

Our Sporting Visitors

Sports tourism is serious business

Sports tourism is serious business. Research by the British Tourism Authority has indicated that the tourist who comes to indulge in his or her chosen sporting passion spends almost twice as much as the “ordinary tourist”. Perhaps then it is no surprise that 2013’s The Gathering has targeted sporting activities and sporting events as a major part of its marketing campaign.

The power of sports tourism was very much in evidence in 2012 with the American Football Game between U.S. Navy and Notre Dame attracting a capacity crowd which included 35,000 visitors from the U.S. To put that figure in perspective it is the largest number of Americans to ever travel to a sporting fixture outside of the U.S. ever – and that includes the Olympic Games.

Many of these visitors combined the game with a holiday in Ireland and preliminary research has indicated that hotels, restaurants, shops and golf courses saw a sharp increase in business not alone in the period around the game but throughout August and September. Initial figures indicate that the overall contribution to the economy as a whole should be in the excess of €100 million. Sports Tourism Works!

But the U.S. Football was only one example of the power of sports tourism. Over 30 international sporting events were held in Ireland in 2012. Some of the positive examples of where sport generated tourism revenue for the economy include

- An estimated 155,000 overseas visitors played golf during their visit to Ireland, their total estimated spend being €204 million, supporting some 7,300 jobs
- 1.15 million people attended the Tall Ships events in Dublin Port
- €100m is the estimated economic impact of the Volvo Ocean Race according to the Galway Chamber of Commerce
- €171,000 was spent by competitors in the Dragon Gold Cup Sailing Championships in Kinsale
- 2,500 people travelled from the United States for the GIFT series of American football games generating an economic return of €4.5 million
- The European Handball Challenge Trophy held in Limerick generated €250,000 for the local economy
- €410,000 was the total spend attributable to the An Post Tour of Sligo cycle
- 2,500 people visited the National Aquatic Centre over the 5 days of the Dublin Water Polo Cup
- 2,300 competitors and 800 volunteers took part in 6 National Swimming Championships
- Over 30 countries sent teams or athletes to Ireland for pre-Olympic training
- 58,000 people attend the Phoenix Park Motor Races
- 600 delegates from 100 countries visited Ireland for the International Sailing Federation Conference
- 180 foreign athletes competed in the Irish Badminton Open
- 2,000 seats filled six times at the Electric Ireland Men’s Olympic Hockey Qualifiers at UCD
- €250,000 was the value of the Tour de Burren to the Clare economy
- 100,000 people visited the Dublin Horse Show
- 2,284 bed-nights created by the Great Limerick Run
- 36 extra transatlantic flights were scheduled to cater for the Emerald Isle Classic.



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the **future** of Irish Sport

Vision 2020

Sarah O'Connor

Chief Executive Officer,
Federation of Irish Sport



This past year has once again demonstrated the huge potential of sports tourism for this country. The Navy v Notre Dame Game, the Youth Sailing World Championships, the Volvo Ocean Race, the Men's Olympic Hockey Qualifiers were all examples of this phenomenon not to mention the hundreds of thousands of golfers, walkers, cyclists, anglers, triathletes, horse riders and marathon runners who come to Ireland each year to partake in their chosen sport.

The potential is huge and yet unlike many other countries around the world our approach is unsystematic and ad hoc but there is a better way... the sooner we set up a dedicated agency to bid for sports events the better. An example of what is possible is Sport Event Denmark which has an outstanding track record. Denmark is of course like us, a relatively small country with limited facilities but it's a heavyweight in terms of the sporting events it attracts. A joint venture between the Danish government and the country's national sporting organisations, 'Sport Event Denmark', is now so successful it wins 2 out of every 3 events it bids for.

In recent years Sports Event Denmark has facilitated the hosting in Denmark of Olympic and UEFA Congresses, World and European championships across a wide range of sports including cycling, wrestling and football. And the future is bright with major show-jumping, badminton, table tennis, canoeing and archery events all already booked over the next three years.

A similar model could and would deliver for Ireland. We have a strong track record in hosting sport events but there has never been a strategic approach to the bringing in of such events. This is an area where Ireland could excel and deliver a boost to our tourism industry. The international competition is however tough and an organised and professional approach is required.

I would love to think that by 2020 'Sport Bid Ireland' would be established in Ireland ensuring that sport and government were working in tandem to secure a steady stream of appropriate events into Ireland with all the ancillary benefits that this would provide.