



Donegal County Council

TOURISM STRATEGY

A PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM



**Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall**
Donegal County Council

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FOREWORD

Donegal has long been recognised as a place of breathtaking landscapes, rich culture, and warm hospitality. Tourism is central to our economy and to our identity, sustaining livelihoods and strengthening communities across the county.

With this Tourism Strategy Donegal County Council set out a shared vision for the future of tourism, one that is vibrant, regenerative, and sustainable.

This strategy embraces the principles of sustainability and inclusivity. It places our people and places at its heart, ensuring that tourism gives back more than it takes. It commits us to protecting our environment, celebrating our traditions, supporting local businesses, and creating opportunities for communities to thrive. Our ambition is to grow Donegal's reputation as a world-class destination while ensuring balance, dispersing visitors across the county, extending the season, and encouraging longer stays that benefit both visitors and host communities.

The “Donegal – Ireland's DNA” brand captures what makes us unique: a place that is Diverse, Natural, and Authentic. Through coordinated action across five strategic pillars, product development, marketing and promotion, destination management, business and community engagement, and collaboration we will deliver experiences that are meaningful, sustainable, and transformative. This strategy is also a call to partnership and collaboration between public bodies, local businesses, community groups, and our many partners at national and international level. Together, we will ensure that Donegal remains not only the starting point of the Wild Atlantic Way, but also a shining example of how tourism can contribute positively to the economy, society, culture, and environment. We look forward to working with all stakeholders to bring this vision to life, creating a thriving tourism sector that future generations of Donegal can be proud of.



John McLaughlin
Chief Executive, Donegal County Council
Chairman, Donegal Tourism



Cllr Paul Canning
Cathaoirleach of Donegal County Council



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 About the Strategy

The importance of the tourism sector in Donegal and the economic opportunity it presents is reflected in the increasing role played by Donegal County Council in facilitating the growth and development of the sector over the last number of years.

This strategy reflects the wide array of tourism related activity being carried out by Donegal County Council to develop the sector and enhance the experience for visitors to Donegal. It also sets out a strategic direction and ethos that will guide the work of the Council in sector in the years to come.

This strategy is underpinned by the ethos of regenerative and sustainable tourism. Regenerative and sustainable tourism puts the place and its people at the centre. Its ambition is to facilitate tourism development which intentionally creates the conditions for communities and places to thrive.

This strategy is focused not just on increasing visitor numbers, but on higher impact tourism with a lower carbon footprint i.e. increasing the duration of stay, dwell time, spread of visitors throughout the county while minimising the impact on the environment.

1.2 Core Values

The core values underpinned in this tourism strategy are as follows:

- ✓ Tourism should give back more than it takes
- ✓ Ensures that people and places can sustain and regenerate themselves
- ✓ Revitalises local economies
- ✓ Celebrates and maintains local culture and traditions
- ✓ Conserves and protects the environment mitigating climate change
- ✓ Shares memorable, authentic, local experiences with visitors

1.3 UN Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

The 17 SDGs are integrated—they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. This Strategy aims to support the achievement of these goals with specific goals identified in the Action Plan.



Figure 1 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's)

1.4 Tourism in 2025 – Where we are

Tourism is Ireland's largest indigenous industry and its biggest regional employer, with approximately 260,000 people working in tourism and hospitality. In 2024, the sector was estimated to contribute around €8.5 billion to the Irish economy – with domestic tourism generating roughly €3.0 billion and international visitors contributing about €5.5 billion.

According to Fáilte Ireland¹ in 2023 Donegal welcomed 179,00 overseas tourists generating €155m in revenue with an average spend per capita of €866 and staying an average of 7 nights. 1 in 2 overseas visitors were travelling to Ireland for the first time. In 2023 Donegal welcomed 699,000 domestic tourists generating €187m in revenue with an average spend per capita of €267 and staying 3 average nights in Donegal.

In January 2024, approximately 1.3 million overseas passengers arrived in Ireland, marking an increase of around 1.5% compared to pre-pandemic levels. Data from Q3 and Q4 2024 also indicate that international travel was nearly on par with domestic overnight trips, underscoring a robust recovery in tourism following the disruptions experienced in 2020 and 2021.²

¹Fáilte Ireland 2023 Key Tourism Facts ²ITIC's "Key Tourism Statistics 2024



1.5 Tourism into the Future – Where we want to be

This tourism strategy contains a detailed action plan that when delivered will have a positive impact in County Donegal in areas such as product development, infrastructure, marketing and promotion, sustainable tourism and many others. A coordinated and collaborative approach to delivering on this action plan is essential. By continuing to increase visitor numbers in Donegal with an emphasis on sustainable tourism, higher impact, smaller footprint, we can generate economic growth, create and sustain jobs.

The tourism strategy aims to disperse visitor numbers across the county in each of the Municipal Districts, reducing pressure on hot spot areas and providing more opportunities for businesses to benefit from tourism in those lesser visited areas. The tourism strategy also encourages an accessibility approach to initiatives in the tourism sector to ensure that Donegal is accessible for all. The green transition has accelerated due to climate change, therefore sustainable tourism is a priority. The digital transition continues to impact the tourism sector as we explore the use of digital technology to enhance the tourism experience and provide data that informs policy in Donegal.

As well as bringing more direct benefits spread across a wider area, particularly to areas not traditionally toured, sustainable and regenerative tourism is also responding directly to newly emerging market desires.

Visitors want to:

- Be empowered to 'do more good and less harm' by directly benefitting the place, the environment and the people
- Immerse themselves in the place by having a truly authentic experience; eat, sleep and buy Donegal
- Get close to nature, the outdoors and fresh air
- Have a transformational experience, enhance their wellbeing
- Travel shorter distances, take domestic visits and local day trips
- Understand the story of the place from a local perspective
- Experience the unique culture and heritage of the place through partaking in local customs, events and practices

Donegal's innate character - wild outdoors, rich culture and warm hospitality provide the foundation upon which a vibrant tourism destination can be built. The County's brand – Donegal – Ireland's DNA – Diverse, Natural, Authentic aligns directly with this regenerative sustainable tourism direction.



1.6 The Role of Donegal Tourism CLG

Donegal Tourism CLG is an organisation dedicated to promoting and developing tourism in County Donegal. Governed by a Board of Directors and comprising the Associate Members Committee and various stakeholders, it plays a crucial role in coordinating the overall tourism sector. Donegal Tourism CLG fosters strong collaboration, networking, peer support, and learning among its members. It is responsible for marketing and promoting Donegal's unique attractions and experiences.

Supported by Donegal County Council, Donegal Tourism CLG is instrumental in shaping the future direction of tourism in Donegal, ensuring sustainable growth and continued success. The Board of Directors is made up of 15 Directors, representing various sectors, ensuring diverse input from a wide cross-section of the tourism industry. The board influences and approves the activities planned by the Donegal Tourism unit team.

Every two years, three representatives from the Associate Members Committee are elected to the Donegal Tourism CLG Board. The Associate Committee members are representatives from across the tourism sector and they avail of membership benefits such as participation at trade shows, a monthly trade newsletter etc. The committee serves as a platform for local tourism organisations, businesses, the education sector, and community and cultural representatives to come together, share experiences, and exchange knowledge.

1.7 Strategic Context

The tourism framework set out in this strategy has been drafted in the context of a range of national, regional and local plans and policy documents, including the following:

- National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040
- National Development Plan 2018 – 2027
- People, Place and Policy - Growing Tourism to 2025
- Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025
- Embracing Ireland's Outdoors – National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027
- Provision and Management of Recreation Facilities and Infrastructure 2022, Coillte
- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern and Western Region 2020-2032
- Wild Atlantic Way – Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023-2027
- Donegal Strategic Enterprise Development Plan 2030
- County Donegal Development Plan 2018-2024
- Draft County Donegal Development Plan 2024-2030
- County Donegal Heritage Plan 2023 – 2030
- Donegal County Council Caravan, Camping & Campervan Study 2021



- Donegal Outdoor Recreational Strategy 2023-2029
- Donegal County Council Draft Climate Action Plan 2024-2029
- Cultúr le Chéile: Strategic Plan for Culture Division 2022-2026
- Inishowen Destination and Experience Development Plan, 2022
- European Agenda for Tourism 2030
- EU Transition Pathway for Tourism
- Fáilte Ireland Accessible & Inclusive Tourism

At a national level, there is a strong emphasis on developing a sustainable economic model (through **Project Ireland 2040**) and in respect of tourism, creating a better regional spread (**People, Place and Policy Growing Tourism to 2025**) and making more effective and sustainable use of the country’s rural areas and resources (**Our Rural Futures**); and the future marketing of Donegal’s tourism will continue to leverage not just the benefits of the Wild Atlantic Way but the tourism assets right across Donegal communities.

The **Governments Tourism Strategy 2025** commits to “development in the tourism sector reflecting the highest standards of environmental and economic sustainability, and the role of tourism in promoting peace and political co-operation on the island of Ireland”.

Fáilte Ireland ’s Wild Atlantic Way Regional Tourism Development Strategy is based around 8 key strategic pillars including sustaining tourism businesses, supporting tourism careers, accelerating domestic tourism, developing the outdoor tourism experience, transforming tourism as regards online, digital and e-commerce, developing and distributing the destination experience, driving climate action and delivering excellence. The strategic challenge identified by Fáilte Ireland to raise the profile of the northern half of the Wild Atlantic Way internationally and grow overseas visitor revenue is welcomed along with the 6 strategic objectives to tackle this challenge including: Growing year-round appeal, Raising international Profile, Increase Revenue, Visitor Dispersion & Season Extension, Protecting Authenticity & ‘Wildness’, Growing Industry Capacity & Capability, Industry and Stakeholder Collaboration.

The Donegal Strategic Enterprise Development Plan 2030 identifies Tourism as key business cluster as well as a cross cutting driver in terms of its potential within the Blue Economy, The Donegal Food Coast, The Creative Sector and ICT as a tourism enabler. This direct linkage with the tourism strategy pillars and actions is critical in terms of enabling delivery and optimising the potential of the sector in the County.



Donegal’s Climate Action Plan provides a strong base to grow a greener tourism destination and embrace regenerative tourism which are key directions of this strategy. This is borne out in Strategic Goals 5 & 6 of the CAP and through actions around building capacity to drive climate action in our communities and businesses. Cultúr le Chéile: Strategic Plan for Culture Division 2022 - 2026 sets out a clear vision where everyone in our society is inspired, enabled and enriched by cultural activity. Cultúr le Chéile commits to cultural development, and seeks to preserve and promote culture, language, arts, libraries and heritage in county Donegal.

The Donegal County Development Plan sets out a spatial blueprint for the development of the County and its role in growing the North West City Region up to 2030. Together with a range of local area plans across the County, this tourism strategy sits within this spatial framework in terms of its strategic objectives and policies across areas such as infrastructure development, housing and accommodation provision, environmental and cultural safeguarding, rural revitalisation and urban strengthening.

This tourism strategy and action plan forms an integral part of the **Donegal Integrated Framework Local Economic Community Plan 2023-2029** and will simultaneously act as a key delivery mechanism for the wider objectives and many of the key actions across both strategy frameworks.

Donegal Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2029 aims to guide and facilitate the sustainable development and management of outdoor recreation up to 2029 and beyond is closely aligned with the ambitions and aspiration of the recently launched National Strategy for Outdoor Recreation - Embracing Our Great Outdoors.

Fáilte Ireland’s existing and planned **Destination and Experience Development Plans** (DEDPs) including Inishowen DEDP 2022 and those planned for West Donegal & the Islands and for South Donegal have and will provide a framework to present the experiences and stories of that area in a way that visitors can easily engage with along with a suite of tangible actions to develop the assets of the area and a process for tourism business to shape their offer in line with the overall experience brand proposition and key motivating themes for their area.



1.8 Local Context – Donegal - a Truly Authentic Place

Donegal has a proven track record in tourism and has been a major economic driver for the local economy. It possesses a wealth of world-class tourism assets. The county hosts 37 Discovery Points and 3 Signature Discovery Points on the Wild Atlantic Way which are Sliabh Liag, Fanad Lighthouse, and Malin Head. Together with other iconic attractions such as Glenveagh National Park and Grianán of Aileach. These sites are capable of attracting significant visitor numbers in their own right. Donegal has been awarded several accolades including...‘Best in Travel 2024’ by Lonely Planet and identified as ‘The Coolest Place on The Planet’ by National Geographic Traveller as part of their ‘Cool List’ awards in 2017 and ‘Ireland’s Hidden Gem’ by readers of the ‘Irish Independent Travel’. Donegal Airport has also been voted ‘Most Scenic Landing in the World’ by Private Fly.

The launch of the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW), as a tourist route and brand in 2014 brought a re-imagined vision to the northwest coast, particularly to rural coastal communities that were falling victim to population decline and a limited tourist season. This is now opening up our less touristed locations in Donegal as emerging authentic destinations such as active in nature and spiritual tourism and wellbeing and this includes in areas such as East Donegal and other border regions.

The county attracts tourists from all over the island of Ireland and many overseas visitors from the USA, the UK and mainland Europe. The tourism product that is provided in Donegal has helped the sector flourish and thrive, creating more opportunity for job creation and enhancing the tourism experience at our numerous tourist locations. Collectively this has enhanced the County’s appeal as a destination. Donegal has become renowned for its niche tourism offering in areas such as food tourism, the ‘Food Coast’ and the range of quality restaurants and the availability of locally produced and artisan food products. The County is celebrated for its festivals, events and traditions which are often founded and enriched by the arts and the rich cultural and linguistic heritage of the place.

Outdoor recreational activities have grown from strength to strength particularly in recent years where the value of the great outdoors has become a key defining reason for people to choose Donegal as a holiday destination. The county’s natural assets (loughs and lakes; glens, valleys, and waterfalls; the coastline and mountain ranges) are characterised by an abundance of tourist attractions. Among the many growing activities which the county has to offer are world class golfing courses, fishing/angling, walking/hiking, cycling, horse riding, birdwatching, sailing, surfing, and many more.

Visitor numbers to our Signature Discovery Points in County Donegal in 2023 are set out below.

Attraction	Visitors Numbers
Sliabh Liag	160,000
Fanad Head	101,591
Malin Head	99,073

Visitor Numbers to Signature Discovery Points 2023³ Donegal County Council (Disclaimer: The figures for Sliabh Liag, Malin Head and Fanad Head are indicative figures collected by Donegal County Council from the Council’s Visitor Monitoring Equipment. These figures are not provided by or validated by Fáilte Ireland)



The table below in figure 3 outlines other visitor numbers at attractions across County Donegal according to the Fáilte Ireland Visitor Attraction Dashboard for 2023.

Key Visitor Attractions	Number of Visitors in 2023
Glenveagh Castle and Grounds	165,079
Sliabh Liag Cliffs	81,768
Donegal Castle	63,072
Glencolumbkille Folk Village, Museum & Heritage Centre	61,902
Waterworld Bundoran	58,274
Oakfield Park	49,274
Tropical World	45,000
Glebe House and Gallery	44,364
Doe Castle	37,120
Doagh Famine village	35,000
Grianán of Aileach	17,919
Fort Dunree Military Museum	14,500
Donegal Railway Heritage Museum	7,000
Inishowen Maritime Museum and Planetarium	7,000
Donegal County Museum	6,017
Lifford Old Courthouse	3,360

Figure 2 Visitor numbers at attractions in the County in 2023⁴

Connectivity by air remains central to Donegal’s appeal. Dublin Airport is less than 3 hours from County Donegal and offers regular flights to Donegal Airport. Donegal Airport, along with Ireland West Airport Knock, City of Derry Airport, Belfast International, and Belfast City Airport, ensures the region is reachable within two hours.

On the ground, Local Link Donegal operates over 30 routes, complemented by national services from Bus Éireann and Irish Citylink. Seasonal ferry services from operators like Stena Line and Irish Ferries connect key Irish ports—Dublin, Rosslare, and Belfast—to international destinations, while a broad network of car hire companies, including Enterprise, Avis, Budget, Europcar, Hertz, and local operators such as Donegal Car Hire, offers flexible options for exploring our scenic region. Within Donegal ferry services such as those from Burtonport to Arranmore, Magheroarty to Tory and Rathmullan to Buncrana connect our islands and regional areas.

³Donegal County Council (Note: Sliabh Liag figure is estimated taking account of local traffic) ⁴Fáilte Ireland Visitor Attractions Dashboard 2023



1.9 Challenges & Opportunities

As we strive to enhance and expand tourism in Donegal, it is essential to acknowledge and address the various challenges that confront us. These challenges present hurdles that impact the overall sustainability and growth of the tourism sector. By understanding and strategically responding to these issues, we can better position Donegal as a resilient and sustainable tourist destination. The following section looks at the key factors influencing the tourism landscape in Donegal and the broader Irish context.



Challenges specific to Ireland and Donegal

RISING COSTS

Rising costs, including energy, accommodation, and general cost of living, continue to present significant challenges to businesses and consumers. According to Fáilte Ireland, tourism operators are under pressure to manage increasing costs while maintaining competitive pricing, as customers face reduced disposable income. Ireland's annual inflation rose to 1.4% in December 2024, driven by higher transport, recreation, and cultural costs. While this is lower than the eurozone average of 2.4%, the sector remains under strain, with rising prices making it difficult for businesses to balance sustainability with affordability for tourists.

CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Protecting our unique environment, while going beyond a reduction in our impacts on climate change to where we are increasing climate positive outcomes to meet our targets is one of our greatest challenges. The tourism sector in Donegal has a vital role to play in implementing this change by embracing the principles of sustainable and regenerative tourism and translating them into our actions and attitudes.

KEY SKILLS

Staffing remains a critical challenge for businesses in the tourism sector amidst ongoing labour market pressures. According to Fáilte Ireland's Tourism Careers Research – Winter Update 2024⁵, industry vacancies have stabilised at approximately 18,000, down from 22,000 in 2022 and significantly lower than the 40,000 reported in early 2022. This decline reflects the positive impact of targeted efforts by employers and public sector initiatives. Donegal County Council will continue to collaborate with Atlantic Technological University (ATU), the Education and Training Board (ETB), and Fáilte Ireland to support skills development. These partnerships aim to build a robust skills pipeline, assist businesses in adopting efficient and sustainable staffing models, and enhance staff recruitment and retention across the tourism industry.

SEASONALITY AND REGIONALITY

Despite strong tourism performance in recent years, seasonality remains a challenge for business viability and limits opportunities for permanent employment in the sector. Efforts are focused on extending the season through targeted marketing campaigns and promoting Donegal's off-the-beaten-track experiences. Donegal County Council, in collaboration with Donegal Tourism CLG, will continue to focus on extending the tourism season through targeted marketing campaigns, product development, and industry collaboration. These initiatives aim to distribute visitor numbers more evenly across the county, enhancing regional tourism while fostering economic resilience for local businesses.

ACCOMMODATION SHORTAGES

Tourism accommodation stock is used by Government during times of need to meet the humanitarian housing needs of those seeking International Protection such as for those fleeing the war in Ukraine or other international conflicts. The resultant shortfalls can create tourism accommodation shortages, price increases, choice limitation for visitors, job displacement as well as significant impacts on other tourism businesses such as activities, pub and restaurants.



In this situation, the goal is to place those affected in more suitable long-term accommodation. However, this can be challenging due to the shortage of housing availability nationally and ongoing population growth. The development of additional high quality tourism accommodation will be supported and facilitated where appropriate to service accommodation needs of both domestic and international visitors.

According to Fáilte Ireland, the number of registered bedspaces available for tourism in Ireland has increased by 7.6%, rising from 220,000 in November 2023 to an estimated 237,000 in November 2024. Additionally, the number of attractions and activities listed on DiscoverIreland.ie has grown by 10.6%, from 2,950 to 3,263, reflecting a continued expansion of tourism offerings across the country.

PRESSURE FOR DEVELOPMENT

Donegal's natural and cultural heritage is vital to tourism, but its conservation is essential for future sustainability. Certain developments, whether individual or cumulative, can degrade landscapes, historic buildings, and local flora and fauna. Regulatory systems, such as development management and impact assessments, are key in mitigating these impacts. "Heritage proofing" projects, especially those not requiring planning, ensures the right developments occur in the right places. Best practice guidelines from the County Development Plan, Heritage Plan, and governmental guidelines must be followed in all public realm initiatives, from bus stops to signage.

CONGESTION

Congestion at popular tourist sites during peak season can lead to environmental degradation, including erosion, and negatively impact the visitor experience. This has been particularly noticeable at certain beaches, trails, and in Glenveagh in recent years. To mitigate these effects, it is crucial to provide infrastructure that balances accessibility with sustainability. Thoughtfully designed facilities, scaled appropriately to the site, are essential for managing congestion, preserving natural landscapes, and ensuring that the unique character of these attractions is maintained for future generations.

Opportunities

In response to these challenges, Donegal has several key opportunities to shape its tourism future:

- Promote increased sustainability in tourism businesses
- Build an eco-friendly destination
- Create a more self-sufficient tourism economy - Eat, Drink, Buy, Donegal
- Safeguard biodiversity loss /landscape degradation through visitor management and planning
- Create and promote tourism in less visited locations
- Drive tourism growth in the winter and shoulder seasons
- Encourage visitors to other sites and provide appropriate infrastructure at honey pot locations
- Support the sector to increase accommodation supply and foster more sustainable staffing models
- Support measures that ensure accessibility for all in the tourism sector
- Promote digital technology to further promote the region and enhance the visitor experience





1.10 Achievements to Date

The development of the tourism sector in Donegal has been a key economic priority for Donegal County Council over the last number of years. The Council has collaborated extensively with a range of key stakeholders including communities, businesses and the various state agencies including Fáilte Ireland, to develop products, attractions and visitor experiences while also investing in the promotion of Donegal as a destination of choice both on the island of Ireland and overseas. The below sets out a summary of examples of tourism initiatives delivered in recent years along with ongoing and future projects.

1.10.1 Destination Management, Infrastructure

- **The Local Authority Weatherproofing & Outdoor Dining Infrastructure Scheme** delivered a new project in Letterkenny at An Grianán Theatre, which benefited from the development of new outdoor recreational space costing over €200k in funding.
- Donegal Town has seen the **redevelopment of the Diamond** public realm space under the Outdoor Public Space Scheme 2021 including a new canopy for arts and cultural performances with a significant investment of over €700,000 from Donegal County Council and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.
- Donegal County Council supported the **development of Fanad Lighthouse** in collaboration with Fáilte Ireland, Irish Lights, Údarás na Gaeltachta and with EU Interreg IVA funding from the SEUPB to deliver a flagship tourism attraction on the Fanad Peninsula, a Wild Atlantic Way Signature Point.
- **Bundoran has received investment** under the Fáilte Ireland Destination Towns initiative aiming to boosting the attractiveness and tourism appeal, in addition to the planned development of access and public amenities at Tullan Strand, Bundoran.
- **Under the DEDP (Destination Experience Development Plan), funding in the amount of €12.5m** has been secured from Fáilte Ireland for a large-scale **immersive heritage and cultural experience project** to re-imagine the visitor experience at the spectacular Fort Dunree - a Discovery Point along the Wild Atlantic Way. It is anticipated that this new experience upon completion, will attract over 100,000 visitors per annum and have a significant impact in the creation of new employment opportunities and large-scale economic activity in the area. Donegal County Council is also feeding into the early stages of the **West Donegal and the Islands Development Plan (DEDP)**, due to launch in late 2025.
- With the support of **€199,969 in THRIVE** funding by the Northern and Western Regional Assembly through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Northern and Western Regional Programme 2021-2027, the Council aims to regenerate the former Letterkenny Courthouse building as an exciting tourist attraction and as a great asset for the Letterkenny community.
- **The Sliabh Liag Strategic Development Project** constituted an investment of €4.95m by Donegal County Council, Fáilte Ireland and the SEUPB aiming to protect the landscape and in tandem, to generate economic activity by providing sustainable local employment within the local community. The capital works delivered a transportation hub, visitor centre, car parking facilities, road improvements and an upland path to conserve the unique landscape amid growing visitor numbers.

1.10.2 Tourism Product Development

- Coastal tourism is promoted through initiatives such as the international Blue Flag and Green Coast beach awards. **In 2025 County Donegal was awarded 14 Blue Flags** for beaches that are clean and safe for bathing. Beaches in Donegal which received Blue Flags are Bundoran, Rossnowlagh, Murvagh, Fintra, Narin/Portnoo, An Charraig Fhinn, Killahoey, Marblehill, Na Dúnaibh, Portsalon, Culdaff, Stroove, in addition to marinas at Greencastle and Rathmullan. In addition, beaches at Dooey, Magheroarty, Drumnatinney, Ballyheirnan and Port Arthur all received Green Coast awards in 2025.
- Donegal also has 14 wheelchair accessible beaches, with beach wheelchairs available for use at **Magherawarden, Rathmullan, Downings, Carrickfinn, Rossnowlagh, Narin/Portnoo and Marble Hill** and 12 bespoke bicycle stands installed at strategic locations along the coast.
- Donegal County Council continues to **develop our network of paths and trails, notably sustainable Greenways**, these include **Letterkenny to Burtonport**, the **Largy to Fintra** Coastal path, the **EU Interreg funded North West Greenway**, Glenties Altar Trail, Great Arch Trail, Murder Hole Beach Trail, Foyle Valley, Muff to Quigleys Point and Buncrana to Carndonagh Greenways among others. With **strong emphasis on active and sustainable travel** a dedicated Active Travel/Greenways Development Team has been established to leverage funding to continue work on developing greenway infrastructure. Works on an **uplands pathway** to provide more sustainable and safe access have also been completed at **Errigal Mountain**.
- **Donegal County Council's annual festival & events programme** includes for example Seachtain na Gaeilge, Bealtaine Festival, Heritage Week, Culture Night, Donegal Bay and Blue Stacks Festival, Wainfest and Cruinniú na nÓg among others.
- Donegal has a **vibrant cultural and arts scene** serviced by the Regional Cultural Centre (RCC), the Donegal County Museum, the extensive network of libraries, the MacGill Summer School as well as supporting arts venues such as An Grianán Theatre, The Balor Arts Theatre and The Abbey Arts Centre. Arts and cultural events such as Ballyshannon Folk & Traditional Music Festival, Allingham Arts Festival, Frances Browne Literary Festival, Lughnasa Friel Fest and Féile Roisa Rua are important attractors to the county.

1.10.3 Marketing and Promotion

- Donegal County Council Tourism Unit manages **Donegal Tourism CLG**. Donegal Tourism CLG Board of Directors and Associate Committee work closely and collaboratively with the tourism sector businesses and other key stakeholders. Donegal Tourism CLG is responsible for marketing and promotion targeting domestic and international markets, tourism product development and tourism business support. Marketing campaigns such as the **'Donegal It's Yours/Ours' campaign** with Eric Roberts in 2024 reached over **5.35 million impressions** and 2.9 million video views.
- The **Donegal Tourism brochure** is designed annually with over 15,000 copies printed and distributed at trade shows and across Donegal each year.
- The **Govisitdonegal.com website** had over 986,000 visitors in 2024 and social media platforms of **Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn** had a combined following of over 93,798 followers and a reach in excess of 8 million.

1.10.4 Business and Community Engagement

- The **Caravan and Camping grant scheme**, stemming from insights gathered in the KPMG Caravan, Camping & Campervan Study 2021, this grant scheme has supported the development, enhancement, and maintenance of caravan, camping, and campervan facilities in County Donegal alongside a targeted marketing campaign reenforcing the messaging around sustainable tourism through the campers ‘code of conduct’.
- The **Minor Tourism Works Related Grant Scheme** is an annual funding programme that provides a total of **€500,000 for both Community and Donegal County Council** led projects. With an allocation of €100,000 to each Municipal District, the Minor Tourism Related Grant Scheme provides essential funding for small-scale tourism improvements across the county, enhancing visitor facilities and supporting local businesses to be more sustainable. Examples of projects under this scheme include minor infrastructure works, improved access to visitor attractions and heritage sites, signage, car parks and laybys, accessibility measures, marine tourism works, paths and trails among others.
- Donegal County Council delivers the annual **Fáilte Ireland Festival and Events Grant Scheme**, which in 2025 has been allocated funding in the amount of €49,750 to fund a variety of festivals and events across County Donegal. In 2024, 37 festivals and events received funding ranging from €500 to €4000 each along with marketing support via the Go Visit Donegal website and social media platforms.
- Donegal County Council also supports several **Strategic Festivals and Events**, which are larger festivals and events that attract a national and/or international audience and have a positive impact on the local economy due to higher visitor numbers, spend, dwell time and bed nights. In 2024, funding in the total amount of €60,000 was awarded to 7 strategic festivals and events e.g. Mary from Dungloe International Festival.

1.10.5 Coordination and Collaboration

- Donegal County Council is working collaboratively with Fáilte Ireland and local stakeholders to deliver the **Inishowen Destination Experience Development Plan (DEDP)**, which is a 3/5 -year sustainable tourism plan for the Inishowen region incorporating catalyst experiences at Malin Head, Inishowen Blueway and Fort Dunree alongside hero experiences at Grianán of Aileach, Inch Wildfowl Reserve and Inishowen Maritime Museum among others.
- A **Night Time Economy Advisor** has been appointed in Buncrana, which is one of 9 pilots nationally. The primary objectives of the Night-Time Advisor initiative are to strengthen local NTE structures, develop a comprehensive action plan tailored to the specific town, and ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts through ongoing local authority collaboration and consultation. Seed funding for **26 events held in Buncrana** in 2024 provided a positive boost to the night time economy with many of these events continuing organically in 2025.
- The **creation of the Donegal Golf Cluster with an ethos of collaboration** and the launch of the new **Donegal golf brochure** will contribute to the promotion of the county’s world-class golf courses, attracting both domestic and international golfers.
- **EU Projects such as TOURBO, SUB and EDIN** funded through Interreg Europe and the Atlantic Area Programme, provide overall funding of €904,000 for Donegal specifically targeted towards good practice pilot schemes that benefit the tourism sector.



2. DONEGAL TOURISM PROFILE

2.1. Attributes

Donegal's natural and cultural heritage forms the foundation of its thriving tourism industry. With the longest coastline of any county in Ireland, stretching 1,134 km, Donegal boasts a diverse range of landscapes and attractions. The county features 14 Blue Flag beaches, two major sea loughs, and Europe's highest accessible sea cliffs. Donegal is home to three Wild Atlantic Way Signature Discovery Points at Malin Head, Fanad Head, and Sliabh Liag, offering breathtaking views. Rugged peninsulas to the north, renowned mountainous inland areas, and a large collection of islands—both inhabited and uninhabited—further enhance its appeal.

Culturally, Donegal is the proud home of Ireland's largest Gaeltacht region, covering 1,502 km² where the Irish language thrives. The Gaeltacht's festivals, arts, and traditions create a unique cultural draw for visitors, particularly those from overseas with an interest in Irish language and heritage. This is complemented by a rich arts scene, exceptional local cuisine, and a vibrant entertainment offering featuring traditional music, dance, storytelling, fine art, crafts, and local produce. These elements form the foundation for a compelling 'only in Donegal' tourism experience.

The warmth of the Donegal people, with their renowned hospitality and genuine interactions, brings the county's tourism offerings to life, creating lasting memories and encouraging repeat visits. The personal connections visitors make with locals often result in word-of-mouth recommendations, ensuring the continued growth of Donegal's tourism sector. Moreover, the strong connection with the Donegal diaspora—whose members often return to reconnect with their roots—further amplifies these personal interactions, resulting in word-of-mouth recommendations that continue to drive the growth of Donegal's tourism sector.

Donegal's architectural and archaeological heritage adds further distinction, with a wealth of ancient castles, shipwrecks, spiritual sites, and other historic monuments located throughout the county. Each town and village is steeped in history, contributing to Donegal's unique cultural landscape.

Geographically, Donegal shares 93% of its land boundary with Northern Ireland, making it the county with the longest shared border in Ireland. This strategic proximity, enhanced by key routes such as the Wild Atlantic Way, the Causeway Coastal Route and access to the 'Walled City' of Derry, offers significant potential for regional tourism collaboration.

Donegal is part of the North West City Region, which is the fourth largest urban agglomeration on the island of Ireland comprised of Donegal, Derry and Strabane. The North West City Region is an initiative born out of close collaboration and partnership between Donegal County Council and Derry City & Strabane District Council Donegal working together to realise common goals and objectives, particularly in the tourism space.

These rich natural, cultural, and geographical assets, combined with strong connectivity, position Donegal as a prime destination for tourists seeking a unique and authentic Irish experience.

2.3. Facilities and Amenities

The continued growth and promotion of the County’s visitor infrastructure and experiences has catapulted Donegal’s popularity as a domestic and international destination. A snapshot of the amenities and operators from the Go Visit Donegal Official Visitor Guide is set out below.

Category	Number of Operations
Family Fun Facilities (including activity centres, pet farms, picnic spots, leisure centres, cinemas)	40, plus 46 playgrounds
Golf Courses	23 (including 6 pitch & putt)
Angling (including game angling, coarse angling, put and take fisheries)	23 plus sea angling information from 5 regional centres and 15 charter boats
Watersports	14 surf schools, 8 scuba dive operators, 10 boat trip operators, 6 operators of other watersports ie. kitesurfing, kayaking, sailing.
Walking & Hiking	79 trails, divided into 5 categories: Coastal Walk, Upland Hiking Trail, Family Walk, National Park & Woodland Walk, Lake & River Walk and 6 operators of walking tours.
Cycling	5 National Cycle Routes and 7 Bike Hire and Tour Operators
Adventure	17 Operators of various forms of adventure activity
Equestrian Centres	9
Beaches	14 Blue Flag, 5 Green Coast
Culture	5 Arts and Culture Centres, 40 venues providing one form or another of heritage experience, ranging from museums galleries, historical buildings, industrial heritage, arts and crafts and the Glenveagh National Park
Donegal Crafts	33 Creative Donegal Operators, 23 Galleries, 11 Donegal Design Specialists
Festivals	88 across the year to a wide range of themes and interests
Gaeltacht and the Islands	The geographical area of the Donegal Gaeltacht is 1,502km2 and this is equivalent to 26% of the total area of the Gaeltacht and there are ferry services to four of the islands.
Donegal Gardens	21
Food Coast	9 certified Donegal producers, 21 chefs and restaurants and 1 food operator

2.2 Accommodation

Fáilte Ireland’s Accommodation Supply dashboard for 2024 illustrated below provides a breakdown of the 12,729 bed spaces in Donegal broken down by Accommodation Type, Welcome Standard and Star Rating.

There were 367 properties registered and approved by Fáilte Ireland in 2024, including 51 hotels, 28 B&B’s and 122 self-catering. There is an even breakdown of 3 and 4 star hotels at 25/22. The largest volume of bed spaces remains with the hotels at 59% followed by caravan and camping at 7%.

Donegal has seen a decline in the number of traditional B&B’s in the county and the closure of B&B Ireland, the Association that promotes the B&B sector nationally, based out of Ballyshannon has impacted that decline along with other demographic and changing trend patterns. Self-catering has emerged as the largest offering of accommodation in County Donegal. Figures below indicate those self-catering properties registered with Fáilte Ireland although the number of unregistered Airbnb properties in Donegal is higher.

Donegal offers one 5 star hotel and other luxury accommodation for the high end market

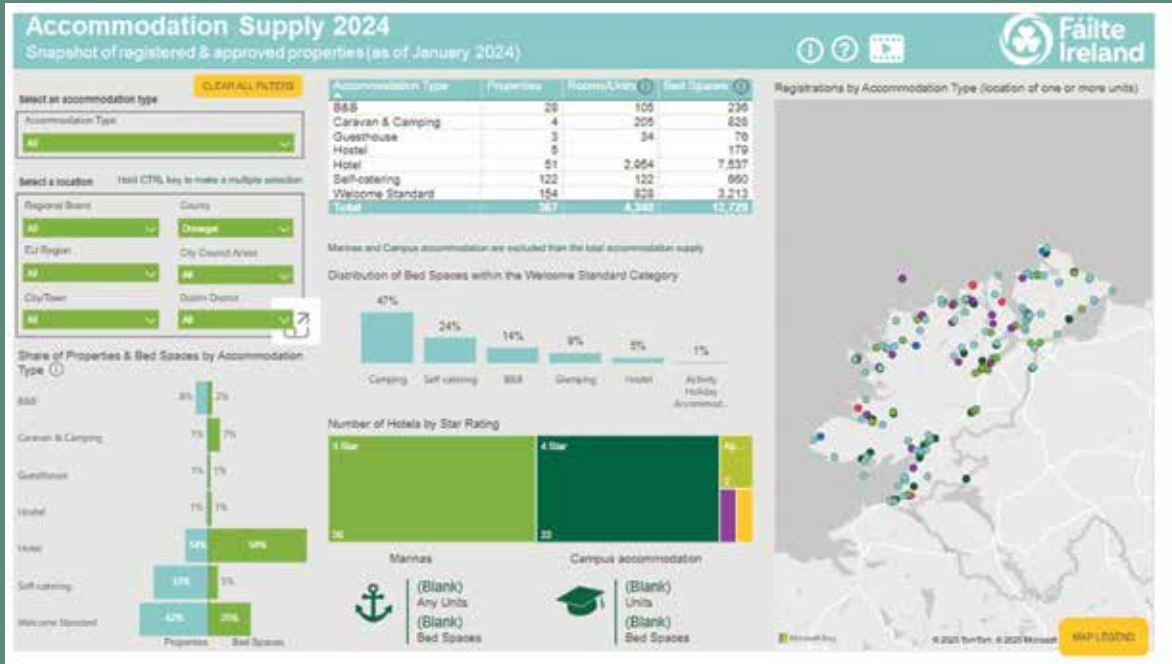


Figure 4 Donegal Amenities and Operators

2.4 Domestic Tourism

The importance of domestic visitors to Donegal is particularly evident both regionally and seasonally and none more so than in recent years. In 2023 Irish residents took 14.3 million domestic trips, spending a total of €3.1 billion. 4.8% or 699,000 of which were taken in Donegal with a spend of €186 million.

The average spend per domestic visitor per trip to Donegal is €266.09. Domestic visitors stayed an average of 3 nights, a total of 2.3 million nights. The length of stay in Donegal which averaged 3 nights was greater than the national average of 2.2 and longer than any other County in Ireland (bar Kerry). ⁴

County	Spend	Trips	Spend per trip €	Length of Stay Nights
Kerry	€432,900,000	1,326,000	€326.47	3.7
Donegal	€186,000,000	699,000	€266.09	3
Clare	€180,300,000	674,000	€267.51	3
Wexford	€209,600,000	919,000	€228.07	2.6
Cork	€402,100,000	1,706,000	€235.70	2.6
Mayo	€147,700,000	649,000	€227.58	2.5
Roscommon & Longford	€57,300,000	277,000	€206.86	2.3
Waterford	€98,100,000	499,000	€196.59	2.2
Galway	€235,900,000	1,184,000	€199.24	2.2
Sligo	€55,900,000	302,000	€185.10	2.1
Laois & Offaly	€52,100,000	287,000	€181.53	2
Wicklow	€86,300,000	474,000	€182.07	2
Louth & Monaghan	€52,600,000	294,000	€178.91	2
Limerick	€78,100,000	433,000	€180.37	2
Cavan & Leitrim	€75,500,000	431,000	€175.17	2
Kilkenny	€65,400,000	355,000	€184.23	2
Dublin	€490,000,000	2,416,000	€202.81	1.9
Tipperary	€54,200,000	326,000	€166.26	1.9
Westmeath	€43,700,000	262,000	€166.79	1.9
Meath	€52,600,000	327,000	€160.86	1.8
Kildare & Carlow	€64,000,000	469,000	€136.46	1.5

*Note figures do not include trips from Northern Ireland
Figure 5 Fáilte Ireland Spend per Trip



3. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

3.1 Consumer Expectations

The impact of travel restrictions during 2020 and 2021, combined with the global push for sustainability and climate action, has shifted perceptions of tourism.

This change is shaped by awareness of issues like environmental degradation and accommodation shortages due to over-tourism. Notable global examples include Barcelona, Mount Everest, Hawaii, and Machu Picchu. In Ireland, sites such as Glendalough, the Skelligs, the Ring of Kerry, and beaches along the Wild Atlantic Way have faced similar challenges. Growing concerns about the carbon cost of air travel have led to “flight shame” and views of tourism as extractive.

However, tourism’s economic and social benefits, resilience, and post-COVID recovery highlight its potential as a force requiring careful adjustment to meet evolving visitor expectations which include:

3.1.1 The Visitor Experience

- Having a truly authentic experience
- Immerse themselves in the place
- Become a local for a week
- Experience the outdoors and breathe fresh air
- Understand the story of the place from a local perspective
- Have a transformational experience
- Partaking in local customs, events and practices

3.1.2 Health and Wellbeing

- Enhance their wellbeing
- Practice Self Care

3.1.3 The Built and Natural Environment

- Get close to nature
- Be empowered to do more good, and less harm
- Undertake ‘heritage enhancement’ activities
- Directly benefit the place, the environment and the people
- Neutralise travel – reduce transport impact by giving back to host community
- Access for all - Catering for additional needs
- Discovering new and wild locations

3.1.4 Economic Benefits

- Eat, sleep and buy local

3.1.5 Travel Patterns

- Travel shorter distances
- Undertake domestic trips
- Travel with pet(s)

All of this requires the development of destinations which are sustainable, eco conscious and localised. For Donegal it means that there is a need for carbon neutral, nature based, culture driven options, where visitors can feel like locals by immersing themselves in the activities, landscapes, food and drink of the place.

The unmatched natural and cultural heritage of Donegal provides a solid foundation on which to meet these market desires both international and domestic. This means working with what we already have by showcasing the very essence of our places and people and developing our hidden gems and tourism product in our towns, villages and rural areas.





3.2. Differentiation and Branding

Differentiation

Donegal’s future marketing and promotion will be consistent with, and draw from, the overall Donegal Place Brand, applying the concept of DNA to stress its differentiation from other counties.

Branding

The Donegal place brand will play a central role in building Donegal’s reputation as a unique place to visit. ‘Donegal – Ireland’s DNA’ is chosen as the brand driver clearly positioning Donegal within Ireland which is a strong recognisable brand in the overseas markets. Go Visit Donegal will continue as the calling card for Donegal particularly for all digital marketing activities.

The Donegal place brand provides two special benefits for the marketing of tourism to Donegal. Firstly, the DNA focus of the overarching place brand for Donegal will assist in achieving one of the primary goals of the tourism strategy in differentiating the county from others along the Wild Atlantic Way, reinforcing its position as the starting point – or origin – of the route; and, secondly, for those visitor segments who wish to combine their experiences in the county while remaining in contact with the outside world, the linking in the place branding of the Wild Atlantic Way and by combining ‘turf, tech and talent’.

Consequently, quality of life, natural space, outdoor activities, deep-rooted culture, and digital connectivity, are all part of Donegal’s DNA, which underpin its appeal as a great place to not only live, work and do business, but also to visit.

The Wild Atlantic Way is a powerful market-penetrating umbrella brand, which incorporates not just the natural landscape along the coast, but also the culture, heritage, and activities of the county which are influenced by the sea, look towards it, or are otherwise geographically linked to it as part of the WAW hinterland.

Within this context of the WAW, Donegal’s primary strengths incorporated within this Tourism Strategy are twofold:

1. Its outstanding coastal/island and inland natural features provide an extensive range of opportunities for outdoor pursuits requiring differing degrees of physical effort i.e. ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ recreation; and
2. The fact that these outdoor activities can be combined with visits to the towns and villages, in many of which vestiges of a traditional lifestyle and value remain, exposing visitors to:
 - The national significant built heritage of Donegal,
 - The cultural heritage of the people of Donegal expressed through language, literature, music and crafts, and
 - Interaction with the residents of these centres, away from the intense urban lifestyle of many visitors.



4. TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Vision

A vibrant, regenerative and sustainable tourism sector positively impacting on the economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing of Donegal.

4.2 Key Areas of Focus

Taking on board the current operating environment, the changing customer expectations and the vision for the tourism sector in Donegal, the following are the key areas of focus that are clearly emerging:

1. **Strengthening and diversifying the tourism product**, enhancing the Wild Atlantic Way's appeal as the starting point and expanding inland and coastal attractions through collaboration.
2. **Balancing development with preservation** by growing tourism while safeguarding Donegal's natural and cultural heritage.
3. **Extending visitor stay and year-round appeal** by developing all-weather activities and embracing the outdoors in all seasons.
4. **Differentiating visitor experiences** through authentic local engagement, showcasing arts, crafts, food, traditions, and stories.
5. **Delivering targeted marketing campaigns** focused on Donegal's unique features and high-yield markets, supporting the sector in promotion.
6. **Creating carbon-positive offerings** by introducing and promoting climate-friendly measures across the industry.
7. **Accessibility for all** in ensuring that Donegal is a destination that prioritises tourism experiences that can be enjoyed by everyone.
8. **Boosting urban and rural communities** through upgraded amenities, public spaces, and improved access.
9. **Increasing tourism sector self-sufficiency** with business efficiency training to reduce costs, increase profits, and maintain quality.
10. **Strengthening collaboration** with international, national, and local partners, including EU, Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, and Wild Atlantic Way counties.

4.3. Strategic Pillars and Goals

This strategy will be delivered across the following five pillars of action, namely:

- Product Development
- Marketing and Promotion
- Destination Management
- Business and Community Engagement
- Coordination and Collaboration



4.3.1 Pillar 1 – Product Development

Goal: Harness the unique assets of the County and its People The Product Development pillar shall be delivered through a multi-agency approach along with the impetus and investment of the business community with guidance and stimulation from Donegal County Council. Donegal County Council is also leading on the development of several key strategic projects that will have a significant impact on tourism development.

The Council also provides guidance and support for local communities and businesses to create compelling and authentic visitor experiences across a range of services.

Objective 1: To strengthen and diversify the tourism product both coastal and inland with the aim of developing all weather activities, extending visitor stays and enhancing year-round appeal.

Objective 2: To work to differentiate the Donegal experience through our arts, music, languages, crafts, food, traditions and stories to create authentic visitor engagements.



4.3.2 Pillar 2 – Marketing and Promotion

Goal: Anchor Donegal as: Diverse | Natural | Authentic

The Marketing and Promotion pillar shall use the full range of marketing and promotional methods and techniques to maximise penetration of the target segments. This includes those established and newly identified international and domestic markets, which represent the greatest potential and economic benefit for Donegal. The alignment of the County’s tourism branding with the overall Donegal brand will give strong support to the marketing and promotional efforts of individual private sector and community tourism operators.

Objective 1: To promote the Go Visit Donegal brand as it aligns with Donegal brand, Ireland’s DNA (Diverse, Natural, Authentic) and to represent Donegal as a unified destination showcasing the County’s abundant natural and cultural heritage, promote tourism businesses and further develop Donegal as world class destination.

Objective 2: To deliver targeted marketing campaigns focused on differentiating Donegal’s unique and authentic offering to high yield markets.

4.3.3 Pillar 3 – Destination Management

Goal: Create and manage a destination which is rooted in the place

Whilst striving to create a prosperous and dynamic tourism sector which brings socio-economic sustainability across the county, we must ensure that Donegal’s natural and cultural assets are safeguarded thereby ensuring the development and operation of a sector that meets the triple bottom line of sustainability – i.e. nature, sociocultural, and economy.

It is essential that Donegal strikes a balance between the optimisation of value creation for the local community which can be achieved through increased tourist spending while the county retains its local character, identity, and infrastructure to the benefit of the people of Donegal.

The Destination Management pillar seeks to provide Donegal communities with the enabling infrastructure and services to empower them to create the places they want for themselves and visitors.

Objective 1: To deliver enabling infrastructure and management tools to support sustainable tourism development.

Objective 2: To upgrade amenities, public spaces and improve access in towns and villages in Donegal.



4.3.4 Pillar 4 – Business and Community Engagement

Goal: Empower businesses and communities to collaborate around a common vision

Donegal County Council will support businesses and communities throughout Donegal to work together to create and deliver tourism experiences which can draw greater levels of visitors than the individual attractions or activities can realise without such networking or collaboration.

Objective 1: To act as a key support and enabler for business and local communities in sustainably growing the tourism sector in Donegal.

Objective 2: To support business and skills development by facilitating access to training, funding and resources to enhance the resilience and profitability of enterprises in this sector.

4.3.5 Pillar 5 – Coordination and Collaboration

Goal: Facilitate Strategic collaboration and networking to realise our common vision

A close working relationship between Donegal County Council, Donegal Tourism CLG, European partners, national tourism agencies, regional development and regeneration agencies, other local authorities, education and training providers, local development companies, the tourism trade and communities across Donegal is essential to implement and deliver this strategy.

Objective 1: To work collaboratively with all key partners and key stakeholders including Fáilte Ireland, Udarás na Gaeltachta, NPWS, OPW, ATU, industry bodies both locally and nationally to develop vibrant and sustainable tourism sector that contributes positively to the wellbeing of Donegal.

Objective 2: To participate in international, European and national networks to position Donegal, learn from good policies and practices and secure funding to support the development of a vibrant and sustainable tourism sector.

5. MEASURING RESULTS

5.1 Introduction to Monitoring and Evaluation

Effective monitoring and evaluation of the Donegal Tourism Strategy 2025 – 2030 is critical to the implementation of the actions and overall success of the Strategy. By systematically assessing its impact, Donegal County Council can identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for refinement. This section of the Strategy outlines key approaches, methodologies, and KPI's for monitoring and evaluating the Donegal Tourism Strategy 2025 – 2030 to ensure sustainable growth and positive outcomes in the tourism sector in Donegal.

5.2 Importance of Monitoring and Evaluation

Donegal County Council will monitor and evaluate progress and measure success against the goals set out under each of the pillars in this Strategy framework. It is important to monitor and evaluate ongoing progress for the following reasons:

- To ensure alignment with sustainability and economic goals
- Enhance accountability in relation to delivery of the actions
- Adapt to emerging trends, challenges and new opportunities

This will include the ongoing collection of data that will inform future strategic decision making by Donegal County Council in relation to tourism activities to assess how well the Strategy is being implemented and to determine if the tourism strategy has achieved its desired results. Key monitoring and evaluation components include:

- Key Performance Indicators (see section 5.3) – Metrics to assess visitor numbers, economic impacts, online engagement with the brand etc.
- Stakeholder Engagement – Encouraging feedback from tourism businesses i.e. Donegal Tourism Associate Members Network & Board, agencies and local communities to gauge effectiveness.
- Environmental Impact – Monitoring the impact of tourism on the environment and the effect on our climate action targets.
- Data Sources – Surveys, CSO figures, Fáilte Ireland metrics, visitor feedback and digital analytics (e.g., website traffic and social media engagement).



5.4 Donegal County Council Tourism Strategy Implementation Group

Collaboration is key to the success of the Donegal County Council Tourism Strategy, both within Donegal County Council and with external agencies and stakeholders. A Donegal County Council Tourism Strategy Implementation Group will be established within Donegal County Council made up of representatives from key Council Services. This Tourism Working Group will be convened by the Tourism Manager on a biannual basis with the aim of working collaboratively to deliver on the actions set out in the Tourism Strategy. Tourism is a cross-cutting theme within Donegal County Council and many of the teams within each Directorate are directly or indirectly working on projects that impact tourism. A collaborative approach to tourism on a cross-directorate basis in Donegal County Council would encourage shared learning, more efficient use of resources and time and a more collaborative approach to delivery of tourism related projects. By working together decision makers within Donegal County Council will have access to knowledge from across the Council services that will enable more strategic data driven decision making on future tourism development initiatives.

5.5 Adapting to Change

The Strategy may evolve in the coming yearsinfluencing factors change such as geopolitical, financial markets, technological, social trends, economic, policy making, climate change etc. Tourism is a dynamic industry, subject to fluctuations in global trends and local conditions. Adaptive management of the Donegal County Council Tourism Strategy ensures responsiveness to new challenges by:

- Regularly revising tourism policies based on findings
- Implementing corrective measures to enhance effectiveness
- Strengthening collaboration among public and private sector partners, and community representatives and other stakeholders

Monitoring and evaluation are essential to the successful implementation of the Donegal Tourism Strategy and the measurement of results. The actions set out in this Strategy are the result of evidence based strategic decision making. The Donegal Tourism Strategy was developed in close collaboration with a range of organisations and key stakeholders, and it provides a framework for the next five years in relation to working collaboratively to realise the vision and achieve the strategic goals set out within the Strategy.

5.3 Key Performance Indicators

Donegal County Council has set out several Key Performance Indicators across the 5 pillars of the Donegal Tourism Strategy 2025 – 2030 as set out in the table below.

Pillar	KPIs
1. Product Development	• Domestic market share of visitors and spend per visitor • International market share of visitors and spend per visitor
2. Marketing and Promotion	• Domestic and international visitor dwell time • Job creation and retention in the tourism sector • Tourism industry feedback and sentiment • Domestic and international visitor feedback and sentiment
3. Destination Management	• Environmental impact • Traffic and engagement on Govisitdonegal.com • Followers and engagement across Govisitdonegal.com social media channels
4. Business and Community Engagement	• Number of business and community engagement initiatives
5. Coordination and Collaboration	• Membership of Donegal Tourism Associate Committee Network • Establishment of a cross-directorate Tourism Working Group and engagement with other stakeholders

Figure 10 Key Performance Indicators



Pillar 1 - Product Development

Goal: Harness the unique assets of Donegal and its People

***Short Term: 1-2 Years Medium Term: 3-5 Years Long Term: 5-10 Years**

Objective 1: To strengthen and diversify the tourism product both coastal and inland with the aim of developing all weather activities, extending visitor stays, enhancing year-round appeal and increasing international visitor numbers to the northern half of the Wild Atlantic Way.

Sustainable Development Goals	Action	Directorate	Partners & Stakeholders	Timeframe
8, 9	Develop flagship visitor attractions at WAW signature points at Malin Head and Sliabh Liag in collaboration with key partners including Fáilte Ireland, local communities and trade.	Community Development & Planning	Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Sector, Local Communities	Ongoing
8	Develop iconic Fort Dunree Project as a 'must visit' attraction, in collaboration with key partners including Fáilte Ireland, local communities and trade.	Community Development & Planning	Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Sector, Local Communities	Ongoing
8, 11	Support the activities of public, community based and/or private partners to develop projects of scale at key locations, including WAW discovery points, to increase visitor numbers and dwell times at these locations.	Economic Development, IS and Emergency Services; Community Development & Planning	Fáilte Ireland, Udaras na nGaeltachta, Development Companies, Local Communities and Private Sector.	Short / Medium / Longterm
8, 9, 11	Develop new and regenerate existing tourism visitor attractions including for example the former Courthouse in Letterkenny and Waterworld in Bundoran.	Community Development and Planning	Cultural Services, Fáilte Ireland, Local Businesses and Community.	Ongoing
8, 9	Support the development and implementation of the Fáilte Ireland led Destination Experience Development Plans (DEDP) in Donegal.	Economic Development, IS and Emergency Services; Community Development & Planning	Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Sector, Local Communities	Ongoing
15	Work with key partners including OPW, NPWS and Fáilte Ireland to conserve and protect the county's built heritage whilst providing public access and interpretation where possible including to historic castles, monuments and historic graveyards.	Housing, Corporate & Culture	Economic Development, Office of Public Works, National Parks & Wildlife Service, Fáilte Ireland, local communities	Short/ Medium/Long Term
9	Continue to deliver an extensive programme of trail development throughout the county in collaboration with local communities and other key partners.	Community Development and Planning	Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Sector, Local Communities	Ongoing

Objective 2: To work to differentiate the Donegal experience through our arts, music, languages, crafts, food, traditions and stories to create authentic visitor engagements.

Sustainable Development Goals	Action	Directorate	Partners & Stakeholders	Timeframe
8	Secure and maximise investment in our cultural infrastructure to improve the presentation and conservation of, and access to our cultural collections as set out in the Cultúr le Chéile Strategy.	Housing, Corporate & Culture	Dept of Housing, Local Government & Heritage, DRCD	Medium to Long Term
8, 9	Support the provision of cultural experiences through a wide range of programmes and activities including Regional Cultural Centre, County Museum, theatres including An Grianan, The Balor, Abbey Arts Centre and the diverse Arts Programme facilitated by the Donegal Arts Office.	Community Development & Planning	Community, Cultural, Business and Tourism Sectors	Ongoing
8, 11	Work closely with Udaras na nGaeltachta and other key stakeholders to ensure that Donegal's distinctive and authentic gaeltacht culture and language is central to the Donegal visitor experience.	Economic Development, IS and Emergency Services	Udaras na nGaeltachta, local communities and businesses.	Short to Medium Term
8, 9	Leverage the unique literary legacy of Donegal by supporting initiatives such as the Brian Friel Centre in Glenties.	Housing, Corporate & Culture	Local Community and Heritage sector	Short/Medium Term
8, 11	Support the growth and development of Donegal's vibrant festival and events sector as key driver of visitor demand as well as creating positive, memorable and enjoyable visitor experiences.	Economic Development	Fáilte Ireland, Cultural Services, Local Communities and Private Sector.	Short-Medium Term
8	Work to support the development of the Creative and Craft Sector as a key element of the tourism offering including through initiatives such as the Creative Coast, Buy Donegal and the Donegal Craft Village.	Economic Development / Local Enterprise Office	Local Businesses, Fáilte Ireland.	Ongoing
8	Work to develop Food Tourism in Donegal under the auspices of the Donegal Food Coast network.	Local Enterprise Office	Fáilte Ireland, Donegal Tourism CLG, Local Food Businesses.	Short to Medium Term
8, 11	Deliver the pilot Night Time Economy initiative in Buncrana with a view to transporting the learnings and opportunities to other towns and villages in Donegal.	Economic Development	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Fáilte Ireland, Business and Community Sectors	Short to Medium Term

Pillar 2 - Marketing and Promotion

Goal: Anchor Donegal as: Diverse | Natural | Authentic

***Short Term: 1-2 Years Medium Term: 3-5 Years Long Term: 5-10 Years**

Objective 1: To grow the Donegal brand and showcase the county's distinct visitor offering with a view to extending visitor stays, enhancing year-round appeal and increasing international visitor numbers.

Sustainable Development Goals	Action	Directorate	Partners & Stakeholders	Timeframe
8, 11	To raise awareness of the Go Visit Donegal brand as it aligns with the Donegal brand, Ireland's DNA (Diverse, Natural, Authentic)	Economic Development	Donegal Tourism CLG	Short / Medium Term
8	Position Donegal as the starting point of the Wild Atlantic Way using effective messaging techniques and connecting to other routes of international appeal such as the Walled City and the Causeway Coastal Route.	Economic Development	Donegal Tourism CLG, Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland	Short / Medium Term
8	Position Donegal as the starting point of the Wild Atlantic Way using effective messaging techniques and connecting to other routes of international appeal such as the Walled City and the Causeway Coastal Route.	Economic Development	Donegal Tourism CLG, Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland	Short / Medium Term
8, 11	Promote Donegal and the North West region as a destination for international events such as conferences, seminars and business meetings.	Economic Development	Tourism Businesses, Hospitality Sector, Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, Donegal Tourism CLG, Atlantic Economic Corridor	Medium to Long Term

Objective 2: To deliver targeted marketing campaigns focused on differentiating Donegal's unique and authentic offering to high yield markets.

Sustainable Development Goals	Action	Directorate	Partners & Stakeholders	Timeframe
8	Capitalise on recent growth in the domestic market particularly the staycation market, to position Donegal as a must visit destination of choice through innovative, creative and well timed campaigns such as the recent 'Sharing Donegal' Shoulder Season campaign.	Economic Development	Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, Donegal Tourism CLG, local businesses and communities.	Short / Medium Term
8, 11	Work with Tourism Ireland and other partners to target key international markets including GB, France, Spain, Germany & US, across traditional and emerging segments such as Outdoor Adventurers and Nature Lovers, Dream Fulfilment/Passion Travellers, those seeking new destinations and the Irish diaspora.	Economic Development	Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and Donegal Tourism CLG	Short / Medium Term
8, 11	Capitalise on international accolades such as the Lonely Planet's 'Top Destination in the World to Visit' and National Geographic Traveller's 'Coolest Place on the Planet' to increase overseas visitor numbers and spend through a range of targeted marketing campaigns	Economic Development	Donegal Tourism CLG, Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland	Short/Medium Term
8, 11	Build on the existing digital assets including the redevelopment of Govisitdonegal.com website in line with accessibility, mobile and user friendly design guidelines as the 'shop window' in the promotion of Donegal	Economic Development, Information Services	Tourism Businesses, Hospitality Sector, Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland	Short / Medium Term
8, 11	Leverage PR and influencer marketing and engagement with an agile approach to hosting familiarisation and media trips to Donegal including for example hosting TBEX the world travel blogger and influencer conference	Economic Development	Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland	Short / Medium Term
8, 11	Target the Donegal diaspora delivering key tourism marketing messages that appeal to those with ancestral and other connections to Donegal	Economic Development	International Partners, Tourism Ireland, Donegal Tourism CLG, DCC Diaspora Officer	Short / Medium Term
8, 11	Provide Donegal Travel Concierge Service providing specialised knowledge and support to tour operators and travel agents.	Economic Development	Individual & Group Travellers, Tour Operators and Travel Agents	Short / Medium Term
8, 11	Leverage data analytics and insights to measure and track marketing campaign effectiveness and to adjust marketing strategies where required	Economic Development	Tourism Businesses, Hospitality Sector, Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, CSO	Short / Medium Term
8, 11	Develop niche tourism marketing initiatives such as digital nomads, astro tourism (Northern Lights), geological tourism, pet friendly and wildlife tourism.	Economic Development	Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, Tourism Industry Stakeholders	Medium to Long Term

Objective 3: To position Donegal as an eco-friendly location, promoting responsible tourism practices and travel experiences.

Sustainable Development Goals	Action	Directorate	Partners & Stakeholders	Timeframe
8, 11, 15	Incorporate key messaging that Donegal is an eco-friendly location and promote responsible tourism practices and travel experiences through a variety of marketing campaigns	Economic Development	Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, Environment Directorate	Short / Medium Term
8, 11, 15	Work with key partners to raise awareness among visitors of the importance of 'leaving no trace' and having a minimum impact on surrounding environment.	Economic Development	Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, Environment Directorate	Short / Medium Term
8, 11, 15	Continue to promote and raise awareness of the Campers Code for campers visiting Donegal and encouraging responsible practices.	Economic Development	Environment Directorate	Short / Medium Term
8, 11, 15	Deliver the EU funded TURBO project that focuses on the development of sustainable and regenerative tourism practices and enables learning among partners from various regions across Europe.	Economic Development	EU Project Partners, Local Businesses and Communities.	Short / Medium Term

Pillar 3 - Destination Management

Goal: Create and manage a destination that is rooted in place.

***Short Term: 1-2 Years Medium Term: 3-5 Years Long Term: 5-10 Years**

Objective 1: To deliver enabling infrastructure and management tools to support sustainable tourism development.

Sustainable Development Goals	Action	Directorate	Partners & Stakeholders	Timeframe
9	Work to improve road access to and within Donegal to provide enhanced connectivity infrastructure that will facilitate the flow of visitors around the county	Roads & Transportation	Dept of Transport/TII	Short / Medium Term
9	Support air access to Donegal and the wider region by working collaboratively with Donegal Airport, City of Derry Airport, Ireland West Airport as well as airports in Dublin and Belfast.	Roads & Transportation, Economic Development	Dept of Transport, Donegal Airport, City of Derry Airport, Ireland West Airport and other airports and transport providers.	Long-Term
9	Improve and enhance regional and local road access to tourist attractions through the provision of passing bays/ turning areas/adequate parking	Roads & Transportation	Dept of Transport/TII	Short / Medium Term
9	Support and facilitate, where possible, the provision of ferry services in Donegal.	Roads & Transportation, Economic Development	Dept of Transport, Donegal Airport	Long-Term
9	Collaborate with transport providers including Local Link, Bus Éireann and private bus companies to encourage them to provide good quality and affordable transport services to and within Donegal with a particular focus on services to tourist attractions.	Economic Development	Bus Éireann, Local Link, Fáilte Ireland, Private Transport Providers.	Short / Medium Term
8, 9	Work to improve digital access by facilitating the delivery of the National Broadband plan and working with service providers to improve mobile phone coverage across the County.	Information Services	National Broadband Ireland, Network Operators, Utility Companies, Donegal Digital, ERNACT	Short / Medium Term
6, 15	Deliver a sustainable and effective approach to litter and waste management.	Environment	Local communities	Short-Term
13, 15	Develop and deliver a Biodiversity Action Plan for Donegal to integrate biodiversity protection, restoration and best practice with a view to safeguarding natural assets.	Housing, Corporate & Culture	Tourism Sector	Short to Medium Term
8, 9, 15	Enhance sustainable marine and coastal infrastructure to support marine tourism including for example provision of pontoons at Ballyshannon, Mevagh, Burtonport, Teelin Pier, Killult and Rutland piers/harbours and facilities for leisure charters at Greencastle	Roads & Transportation	Dept of the Marine	Short to Medium Term

Objective 2: To upgrade amenities, public spaces and improve access in towns and villages in Donegal.

Sustainable Development Goals	Action	Directorate	Partners & Stakeholders	Timeframe
8, 11	Deliver extensive programme of regeneration across towns and villages in Donegal with a view to improving amenities, public spaces and access for residents and visitors alike.	Community Development and Planning	Local Communities and Businesses.	Short / Medium Term
14	Retain and increase 14 Blue Flag and 4 Green Coast Awards at the county's beaches and harbours	Environment	An Taisce	Short-Term
9, 10	Work to provide all-inclusive access to and from beaches in the county and beach/all-terrain wheelchairs at blue flag beaches as well as other popular beaches	Environment	Local communities	Short / Medium Term
9	Promote active travel across Donegal by delivering an extensive programme of infrastructural works to support walking and cycling opportunities.	Roads & Transportation	Dept of Transport/TII	Short/ Medium/Long Term
8	Support the sustainable development and management of the Caravan and Camping sector through the implementation of the recommendations set out in the 2021 KPMG Study.	Economic Development, Roads & Transportation, Environment	Caravan and Camping Sector	Short to Medium Term
6, 15	Review and enhance the provision and maintenance of public conveniences at key visitor locations across the County	Environment	Dept of Environment, Climate & Communications	Short-Term

Pillar 4 - Business and Community Engagement

Goal: Empower businesses and communities to collaborate around a common vision

***Short Term: 1-2 Years Medium Term: 3-5 Years Long Term: 5-10 Years**

Objective 1: To act as a key support and enabler for business and local communities in sustainably growing the tourism sector in Donegal.

Sustainable Development Goals	Action	Directorate	Partners & Stakeholders	Timeframe
8, 11	Support the activities of businesses and community groups in differentiating the Donegal offering by creating authentic, distinct and emersive visitor experiences.	Economic Development	Fáilte Ireland	Short / Medium Term
8, 11	Support new business start ups and exisiting businesses to access available supports and services.	Economic Development	Tourism and hospitality businesses, local communities	Short / Medium Term
8, 11, 15, 13	Work with tourism businesses to ensure that they can leverage the ongoing capital investments in a range of tourism products including investments of trail developments, greenways, new marine infrastructure, visitor attractions and so on.	Economic Development	Tourism and hospitality businesses, local communities, Waterways Ireland, Water & Environment	Short / Medium Term
8	Work with businesses to ensure that they are ready to avail of Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland promotional opportunities ensuring that Donegal will feature strongly in these international marketing campaigns.	Economic Development	Dept of Transport/TII	Short / Medium Term
8, 11, 13	Support tourism businesses as they adapt to the twin transition, green and digital through a range of interventions including EU projects such as TOURBO.	Economic Development, IS, Environment	Donegal Digital, Ernact	Short / Medium Term
8, 11	Support the development of sectoral clusters e.g. Golf, where there is a strong competitive advantage and opportunity for the county with a view to raising the profile of the county in this market and increase high yield visitor numbers.	Economic Development	Tourism and hospitality businesses, local communities	Short / Medium Term

Objective 2: To support business and skills development by facilitating access to training, funding and resources to enhance the resilience and profitability of enterprises in this sector.

Sustainable Development Goals	Action	Directorate	Partners & Stakeholders	Timeframe
8, 11	Work with local communities to upgrade local amenities and carry out small-scale improvements that will enhance the tourism offering of their area through the Minor Tourism Works Grants Scheme .	Economic Development	Tourism and hospitality businesses, local communities	Short / Medium Term
8	Deliver an effective trade and community engagement strategy including activities such as the annual Donegal Tourism Conference, events and workshops and the regular monthly e-zine.	Economic Development	Fáilte Ireland	Short / Medium Term

Pillar 5 - Coordination and Collaboration

Goal: Facilitate strategic collaboration and networking to realise our common vision

***Short Term: 1-2 Years Medium Term: 3-5 Years Long Term: 5-10 Years**

Objective 1: To work collaboratively with all key partners and key stakeholders including Fáilte Ireland, Udarás na Gaeltachta, NPWS, OPW, ATU, industry bodies both locally and nationally to develop vibrant and sustainable tourism sector that contributes positively to the wellbeing of Donegal.

Sustainable Development Goals	Action	Directorate	Partners & Stakeholders	Timeframe
8	Engage and develop successful partnerships with key stakeholders such as Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland	Economic Development	Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland	Short / Medium Term
8, 11	Partner with Derry City and Strabane District Council, Causeway Coast and Glens Council, Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland and Tourism NI in linking the Wild Atlantic Way with the Causeway Coastal Route and ensuring sustainable development of both routes	Economic Development	Derry City & Strabane District Council, Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, Tourism Northern Ireland	Short / Medium Term
4, 8, 11	Engage with education and training providers to support the reskilling and upskilling of the workforce required to support the tourism industry	Economic Development	ATU, ETB, TUS, NWRC	Short / Medium Term
8	Support Donegal Tourism CLG as the primary co-ordinating vehicle for the tourism sector in Donegal ensuring effective participation from businesses and communities operating in this sector.	Economic Development	Tourism Stakeholders	Short / Medium Term

Objective 2: To upgrade amenities, public spaces and improve access in towns and villages in Donegal.

Sustainable Development Goals	Action	Directorate	Partners & Stakeholders	Timeframe
8	Engage with various EU networks such as the CPMR (Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions), FEDETON (Federation of Nautical Tourism Destinations) and AER (Assembly of European Regions) to explore funding and partnership opportunities and to participate in knowledge exchange and capacity building	Economic Development	International Partners	Short / Medium Term
8	Explore funding and partnership opportunities through EU programmes such as the Atlantic Area programme, Northern Periphery and Arctic programme, Interreg Europe and any other EU programmes relevant to tourism	Economic Development	International Partners	Short / Medium Term
8, 11	Deliver existing EU projects where Donegal County Council is a full or associate partner such as full partnership on SUB, TOURBO, EDIN and as an associate partner on TAAS (Tourism as a Service) and ATLIC engaging in knowledge exchange of best practices in the tourism sector across Europe	Economic Development	International Partners	Short / Medium Term
8, 11	Explore national funding opportunities to deliver projects that positively impact tourism leveraging cross directorate collaboration e.g. FLAG North	Economic Development	International Partners	Short / Medium Term