carrick on Suir links. We suggested that President Michael D Higgins could visit there and promote Ireland and the south east with the great connections in the near future.

Niall said they keep close contact with the President's diary and that this might be a possibility which the relevant parties could pursue.

The West Jet air service runs to St. Johns until October so strong are the bookings and was their best launch in sales terms to

date.

The Granville Hotel has been promoted in Canada with Richard Hurley travelling to Toronto - Thomas Francis Meagher spent some there in Newfoundland during the 1800s, just one element of the strong link with Waterford.

"Having good tourism ambassadors is important," he said.

We referred to the great links with France and how Waterford had twinned with Nantes and St Herblain.

Tourism Ireland is working with its office in Paris, and resources are available there to promote Waterford, with the white and blue drum to be beaten at the Inter Celtic music festival in Lorient this August, with the LE Eithne also sailing there.

Mr Gibbons believes that the Irish tourism product is improving after a few tough years. "The Heritage angle has been put to positive use in Waterford," he said. "It is authentic and real.

"Being real is an attraction and showing our character is a strength of the Irish. We need to talk things up such as our culture - our diaspora do it better than we do at home right now as they are so proud; they won't let their country be talked down such is their love of their home country."

On the contentious matter of Waterford being excluded from a recent tourism map, Mr Gibbons acknowledged this, stated it had been corrected and that this shall not happen again.

As it happened, the tour specifically referred to on that particular map stayed in Tramore, but there as no doubt that the omitting of Waterford from the map should not have occurred.