



Tourism Ireland France Strategic Plan 2011-2014

Elevating the island of Ireland as a holiday destination

Introduction

I am delighted to present the France Strategic plan for 2011 -2014.

Our exploration of the French holiday market found, that while the island of Ireland is perceived very positively, it is also a passive perception. Our strategy aims to challenge this view: to move consumers from thinking 'I'll go one day', to 'let's go today'. Elevation is about lifting our sights, our ambitions, the perceptions of our potential holidaymakers and the contribution of the French market. We use the term 'Elevate' to reflect that we are building from a strong base, which allows us to aim higher, and to grow further than before. We will bring the conversation to a higher level, with more targets and more focused actions.

Our ambitious strategic goal of increasing holidaymakers by almost 40% by 2014 (from 2010), is based on what we see as the concrete benefits of elevating the image of the island of Ireland in the minds of French holidaymakers, who represent our 4th largest holiday market globally. The role of our trade and industry partners was central in developing our strategy, and will be key to its successful implementation. Tourism Ireland was given strong support from industry and trade on both the island of Ireland and in France, throughout the process.

Partnership will be the key to success and we in Tourism Ireland look forward to working with our industry partners in achieving our goals.

Niall Gibbons
CEO Tourism Ireland



1. Unlock the tourism potential of the French Market

1.1 Extensive review

Our new strategy is based on an exploration of the current context for holidaymakers in France, and more specifically, how they perceive the island of Ireland as a destination. The aim of our exploration was to identify new action areas to unlock the tourism potential of the French market for the island of Ireland.

As part of this process, we identified the best holidaymaker segments for increasing growth to the island of Ireland. We focused our strategy on meeting their needs and challenging any barriers to choosing the island as a holiday destination.

To ensure a rich and varied overview, we accessed information from statistical sources, media, opinion leaders, the French market trade, Irish industry partners, Fáilte Ireland, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Shannon Development, Dublin Tourism and most importantly the consumers themselves.

1.2 Identifying the key French Holidaymaker growth segments

Our exploration has provided us with a clear indication of which consumer segments provide the strongest potential for growth based on their size, interests and fit with our product offering.

These segments are:

Young active sightseer and culture seekers

Young city breaker sightseer and culture seekers

Pure mid-age sightseer and culture seekers

Repeat visitors

Northern Ireland visitors



"At this important time in my long life, I have found here exactly what I have been looking for: right in front of me. Ireland has given me it in the most sensitive and welcoming manner"

Charles De Gaulle
(18th June, 1969, Sneem, Co. Kerry)

2 The Elevation Action Plan

Our strategy is based on a strong focus on our holidaymakers, close consultation with our partners and a strong understanding of our strategic goal both in terms of perceptions and results. This section outlines how we will put our insights into action.

2.1 The Essential Elements of our strategy – Everything that we do as part of our strategy in France will be designed to include the following essential elements:

“HOT” - This is the most important of the essential elements and is about keeping the island of Ireland ‘top of mind’ for our target segments in France. Ensuring our target holiday makers buy-in to our ‘HOT’ destination concept will be key to its success. HOT stands for:

Happening (current, on trend)

Ownable (only Ireland can deliver this)

Talkable (creates instant communication and word of mouth)

We will work with our industry partners to ensure that the image we craft for the destination in France, the holiday offerings and great deals we present to our travel trade partners and our consumers are on trend and in tune with current French interests.

Energy – We will convince potential French holidaymakers and travel trade partners that the island of Ireland delivers excitement and an ‘active’ experience. We will deliver energy across our platforms and update all communications to portray energy and excitement. This energy will be communicated to all our holidaymaker targets regardless of life stage, in a style to which they can relate.

Urgency- An element of urgency will be promoted as part of the plan to motivate people to come now. The internet, now the primary researching and booking tool for holidays, will be the key vehicle to drive this change. Value and deals that can be booked instantly will be essential as we compete for discerning French visitors. Exciting, competitively priced island of Ireland holiday offers and deals will have to be both more plentiful and prominent on the popular online booking websites which are the primary reference point for the young French visitor.

Reasons to Visit - Our communications will use real products and ritual iconic experiences to highlight what is unique and differentiating about the island of Ireland and create reasons to visit. To grow our holidaymaker numbers from France, we will expand the image of the destination beyond that of beautiful landscape, by communicating a sense of excitement and a range of iconic experiences.

We have built our strategy on these essential elements and we will actively encourage our partners to include them in their programmes, to amplify the key message that the island of Ireland is a dynamic, fresh, active destination, worth visiting now.

261,000 holidaymakers in 2014 represent a 39% increase over 2010

2.2 Areas for action

Our strategy is based on five main areas for action that we have identified to attract specific holidaymaker segments to the island of Ireland, with clear delivery targets. In addition, to achieve the necessary environment for growth, we have also identified two key action areas where we will work with trade and industry partners. The areas for action, their holidaymaker targets, the challenge they overcome and the specific actions we will take are outlined over the following pages.

Action area 1 - Outdoor Energy

This is about creating energetic and participative connections with the Irish landscape (being part of the landscape, not just looking at it!) and making them authentic through interaction with our people.

Holidaymaker target: Young Active sightseer and culture seekers.

Challenge: To convince them that the island of Ireland offers the active experience they seek.

Action: Activity Events and Partnerships

We will harness the strengths of complementary third-party brands and events to create positive associations around outdoor activities to make them desirable among this target group. We will select a number of brand partners with an activity association such as Aigle, North Face, Decathlon, Quicksilver, Oxbow, etc and explore ways to collaborate with them in the market.



Action area 2 - City Buzz

Inject fun and originality into the communication of our city experiences. This is about creating standout for our cities. It means showing how well worth visiting they are, in their own right. It is about showing young people, energy, live music, living culture and vibrancy around the cities of Dublin and Belfast initially, without distancing ourselves from other iconic images of stunning landscapes and friendly pubs. It means highlighting the thrills of a night out as well as a warm welcome to the party.

Holidaymaker target: Young citybreaker Sightseer and Culture Seekers

Challenge: To ensure that our cities stand out attractively among their European city break competitors. In France, island of Ireland cities tend to be over-shadowed by the dominant rural perception of the destination and we will highlight the city attractions to those who want a more urban experience.

Actions: Special Deals

Create exclusive offers for French holidaymakers to entice them to visit our cities and ensure that the packages and deals showcase what’s unique about our vibrant city experiences. Websites popular with this segment, as well as digital and social marketing, will be harnessed for special promotions. It’s about showing exclusive, yet affordable, fun.



Action area 3 - Life Enhancing Experiences

Communicate life enhancing cultural experiences that can be easily shared with others. This is about finding, packaging and creating awareness behind experiences that will enhance the holiday enjoyment of the mid- age Sightseer and Culture Seekers, that may stay in their memory long after their holiday is over. It means publicizing and creating word of mouth around experiences that will appeal and excite. Experiences will need to be unique and authentic to the island of Ireland. We will need to show how these experiences enhance their lives.

Holidaymaker target: 'Pure' Mid-Age Sightseer and Culture Seekers

Challenge: To ensure these French holidaymakers begin to visualize something of the range and diversity of great things to see and do that is available on a holiday on the island of Ireland. Mid Age Sightseer and Culture Seekers currently lack suitably motivating points to help them choose the island of Ireland ahead of other destinations.

Actions: Discover Yourself – We will develop an online application that will let people discover the activities on the island of Ireland that offer exciting alternatives to what they do in normal life.

Potential holidaymakers will complete an online questionnaire. The questionnaire will help populate itineraries full of activities personalized to their individual needs. The app will offer a range of attractive options but users will also be able to choose from a range of unique "discover yourself" options for more unusual or unexpected things to do.

Ultimate Month – A campaign that will include a competition where the prize will be an ultimate, fun-filled -month on the island of Ireland enhanced by unexpected activities. The campaign will run in Social Media and across multiple popular travel and lifestyle websites. The month-long itinerary will be determined by our Facebook fans who will vote on a range of surprising things to do that reflect unique aspects of the island of Ireland experience.



Action Area 4 – Mobilize our French fans

This is about activating our French fan base among previous holidaymakers to Ireland. We want to harness the very positive memories they have from previous visits while giving them compelling reasons to come again now. We will mobilize our French 'hibernophiles' by ensuring previous French visitors feel so excited by the prospect of a holiday here that they feel compelled to come back. This is about showing previous visitors that there are lots more things to see and do on the island. It is about creating excitement and showing new news, to give people reasons to come back. It is about making repeat visitors feel and behave like fans so that they will share the new news with others and become advocates for holidays here.

Holidaymaker target: Repeat Visitors

Challenge: Our key challenge is to harness the very positive memories they have from previous visits while giving them new reasons to come again now and keeping them updated on new activities and experiences.

Action: CRM Marketing programme -Build a database of previous French visitors through social media and from bookings, passenger surveys, etc. Communicate regularly with this group of previous visitors so they begin to feel part of an exclusive club. They will get early notification of great deals and activities and product updates as well as invitations to special events in the market.



Action area 5 - Pioneering Northern Ireland

Show Northern Ireland as an animated, pioneering destination with a unique edge. This will be about showing Northern Ireland's unique personality as a destination that is off the beaten track. A destination for those who are a bit pioneering, who want unique holiday experiences that others haven't experienced.

Holiday maker target: French sightseers and culture seekers from all ages and interests.

Challenge: To ensure that French consumers know all there is to do and see on holiday in Northern Ireland and that they develop a sense of excitement about the destination. French holidaymakers don't have sufficient positive, exciting associations with Northern Ireland.

Action: Northern Ireland Top 5: A specific year-round programme that showcases the Top 5 big things to do.

This is about zoning in on five specific unique things to do in Northern Ireland, which showcase it as an exciting, vibrant destination. It will mean using surprising imagery and alternative/unusual media to create a sense of awakening.

Communications will focus on:

1. Titanic Belfast
2. Giant's Causeway.
3. Derry/Londonderry – walk its walls and learn about the past.
4. Causeway Coastal Route.
5. St. Patrick's Trail – share in the journey from slave to revered holy man and international icon.

Action Area 6 - Inspire the French trade

Inspire the French travel trade to re-ignite their love of the island of Ireland by providing them with new and exciting holiday choices, knowledge and material to offer their clients. It is about creating excitement through incentives and word-of-mouth to make the island of Ireland top of mind when recommending holiday destinations.

Target partner - French Travel Trade: One fifth of French holidaymakers to the island of Ireland book their holiday through travel trade channels. Our travel trade goal for 2014 is to reinvigorate the trade, making the island of Ireland top of their recommended destination list.

Challenge: The French travel trade currently sees the island as ideal for an 8-day car touring or coach holiday. When compared to newer holiday destinations like Croatia, Scandinavia and South East Asia, the French travel trade perceives a holiday on the island of Ireland as safe and conventional as opposed to a destination to get excited about or to appeal to the adventurous.

Actions

Retail Trade Sales Kit: Tourism Ireland will produce a new 'Point of Purchase' travel trade communications kit reflecting the new marketing strategy for France and our new advertising campaign. An incentive scheme and a special new programme of educational events will help motivate Travel Agents to display and use the kit.

Ultimate Familiarisation Trip: An unexpected and unforgettable familiarisation trip for top-performing French travel trade to change perceptions of the island of Ireland holiday experience. Travel agents who complete our E-Training programme will be eligible to win the Ultimate Familiarization trip. They will also have the opportunity to shape the itinerary by voting, through a special Facebook page, on surprising options and activities to be included.

Action Area 7 - Maintain access and identify new opportunities

Implement strong regional business development plans around key access points to strengthen awareness and interest in the island of Ireland holiday experience. We will achieve this through integration of regional consumer programmes with strong local trade activation and Irish industry road show marketing opportunities.

Targets: Access partners- airlines, ferry companies, regional airports, regional development stakeholders.

Challenge: While access is still strong at 32 routes (Summer 2011), France is suffering declines in frequency and capacity (-9% over Summer 2010). Our key challenge will be to stabilize and grow access from areas indicating strong interest in visiting the island of Ireland. The current limited levels of access from the East and South West of France, where interest in the destination is strong, is inhibiting growth. Access to Northern Ireland and the West of Ireland is also limited.

Actions

Regional access blitz: Roll out a business development programme to boost travel from regional France incorporating consumer and trade promotional activities. This calls for an integrated approach to working with Regional Airports in France. Promotions will include hosting "island of Ireland" days and regional Road Shows with our Carrier partners in each region. Local Tour Operators and Travel Agents will be invited along to meet with island of Ireland based industry representatives, to be briefed on the latest product developments. These events will be supported by advertising in the airport hinterland.

Proactive lobbying: Case-make for routes to the West of Ireland and to Northern Ireland. Tourism Ireland will lobby pro-actively for the introduction of new routes to the West of Ireland and to Belfast.

3.0 Implications for our partners in the island of Ireland Tourism Industry and in the French Travel Trade.

3.1 Irish Industry

- Industry partners should provide promotional literature and packages that reflect the participatory experience that is on offer on the island of Ireland. They should be available in the French language.
- DMCs (Destination Management Companies) should keep Tourism Ireland informed of their new product offers and innovations so we can update the French trade on such developments.
- DMC's should visit the market frequently and participate in joint promotional activities with their client base.
- The island of Ireland industry should provide special offers when Tourism Ireland seek to expand into "new distribution" opportunities – such as Groupon - to ensure the success of the promotion
- The Northern Ireland industry should consider establishing marketing groups that would facilitate greater presence at French events.
- The Northern Ireland industry should come to France more often to support Tourism Ireland in presenting the destination. A strong Northern Ireland presence in the market in the first quarter of 2012 will be key to highlight Titanic Belfast and NI2012 events
- The Irish Industry Partners should get involved in additional marketing opportunities outside of the Paris region. All such opportunities can be located on the Tourism Ireland Industry Opportunities website.

3.2 Product Development

Accommodation providers such as hotels and B&Bs should highlight the outdoor activity options available in their area, and to make them part of the wider destination experience they offer.

DMC's should include participative experiences in their programming and encourage their trade partners in France to offer these options.

Attractions and product providers should furnish French Language guided services or literature.

3.4 French Market Trade

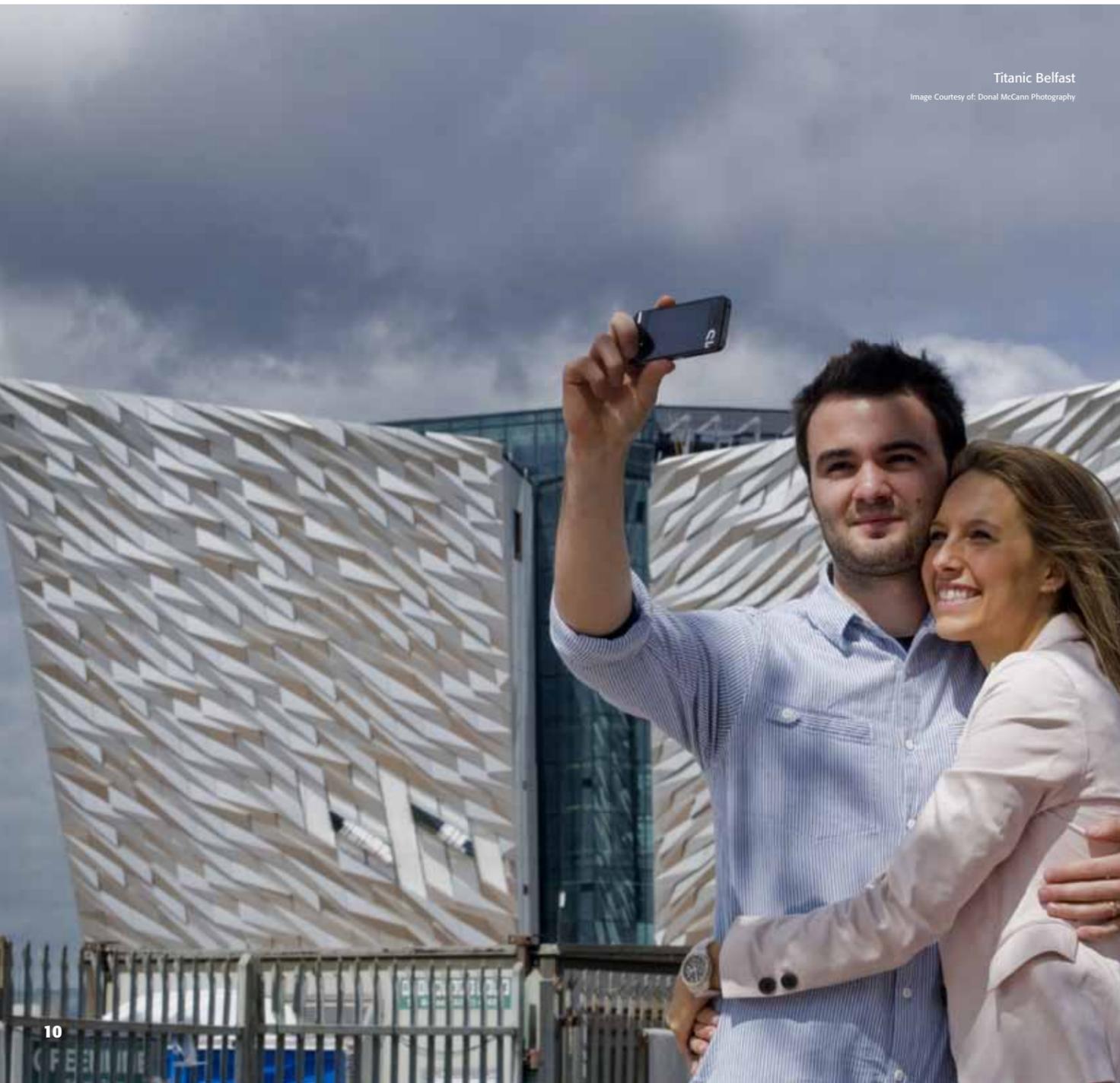
- Tour operators will be encouraged to offer a broader range of island of Ireland itineraries to reflect more activity based holidays.
- Tour operators and product providers will be offered and encouraged to use a Tourism Ireland supplied Toolkit containing brand information, new on-trend and HOT imagery as well as Titanic Belfast information.
- All Trade will be encouraged to introduce and expand their Northern Ireland offers in light of the multiplicity of exceptional events happening in 2012.
- Tour operators interested in proposing a deal for Groupon type campaigns should engage with Tourism Ireland to avail of partnership opportunities.



Conclusion

Tourism Ireland will transform the island of Ireland into a destination to 'visit now' for French holidaymakers. The goal of our action plan is to grow our French market to 261,000 holidaymakers in 2014, an increase of almost 40% on 2010. We are confident that this action plan will achieve our strategic goal. The plan identifies our best targets amongst holidaymakers, includes the essential elements of HOT, energy, urgency and reasons to visit across all activities and has seven action areas to target holidaymakers and make working with the trade and industry more effective.

Tourism Ireland has built a strong and appealing image of the island of Ireland in the French market, and over the next three years we will elevate this appeal and deliver even stronger growth. We will inspire the French trade by showing them the diversity and depth of the island of Ireland offering. The role of our island of Ireland industry partners will be key. Finally, we will actively engage with our access partners to maintain existing levels of access and look for new opportunities to expand.



Titanic Belfast

Image Courtesy of: Donal McCann Photography

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Jump Marketing for their support in conducting this review of the French market review and for facilitating our strategic planning.



We would also like to thank the following organizations for their time and insights during our consultations and strategy planning:

French Trade

Air France, Barbara Leijder,
Brittany Ferries, Florence Gourdon,
CP Travel Marketing, Caroline Phelan
Gaeland Ashling, Nicolas Julien,
Go Voyages, Christophe Vieville,
Guide du Routard, Pierre Josse,
Pêche Ireland, Jean Louis Bigot

Irish Industry

Abbey Tours, Brian McColgan
Abbey Tours, John Healy
Abbey Tours, Vanessa Castle
B&B Ireland, Helena Healy
B&B Ireland, Louise McGee
booking.com, Leo Dempsey
Bord Bia, Noreen Lanigan
Causeway Coast & Glens Visitor Centre, Alex Mahaffey
Causeway Coast & Glens, Don Wilmot
Causeway Coast & Glens, Jason Powell
Cliffs of Moher, Geraldine Enright
Dublin Tourism, Ciara Sugrue
Easyjet, Ali Garward
Easyjet, Patrick Johnston
Expedia/Hotels.com, Seamus MacCormaic
Expedia/Hotels.com, Christelle Chan
Facebook, John Lamphiere

Facebook, Julie Pellet
Guinness Storehouse, Fiona Herald
Holiday Ireland, Genevieve Leloup
IHF/Vaughan Lodge & Seafood Restaurant,
Irish Horizons, Christophe de Patoul
Michael Vaughan
Incoming Tour Operators Association (ITOA),
Ruth Andrews
Irish Ferries, Declan Mescall
Irish Hotels Federation, Miriam Young
Irish Welcome Tours, Bernadette O'Carroll
Irish Ferries, Caitriona Butler
Manor House Hotels, Roisin Wallace
Merchant Hotel Belfast, Marco Marra
Merchant Hotel Belfast, Paula Stevens
Trinity College Book of Kells, Anne-Marie Duffley
Tripadvisor, Pollyanna Vincent
Tripadvisor, Victoria Delany

Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Helen Carey
Fáilte Ireland, Orla Carroll



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