

# DESTINATION MAYO

**A STRATEGY FOR  
THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT  
OF TOURISM  
IN COUNTY MAYO**

**2016 – 2021**  
**DECEMBER 2015**



**MAYO.IE**







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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

County Mayo has an established reputation as a tourism destination in the west of Ireland. Its visitor offering is based on an impressive and pristine natural environment, distinctive historical and cultural attractions and a warm visitor welcome.

Mayo is renowned for its diverse, wild and spectacular landscapes, offering some of the best scenery in the country. Mayo can also boast a number of impressive geographical attributes - Ireland's longest coastline, Ireland's largest island, Ireland's highest sea cliffs at Keem, and Ireland's only fjord at Killary Harbour.

Rich in history and heritage, the county has many fine examples of built heritage dating from the Neolithic periods through to more modern eras including the Céide Fields - the oldest known stone walled fields in the world, archaeological monuments, monasteries, castles, round towers and stately homes including Ballintubber Abbey, Ashford Castle and Westport House. The development of a number of visitor attractions over the last 25 years such as the Céide Fields, the National Museum of Ireland - Country Life, Foxford Woollen Mills, Michael Davitt Museum and more recently The Jackie Clarke Collection, have enabled visitors to engage with our heritage in a much more rewarding way.

Rich in pristine natural resources, Mayo has a reputation as one of the best brown trout and salmon fishing locations in Western Europe. The county has large areas of unspoiled environment where a low industrial and urban base enables the natural ecology to be maintained. Designation of large areas of land and coastline as special areas of conservation and protection and the establishment of the Ballycroy National Park and Visitor Centre has positioned the county as a wild destination for responsible and passive tourism.

The image of Wild Mayo is reinforced by the vast array of outdoor activities on offer, ensuring Mayo's tourism product appeals to a broad range of tourists. With travel patterns in recent years leaning to more active travel experiences, visitor participation in hiking, cycling and water based activities has grown significantly over the last number of years. Mayo has been perfectly positioned to capitalise on these market trends. Initiatives such as the development of an extensive network of Mayo trails including the Bangor Trail, Western Way and the Great Western Greenway have positioned Mayo as a pioneering adventure destination of national importance.

Mayo is the spiritual centre of Ireland, home to two of Ireland's most significant centres of pilgrimage - Knock Marian Shrine and Croagh Patrick. Traditionally, areas that have become significant tourism destinations include Achill, Cong, Ballina and Westport. However, tourism is all-pervasive in Mayo and important in all areas of the county. Most particularly relevant in Mayo is the vital importance of the Mayo Diaspora, with visiting family and friends a large category of visitors to the county and a critical factor in the success of The Gathering in Mayo in 2013.

Tourism is a multifaceted industry with many players and stakeholders operating within a fragmented industry, all contributing to the overall Mayo product. Stakeholders such as trade providers, local communities and development groups, Chambers of Commerce, development agencies (such as LEADER companies), Ireland West Airport Knock (IWAK) and local and national authorities are all making an important contribution. The Gathering initiative in 2013 highlighted the importance of involving communities in the development of tourism. Communities have played a significant role in Mayo tourism through their work in Tidy Towns, annual local festivals, Community Futures and local product development and promotion.

Mayo County Council's Enterprise and Investment Unit (EIU) was established in late 2012 and has as its objective the creation of an environment supportive of enterprise and job creation in County Mayo. Tourism is one of the county's primary enterprise sectors and as such, is a key area of focus for the EIU. The Tourism Strategy is being developed as an outcome of a review and analysis of the key Emerging Economic Sectors<sup>1</sup> and associated investment and employment opportunities in Mayo. This report identified tourism as a key economic sector for Mayo with the potential to create 1,000+ jobs in the medium to long term (7 years) in addition to the existing 4,500 existing tourism industry jobs in the county, driving real economic growth. Tourism is particularly attractive as a key economic sector as the resultant economic benefits are typically generated across both urban and rural areas, focused on SME and micro-enterprises, thereby supporting a wider number of communities and the economic sustainability of rural towns and villages.

The development of this strategy seeks to build on the work of a previous study of tourism in Mayo "A Tourism Plan for Mayo", undertaken by Tourism Development International for Mayo County Council in 1991. Some of the outcomes of the 1991 Plan included *Mayo 5000*, *Mayo Naturally* and the designation of Ballycroy National Park. It also facilitated the development of a number of visitor attractions throughout the county, including Céide Fields, Mayo Naturally, National Museum of Ireland - Country Life and the Lough Lannagh Holiday Village.

The vision for Mayo's tourism industry in 2021 is to be a high quality, inclusive and authentic destination. Intrinsic to this vision is that Mayo's tourism product appeals to the next generation of tourists, targeting both the mainstream mass market and niche specialist market segments with an array of high quality attractions and activity options coupled with a solid selection of accommodation, hospitality services and ancillary service products. Key to the successful delivery of this vision is the availability of a skilled and enthusiastic workforce and good access to the county by road, rail and air.

Mayo has significant potential for new high quality, innovative product development, ranging from the Wild Atlantic Way, Monasteries of the Moy Greenway, expansion of the highly successful Great Western Greenway, Blueway Water Trails, VeloRail, Wild Nephin Wilderness Park and The Mary Robinson Centre in Ballina. Initiatives such as interpretation of the Sacred Landscape, both in East Mayo and along Pilgrim Trails across the county, the famine history of Mayo and facilities for 'hard' adventure activities - both land and water-based - offer unique ways for a wide range of visitors to engage with Mayo's landscape, heritage and people.

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<sup>1</sup> Analysis of Emerging Economic Sectors in Mayo, PMG Consult & the Discovery Partnership (2014)

In addition, great opportunities exist for the creation of innovative and imaginative festivals and events used strategically to enhance the existing offering.

## 1.01 Methodology

Work on preparing Destination Mayo's Tourism Strategy commenced in August 2013, with a draft report submitted for review in the first quarter of 2014 and a later draft report presented to Mayo County Council's Strategic Policy Committee on Tourism and Food in late 2014. The methodology used in preparing this Strategy included the following:

- Desk review of data relating to national, regional and county tourism, including policy review across a number of Government Departments and State Bodies.
- Review and analysis of domestic and overseas tourism statistics provided by Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland
- Consultation with key industry and agency representatives
- Consultation with PMG Consult and The Discovery Partnership on the development of the Emerging Economic Sectors report
- Consultation and review with representatives of the EIU
- Interviews with local tourism organisations, Fáilte Ireland, Destination Westport, Chambers of Commerce
- Contribution to submissions on behalf of the EIU on related government policy (Tourism Policy Review Group and Western Region Outdoor Recreation Strategy)
- Identifying key tourism products and target markets for success
- Developing an outline Tourism Action Plan
- Reporting and Review
- Contributing to Public Transport Policy Review of the NTA
- Review of various Community Futures Plans
- Examination of Best International Practice
- Consultation with the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS), Coillte Teoranta, Inland Fisheries Ireland and the Ireland Golf Tour Operators Association (IGTOA)



## 2.0 CONSULTATIONS

Tourism is everybody's business, and as such, a key part of this Strategy development has been to include stakeholders, the tourism industry and the wider Mayo community in the planning process with a goal of shaping a collective vision for the future of tourism in Mayo.

The consultation phase of this project took place from May-July 2014 and consultations took place in two formats. A series of eight public consultations took place around the county in tandem with a number of informal meetings with communities and stakeholders, all designed to solicit each group's thoughts, opinions, suggestions and recommendations to help articulate the collective vision for Mayo's future as a tourism destination.

### 2.01 Public & Stakeholder Consultations

A total of eight public consultations were held around the county to solicit ideas and feedback from interested parties. Publicised in advance through advertisements in Mayo's local newspapers (The Western People, The Mayo News, The Connaught Telegraph and The Mayo Advertiser), on Mid West Radio and online on [www.mayo.ie](http://www.mayo.ie) and [www.lookwest.ie](http://www.lookwest.ie), details of the public consultations were also circulated via tourism and community organisations and Chambers of Commerce. A copy of the newspaper advertisement for the public consultation process is included in Appendix 1. A summary of the consultation dates and venues follows:

Date	Venue
20 May 2014	BALLINA - Hotel Ballina
21 May 2014	WESTPORT - Mill Times Hotel
26 May 2014	CASTLEBAR - Breaffy House Hotel
27 May 2014	ACHILL - Achill Head Hotel
28 May 2014	Ireland West Airport Knock
9 June 2014	CONG - The Lodge at Ashford
11 June 2014	BELMULLET - Broadhaven Bay Hotel
20 June 2014	KNOCK SHRINE - Knock House Hotel

The high level of community interest and commitment to realising the potential of Mayo's tourism sector bodes well for the future of tourism in the county and must be harnessed, as it is critical to the successful implementation of this strategy. Members of the public were also invited to make submissions for inclusion in the updated Tourism Strategy.

Following this series of public consultation meetings, a second advertisement was placed in the local press inviting submissions from members of the public and interested parties.

Contributions were received from the following groups and individuals:

- Achill Business Network
- Achill Tourism
- Admiral Brown Society Foxford
- ALEA Architects
- Ballinrobe BEO
- Ballinrobe Town Management
- Carnacon Community Development Association
- Coiste Cultúr Teanga agus Forbartha, Thuar Mhic Éadaigh Teo
- Comhlacht Forbartha Áitiúil Acla
- Galway Mayo Institute of Technology Mayo Campus
- Gráinne Úaile Sub Aqua Club
- Greenway Gifts
- Inishturk Islanders
- Louisburgh HQ
- Loveachill.com
- Mayo County Council Management Team and Municipal District Offices
- Mayo County Council Strategic Policy Committee for Tourism & Food
- Mayo County Council Heritage Officer
- Mayo County Council Conservation Officer
- Mayo County Council Arts Office
- Mayo Enterprise & Innovation Advocacy Group
- Mayoplus
- Mulranny Tourism
- National Museum of Ireland - Country Life
- Riverside Footgolf
- Swinford Tourism Group
- Údarás na Gaeltachta
- Westport Civic Trust
- Brian Conroy
- Mary Catherine Heanue
- Adrian Langan
- Orla Calvey
- Aidan Conway
- Michael Larkin
- Martin Leonard
- Val McLoughlin
- Shirley Piggins

The final stages of the Strategy were developed in partnership with members of Mayo County Council's Strategic Policy Committee for Tourism and Food who participated in a presentation session in November 2014 and a workshop in January 2015. The Strategy was adopted by Mayo County Council on 14 July 2015.

### 3.0 ANALYSIS OF TOURISM IN COUNTY MAYO

Mayo has a lot to offer as a tourism destination and has great potential to further develop its tourism industry as a key economic sector for the county. A wealth of natural resources, unspoilt environment, scenic and sensitive landscapes as well as internationally renowned destinations such as Knock Shrine, Westport and Clew Bay, Achill, Cong, Ballina and Pontoon allow for the further development of a wide range of tourism products, including heritage and culture, activity and adventure and religious and pilgrimage tourism. The recent presentation of Ireland's Atlantic coastline as the Wild Atlantic Way touring route offers unprecedented opportunities to showcase the attractions and activities along the Atlantic coast of Mayo to a receptive global audience - an exceptional opportunity for the county.

Mayo performs well in terms of visitor numbers relative to other counties in Ireland. However, Mayo's main competitors in Ireland are generally considered to be other counties along the Western seaboard, Clare and Kerry in particular, both of which receive considerably more visitors per annum than Mayo, illustrating the potential that exists for Mayo's tourism industry.

Recent years have seen a return to growth in overseas tourist markets, most particularly in the Mainland Europe and North American markets. The largest inbound market to Ireland, Great Britain, is also recovering, albeit at a more cautious pace. Increased air capacity and economic improvements in some markets indicate that this market recovery is forecast to continue.

The domestic market continues to present challenges. While the number of Irish residents taking a domestic holiday is increasing, the frequency of their domestic holidays is declining, as is the resultant spend. The future potential of this market is entirely dependent on the domestic economy and it can be assumed that recovery may lead to a growth in this sector.

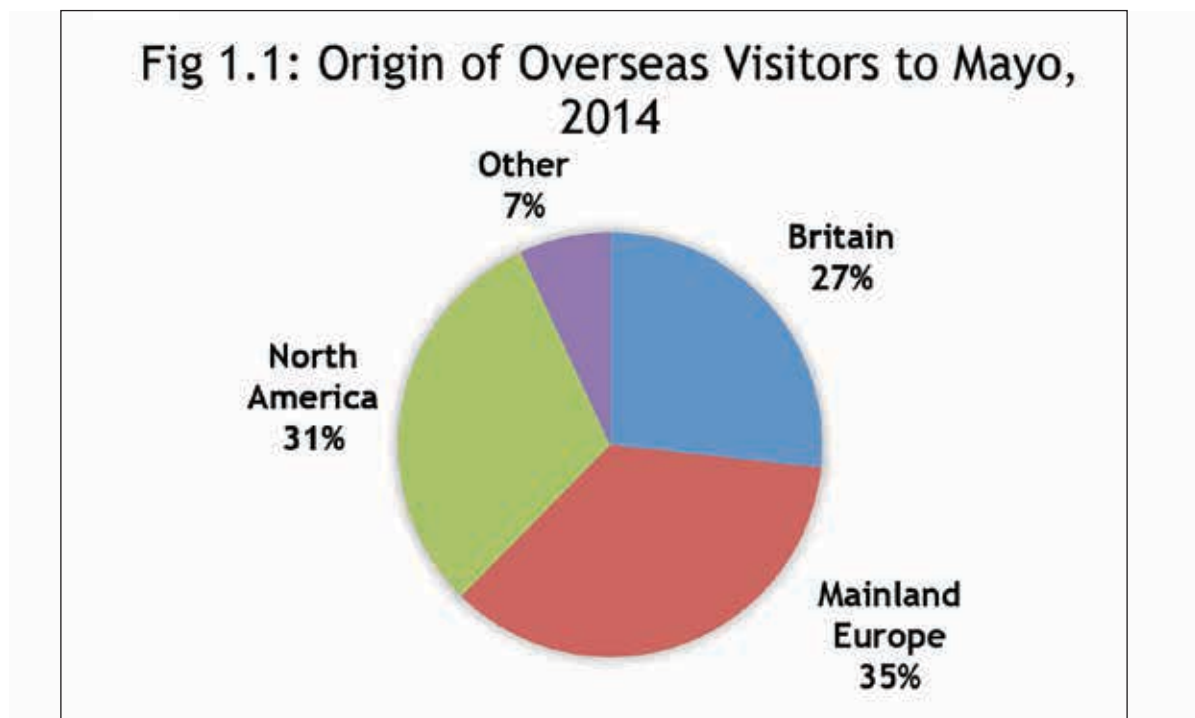


## 3.1 Visitors to County Mayo

### 3.1.1 OVERSEAS VISITORS

Overseas visitors to Ireland grew by 6% in 2014 to 7.1 million visitors, with initial reports indicating that 2015 has exceeded this pace of growth, delivering visitor numbers just shy of those experienced before the global economic crisis began.

Divided to a county level, Mayo received 218,000 overseas visitors in 2014, contributing €60 million to the local economy. As illustrated in Figure 1.1, just under two-thirds of visitors were from Britain and Mainland Europe, with 31% from North America and a further 7% from Other destinations. Overseas visitors typically travel from June to September on fly-drive packages.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Fáilte Ireland Regional Tourism Performance in 2014

### 3.1.2 DOMESTIC VISITORS

Almost two-thirds of Irish people took a domestic holiday in 2014<sup>3</sup>, indicating a slight growth, with the total number of domestic trips at 7.3 million<sup>4</sup>, although this market segment remains vulnerable to wider economic constraints. Notwithstanding, the West of Ireland performed well, receiving 17% of total market share (1.3 million trips), contributing €292 million to the local economy.

The domestic tourism season is primarily from April to September, with shoulder season travel typified by short breaks and longer holidays taking place during the summer months of June-August. Domestic breaks are primarily self-drive holidays (80%), with just under half travelling for holidays, a third to visit family or friends, 5% for business and 12% for other purposes.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.1.3 NORTHERN IRELAND VISITORS

Visitors from Northern Ireland travel primarily to Dublin and the North West, with other regions recording significantly smaller visitor numbers. A total of 96,000 (5%) travelled to the West of Ireland in 2014. However, the average spend per visitor from Northern Ireland was €207 per trip, making this a small but attractive market.<sup>6</sup>

## 3.2 What do visitors do while holidaying in Ireland?

There is a marked difference between domestic and overseas visitors to Ireland and the activities they undertake while here. Those travelling from overseas tend to engage more with Ireland's visitor attractions, exploring heritage and cultural attractions in the main, while domestic visitors spend more time partaking in activities such as hill walking, water sports, golf and cycling as outlined in Figure 1.3 below, analysed using the most recent relevant figures available.<sup>7</sup>

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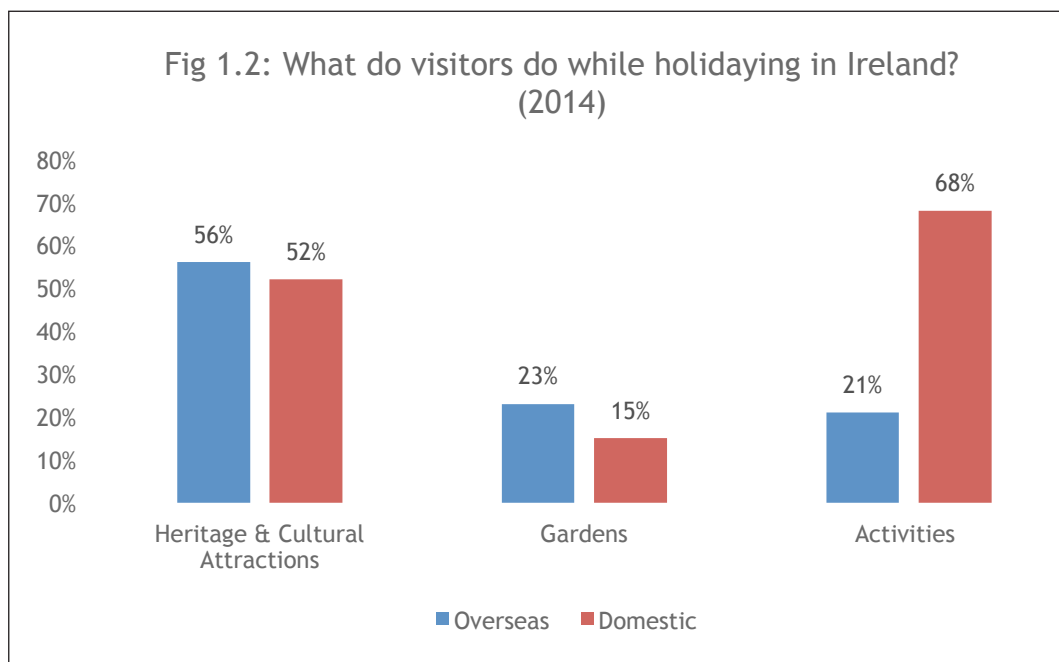
<sup>3</sup> Fáilte Ireland 2014 Tourism Facts

<sup>4</sup> Fáilte Ireland 2014 Tourism Facts

<sup>5</sup> Fáilte Ireland Domestic Tourism 2014

<sup>6</sup> Fáilte Ireland 2014 Tourism Facts

<sup>7</sup> Fáilte Ireland Activity Product Usage among Overseas Visitors in 2013/2014; Fáilte Ireland 2014 Tourism Facts



### 3.2.1 HERITAGE & CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS

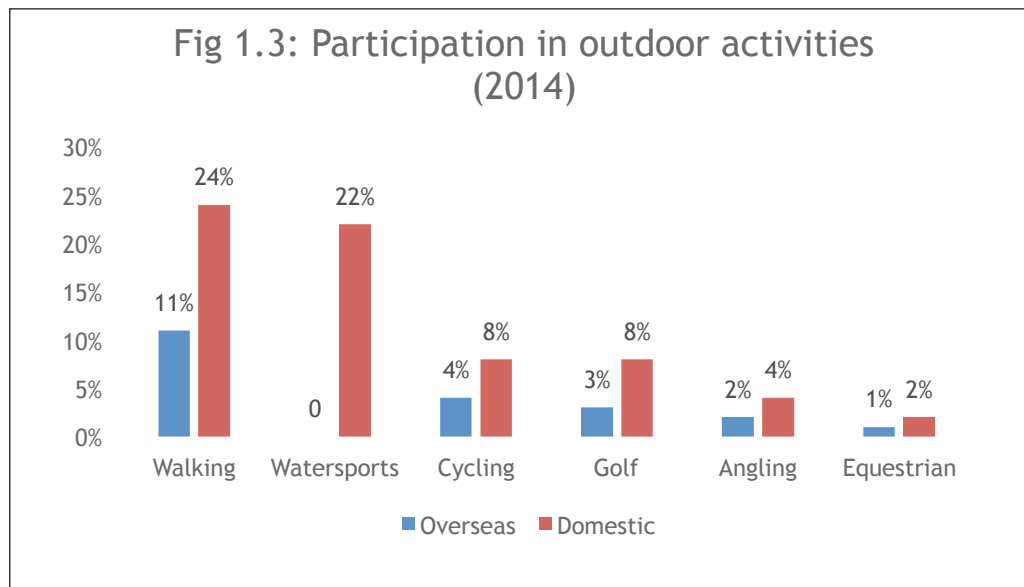
In terms of visitor attractions, most recent records show that Mayo's most popular historical and cultural visitor attractions were:

Principal Attractions	Number of visitors (2014) <sup>8</sup>
Knock Shrine	1,600,000
Croagh Patrick	350,000*
Westport House	140,000
National Museum of Ireland - Country Life, Turlough Park	109,000
Foxford Woollen Mills	75,000
Ballintubber Abbey	32,000
Céide Fields	28,500
The Jackie Clarke Collection	23,000
Ballycroy National Park Visitor Centre	17,000
Michael Davitt Museum	3,000

<sup>8</sup> Fáilte Ireland Visitor Attractions Survey 2014; some figures sourced direct from attractions

### 3.2.2 PARTICIPATION IN OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Although outdoor activity participation is greater among domestic holidaymakers than overseas visitors, both market segments illustrate a similar demand for activity, as illustrated in Figure 1.4 below. Of note is that data available for overseas visitors does not include water sports, but anecdotal evidence indicates that demand for this activity is somewhat lesser than in the domestic market owing in part to the niche appeal of water sports in Ireland for overseas visitors.<sup>9</sup>



Given the key attractions and activities in demand for overseas and domestic holidaymakers in Ireland, Mayo's tourism product is well placed to serve this demand and deliver quality tourism experiences.

Principal Activity Attractions	Number of visitors (2014) <sup>10</sup>
Great Western Greenway	265,000
Croagh Patrick	350,000
Westport House	140,000
Adventure Challenges ( e.g. Gaelforce, Sea 2 Summit, Westportif, Race2Glory, Achill Roar, Pink Ribbon, West of Ireland Mini Marathon etc).	36,000

<sup>9</sup> Fáilte Ireland 2014 Tourism Facts; Fáilte Ireland Activity Product Usage among Overseas Visitors in 2013/2014

<sup>10</sup> Source: Mayo County Council



## Destination Marketing

Marketing Mayo as a destination is presently undertaken largely by Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland under the Discover Ireland and Ireland.com brands as part of the Ireland West region and the Wild Atlantic Way. There are a number of destination marketing organisations in operation (Achill Tourism, Destination Westport, Mayo North, Erris Beo, Love Castlebar), along with a variety of themed marketing initiatives such as Mayo Trails and the Blueways that showcase individual activity products in the county.

## 3.3 SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mayo's appeal as a rural and coastal (green and blue) county</li> <li>• Westport's long-standing success as a heritage, adventure and family-friendly destination</li> <li>• World-class natural &amp; heritage resources</li> <li>• Diverse tourism product is well placed to meet the desires of the next generation of tourists</li> <li>• Long established Greenway product</li> <li>• Strong stakeholder commitment to further developing Mayo's tourism potential</li> <li>• Authentic cultural and heritage engagement opportunities</li> <li>• Ireland West Airport Knock</li> <li>• Westport - Best town in Ireland to Live In</li> <li>• Erris - Best Place in Ireland to go Wild</li> <li>• Quality of life</li> <li>• Mayo's Tidy Towns, Tourism Towns and Pride of Place winning destinations</li> <li>• Gaeltacht regions</li> <li>• Rich heritage - Céide Fields, ecclesiastical sites, literary and social heritage</li> <li>• Excellent spread and range of visitor attractions</li> <li>• Established destination towns and regions</li> <li>• Strong Community Involvement, structures and engagement (Tidy Towns, Pride of Place, Community Futures)</li> <li>• Many well-established festivals</li> <li>• High quality adventure product</li> <li>• Excellent location as the heartbeat of the Wild Atlantic Way</li> <li>• Unspoilt areas of peace and tranquillity</li> <li>• Arts Centres</li> <li>• TF Royal Theatre &amp; Convention Centre</li> <li>• Large Diaspora</li> <li>• Large number of high quality beaches</li> <li>• People</li> <li>• Ballycroy National Park</li> <li>• Flora &amp; fauna</li> <li>• Centre for Sports Training &amp; Excellence - Breaffy House Resort</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global recession still evident in some source markets, especially Great Britain &amp; domestic</li> <li>• Challenging business environment, particularly for tourism SME &amp; micro-enterprises</li> <li>• Limited supply of high end accommodation limits revenue generation potential</li> <li>• Limited range of accommodation offering in some regions</li> <li>• Over reliance on domestic market</li> <li>• Loss of market share over the last decade from the West in preference to cities such as Dublin and Belfast</li> <li>• Lack of balanced regional distribution/fragmented tourism industry</li> <li>• Seasonality</li> <li>• Reliance on the Diaspora market in some regions</li> <li>• Limitations of access by road/rail/bus</li> <li>• Budgetary constraints</li> <li>• Lack of tourism infrastructure/facilities/product in certain areas</li> <li>• Dearth of indoor attractions and activities in some areas</li> </ul>

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wild Atlantic Way</li> <li>• Brand development &amp; renewed destination marketing activity</li> <li>• Significant untapped potential with limited tourist awareness of some areas</li> <li>• Transatlantic route potential at IWAK</li> <li>• Road infrastructure improvements, especially along N5, N17, N59</li> <li>• Strong growth forecasts for overseas tourism to 2018</li> <li>• Resurgence of domestic tourism, particularly family/activity segments</li> <li>• Focus on tourism as a high potential economic sector in Mayo, leading to greater policy focus and enterprise supports</li> <li>• Develop a collaborative county-wide Tourism Forum</li> <li>• Build on the success of The Gathering to develop uniquely Mayo festivals &amp; events</li> <li>• National Outdoor pursuits Centre</li> <li>• Adventure Capital Of Ireland</li> <li>• Salmon Life Centre</li> <li>• Ship to Reef National Diving Experience</li> <li>• Wild Nephin Wilderness Area</li> <li>• VeloRail</li> <li>• The Mary Robinson Centre</li> <li>• MICE market<sup>11</sup></li> <li>• Developing iconic coastal walks</li> <li>• Mayo Day - capitalise on Mayo's global Diaspora connection</li> <li>• Deserted Village Centre Achill</li> <li>• Extension of the Greenway product</li> <li>• Renewed interest in international investment in Mayo's tourism product</li> <li>• 1921 Commemorations</li> <li>• Spiritual and Faith-based Tourism</li> <li>• Castlebar Military Barracks Development</li> <li>• Clew Bay</li> <li>• Mayo/Galway Geopark</li> <li>• Keem Bay</li> <li>• Venture Cup Ocean Race</li> <li>• Mayo Dark Skies Ballycroy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited investment in tourism product in recent years</li> <li>• Number of Mayo hotels in financial difficulty</li> <li>• Speed of global economic recovery</li> <li>• Improved domestic economy may divert some domestic tourism potential to overseas destinations</li> <li>• Widespread adoption of Mayo's great tourism success story, the Great Western Greenway</li> <li>• Competition from both domestic and international destinations</li> <li>• Weather</li> <li>• Erosion and path deterioration on high profile walks - negative national coverage</li> <li>• Decline of Irish as a living language in Gaeltacht regions</li> <li>• City appeal</li> <li>• Lack of innovation in some parts of the industry</li> <li>• Poor yield in certain product segments</li> </ul>

<sup>11</sup> Meetings, Incentives, Conferencing and Events

## 3.4 Needs Analysis

Mayo's size as Ireland's third largest county, with its varied topography and coastline, gives the county a broad tourist appeal. From urban tourism hubs in Westport and Ballina to remote rural destinations such as Inishturk, the infrastructure to service Mayo's tourists and the activities and attractions on offer for tourists vary widely throughout the county. An overview of the principal tourism needs is included below here.

### 3.4.1 ACCESS

The primary access routes for tourists coming to Mayo is by road, arriving from Dublin (N5), Galway or Sligo (N59, N84, N17). Roads throughout the county are good, and upgrades on the N5, N17/N18 and N59 will be a welcome development. The Wild Atlantic Way touring route has diverted many visitors off traditionally busy routes to coastal roads around the county.

Car parking facilities in the county are good, with additional facilities and improvements underway at recreational areas and Wild Atlantic Way Discovery Points. A lack of coach parking facilities, particular in Westport and Cong, needs to be addressed.

Mayo's primary towns (Ballina, Castlebar and Westport) are well served by rail and bus services, linking the county with main destinations and connecting with regional services. Public transport services to IWAK and outlying areas such as Achill and Belmullet can be weak and would benefit from additional services.

A key advantage for Mayo over nearby counties is the proximity of IWAK, with 22 UK and European routes, delivering overseas visitors directly to the county. Any opportunity to add additional services attractive to the inbound tourism market and to add to the destination awareness in source markets would be welcomed. A new transatlantic charter service for pilgrims between New York and IWAK illustrates the potential to service transatlantic routes from IWAK.

### 3.4.2 ACCOMMODATION

Mayo's 172 registered accommodation providers are spread throughout the county, with a good selection in key tourism destinations. Hotel accommodation is best available in towns such as Westport and Ballina, with guesthouses, B&Bs and self-catering accommodation more prevalent in smaller regions including Achill, Belmullet and regional towns.

Taking into consideration the seasonality of Mayo's domestic tourism markets and the average West of Ireland occupancy rates in 2012 of 62%, there is real scope to develop out of season and midweek tourism, particularly in rural areas where occupancy rates are generally below average.



Mayo's accommodation base has grown considerably in the last 20 years, adding a number of high quality 3 and 4 star hotel properties in busy areas in particular, many of which have leisure and/or spa facilities on site.

The accommodation base is not as diverse in Mayo as in other areas, indicating the opportunities available for innovative accommodation products and facilities at either end of the spectrum - high end and budget accommodations. Mayo's accommodation providers in more rural areas must seek opportunities to extend their season, potentially in collaboration with nearby product providers to ensure a compelling out of season experience they can advertise to key markets.

### **3.4.3 TOURISM PRODUCTS**

#### **Heritage and Cultural Visitor Attractions**

Mayo is a county with a rich heritage. The remote and rural nature of the county has meant much of this heritage has survived to today intact and authentic, offering an exciting opportunity to showcase a rare and authentic offering that is highly attractive to overseas visitors in particular.

Investment in the visitor attraction sector in the last 25 years has led to the development of a number of landmark attractions that capture and showcase Mayo's heritage and offer a range of weather-independent attractions for visitors to enjoy. Coupled with this, Mayo's Arts and Cultural Centres add a cultural dimension, including diverse evening entertainment. These attractions can be instrumental in driving regional spread of Mayo's visitors, along with growing out of season tourism, and so should form a central part of Mayo's destination messaging. Capital investment opportunities for some of Mayo's attractions would be of great assistance in ensuring the interpretation and story-telling remains fresh, vibrant and contemporary.

#### **Walking/Hiking**

Renowned for its unspoilt and richly diverse landscape, Mayo has become a premier walking destination, due in no small part to the collaborative principles that have made rural tourism Mayo's success story. A wide range of walks of varying lengths encompass a variety of terrains, giving walkers much to choose from and many opportunities to experience a slice of rural life in Mayo.

Mayo's most popular walking trails are generally those with good access from urban centres popular with tourists, such as the Great Western Greenway, Belleek Woods and Lough Lannagh, while the popularity of remote coastal walks such as Carrowteige's looped walks and the inland Bangor Trail demonstrates the demand for exceptional walking experiences. High level walking is also popular with visitors to Mayo, with over 350,000 climbing Croagh Patrick each year. Other popular high level summits include the Nephins, Mweelrea and Achill's high points.



Significantly, Mayo is well placed to meet the growing demand for long-distance and spiritual trails such as the Camino de Santiago, with a number of spiritual and pilgrim trails in existence, all connected to St Patrick, Ireland's national saint. High quality walking festivals such as the Castlebar International Four Day Walks, Burrishoole Walking Festival and Croagh Patrick Heritage Trail Walking Festival are important contributors to the popularity of Mayo as a walking destination.

There is a need to continue to develop interesting and accessible walking trails and sustainably maintain existing trails to maintain Mayo's position as Walking Capital of Ireland. Additionally, providing ancillary services at trailheads and along long distance walks in particular. Developing a suite of iconic walks and innovative design features along walks is important in ensuring Mayo's walks remain attractive and compelling for new and seasoned visitors alike.

## **Cycling**

Following the successful positioning of Mayo as Ireland's leading walking destination, Mayo has more recently led the way in developing an exceptional cycling product, attractive to casual and long distance cyclists alike.

The success of the initial stretch of Great Western Greenway has led to its expansion and similar trails being developed throughout the county. In tandem, cycle hubs in more remote parts of the county such as Achill, Belmullet and Clew Bay have positioned these regions as long distance cycle routes, many of which adhere to National Cycle Network standards and EuroVelo 1 routes. There is also a need to develop a greenway network of scale (200km) to attract international touring cyclists to Ireland.

Enhancing the visitor experience around these cycle trails should now be a priority to ensure they retain primary positioning, focused on food, arts and cultural experiences to compliment the activity offering and comprehensive ancillary services, most importantly high quality bike and equipment hire. Fostering a culture of cycle-friendly lifestyles in the county through initiatives such as Smarter Travel is vital to the continued success of the cycling product in Mayo.

## **Angling**

Mayo is known throughout the angling world as a world class destination for brown trout and salmon fishing. The county has excellent sea angling in particular Clew Bay with its fish variety and sheltered attributes. The clean, green and wild natural environment in the county is a critical part of that success story, and a careful balance between servicing demand and sustainable management of resources is essential to its future viability.

Anglers tend to be long-staying tourists, who require limited facilities to enhance their experience, such as pontoons, ghillies, clear access routes to the water's edge and boat hire for sea fishing. The repeat potential of anglers is exceptional, so delivering an experience that exceeds expectations will be well rewarded in this market.

## Water Sports

Mayo is home to Ireland's longest coastline, and with its position on the North Atlantic coast of Europe, this coastline is a mix of soaring cliffs, jagged mountains, secluded harbours, islands and sandy beaches. Reflecting the remote, untrafficked nature of Mayo's coastline, 12 of Mayo's 30 accessible beaches were awarded Blue Flags and 8 Green Coast status in 2015. The unspoilt nature of Mayo's beaches are their lure, along with weather and waves that draw adventure sports enthusiasts from around the world in increasing numbers.

Servicing this demand has led to an increased requirement for beach facilities in recent years. The addition of pilot Blueways has helped develop some beaches, such as Old Head, Keel Strand and Silver Strand in Doogort, into natural hubs for water sports, making them ideal for investment in centralised Activity Services Centres and linkages to other activities, via Greenways or consolidation of visitor servicing facilities for all activity participants.

Enhanced technology has made water sports more attractive as a year round activity, as has storm-chasing and extreme adventure, meaning there is real potential for these activities to deliver visitors on a year round basis. The ever-expanding range of water-based activities popular on Mayo's coast has appeal to a broad market where word of mouth endorsements deliver business growth, which makes it vital that the facilities that augment the water sports offering truly are world-class and continue to grow this market segment. Fostering and supporting innovation in enterprises servicing this sector is also vital to ensure continued expansion here.

## Equestrian

Equestrian centres and stables are well distributed around the county, adding to the activity product offering in many important tourism destinations, such as Westport, Achill, Ballina and Cong. There is a requirement to investigate the potential of developing new or existing trails for horse riding, which offers great potential as an alternative means to explore Mayo's coastline and uplands.

## Festivals

Largely attributable to successful community engagement in tourism in Mayo, the county is home to just under 150 festivals and events each year - a remarkable achievement. Many festivals have long histories and have become part of the fabric of life in Mayo's towns and villages, often playing an important role in drawing Mayo's Diaspora home on holiday. These festivals offer an authentic experience and a genuine engagement opportunity for visitors.

Added to these community festivals, Mayo has a growing number of activity related festivals and events each year, celebrating the adventure product to an increasingly national and

international participation base. A range of other festivals such as arts, food and music festivals also take place throughout the county each year.

If Mayo's festivals and events are to draw visitors to the county and deliver real economic benefit for the host destinations, a review of the festival offering is required, benchmarking it against that of similar destinations in terms of variety, themes, dates and quality. Such an activity would determine the optimal spread of festivals for seasonal and regional distribution and identify new themes and offerings for festival organisers to consider. A series of workshops to upskill and build innovation and capacity in community groups would also add to the county's festival offering and help attract additional visitors to Mayo.

### **Themed Explorations/Journeys**

The success of the Wild Atlantic Way demonstrates the great potential of a strong theme or identity as a hook to draw visitors to a particular place. Adding a series of themed journeys for car touring, cycling or walking around the county would be of great benefit in driving tourists along pre-determined trails, assisting in their balanced and regional distribution. Suggested themes to consider include Humbert's Way, Tír Sáile Sculpture Trail, Gráinne Mhaol.

Marketing is the primary need to develop these journeys, which could potentially be communicated in brochures, maps and online, while interpretation, could be facilitated at scenic look out points along these routes. Car parking and lay-by facilities are vital to the success of such trails and serve as important visual marketing tools for the county when shared by visitors via social media.

Similarly, the Wild Atlantic Way and Mayo's Discovery Points offer ideal opportunities to showcase a range of points in the county. Local businesses and service providers have great potential to develop activities and experiences around these Discovery Points to grow their business, which can be facilitated as community based collaboration. Similarly, Knock Shrine, Croagh Patrick and Ballintubber Abbey, in conjunction with the less well-known Monasteries of the Moy and the Augustinian remains in Cong offer unique spiritual and faith-based experiences to visitors, in turn offering opportunities for business growth and development.

### 3.5 Future Potential

Mayo's tourism product is ideally placed to maximise on future tourism trends, offering a green and natural product, rich in authenticity and memorable experiences, with diverse activity products that lead the way in terms of dynamic packaging for the next generation of tourists. With a broad range of quality accommodation product and a selection of existing natural tourism hubs, Mayo has much to offer for first time and repeat visitors.

Mayo's core strengths as a tourism destination are generally understood to be the 'green and blue' of Mayo - but add to that the picturesque landscape, its rural isolation and country towns, Mayo's people and the authenticity of the heritage and cultural offering too. In many respects, Mayo as a destination is perfectly aligned with the Wild Atlantic Way brand, heavily promoted both at home and overseas by Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland with a compelling call to action that has yielded great success to date. It's a positioning many would be envious of.

However, Mayo is so much more than Ireland's Atlantic coastline and its undisputed draw. Mayo's heartland is layered with the history, trials and tribulations that have shaped the county's people and their story, all told through the rich heritage and cultural product around the county - from Céide Fields, an ancient farming settlement on the edge of Europe, the Michael Davitt Museum and its tale of the struggle for land ownership to the National Museum of Ireland - Country Life, the custodian of a history of rural life in Ireland to Westport House and the story of Clew Bay's famous Pirate Queen, and most recently, the 'Procession of the Souls' interpretation of the Great Irish Famine in Swinford.

Exceptional service, imaginative marketing and strategic tourist attractions will be essential to deliver growth to Mayo's culture and heritage attractions. The reopening of Castlebar's Royal Theatre adds greatly to the county's conference and events capacity in addition to offering high quality evening entertainment options that can offer potential in the low and shoulder seasons. Facilitating product innovation and investment will be a prerequisite to delivering world-class experiences to visitors and industry collaboration vital for cross-selling and ensuring Mayo's visitors have much to choose from during their stay in the county.

The landscape too has its draw, with its unforgettable beauty forming the backdrop for a playground enjoyed by thrill seekers and the adventurous at heart. This is the tourism product Mayo is best known for - the walking and cycling trails, the array of water sports and extreme adventure, the golf, equestrian sports and angling. Future potential here lies in copper fastening Mayo's position as a leading destination by augmenting the excellent product offering with world-class facilities and innovative and exciting tourism infrastructure - rope bridges, glass-bottomed viewing platforms and thought-provoking public art.



### 3.5.1 MARKET TRENDS

2010 saw a dramatic change in Ireland's overseas visitor trends, halting the decline of previous years, with every year since recording an average 5% growth in overseas visitors. Future projected overseas visitor numbers indicate this level of growth will be sustained, due in part to returning economic stability in the global economy, aided by strong growth in air access from key source markets to Ireland. Tourism Ireland estimate that by 2016, an all-time high of 8.9 million overseas visitors will travel to the island of Ireland.

A decline in domestic holiday trips attributed to the recession has also been halted in recent years. While growth projections for domestic holiday trips are not presently available, anecdotal evidence indicates an improvement and it is reasonable to extrapolate that domestic holiday trips will experience cautious growth in the coming years.

In terms of choice of destination, part of the recent decline in visitor numbers to the West of Ireland has been attributable to two changes in travel patterns - the rise of short break, urban holiday choices and an increase in travel to Northern Ireland and Belfast in particular, which has happened at the expense of rural parts of Ireland, including Mayo. Additionally, competing destinations such as Scandinavia, Scotland and Iceland have drawn visitors away from familiar destinations, including Ireland. However, this trend appears to be evolving again, with many now seeking an escape from increasingly hectic life in a destination that offers a slower pace of life and wide open spaces - ideally positioning Mayo as a solution for such holidaymakers.

When planning their escapes, the next generation of tourists is increasing seeking a more sophisticated holiday experience. This is reflected in their desire for opportunities to interact and engage with the communities they visit, leading to a growth in dynamic, experiential packaging. Authentic experiences, unique products, activities and festivals and events that offer a compelling reason to visit an area are key hooks in attracting these tourists.

### 3.5.2 KEY MARKET SEGMENTS

Key market segments have been categorised by Tourism Ireland, and the priority segments for Mayo to target (across all source markets) are outlined below here. Aligning Mayo's destination marketing with Tourism Ireland's activity presents great opportunities to connect with these priority market segments, build on destination awareness and grow overseas visitor numbers for Mayo as a result.

## Culturally Curious

- Mostly older couples with time to spend
- Independent active sightseers
- Looking to explore new places and broaden their minds
- Like to explore landscapes, culture and heritage
- Enjoy authentic destinations and immersive holiday experiences
- Take more frequent breaks and are likely to stay longer than other segments

## Great Escapers

- Young couples and families with young children
- Enjoy active holidays, exploring countryside
- Love the 'wow' factor of off-the-beaten-path destinations
- Holidays are a balance of relaxation and exploring their chosen destination
- More likely to take domestic short breaks and ease of access is a key appeal

## Social Energisers

- Young couples and/or adult groups
- Seek excitement & new experiences in urban and rural locations
- Looking for fun & social holidays
- Enjoy active and novel destinations
- Like the thrill of adventure and extreme activities

## Top Tanners

- Younger families
- No travel agenda, enjoy very active holidays
- Seek fun & fulfilling activities with their partners and children
- Enjoy family-friendly destinations with a wide range of activities to offer nearby

The increase in direct access routes available to overseas visitors at IWAK can also significantly contribute to growth. Evidence from both Dublin and Shannon is that new route access delivers immediate growth in visitors and associated revenue, which is expected to be replicated at IWAK. New routes planned for 2016 and beyond will add greater connectivity from key source markets in Great Britain and Mainland Europe and open the door to the untapped potential direct transatlantic travel can deliver for Mayo and its hinterland.

### 3.5.3 MAYO'S POTENTIAL - A COLLABORATIVE VISION

Recognising the vital part that community and industry collaboration has played in creating the success stories of Mayo's tourism industry, collaborative consultation was a key part of this strategy development. Tourism is everybody's business, and as such, stakeholders, the tourism industry and Mayo's community all have an important voice in the planning process with a goal of shaping a collective vision for the future of tourism in Mayo.

Consultations took place in two formats. A series of eight formal consultations took place with the goal of bringing the community together and developing a collective vision. In addition, the consultations included an idea generation process and sought to identify opportunities for future collaboration and future needs and requirements of the community in order to participate in delivering Mayo's Tourism Strategy.

In tandem with the formal consultation, informal meetings with tourism co-operatives, community groups, stakeholders and interested parties, all designed to solicit thoughts, opinions, suggestions and recommendations to help articulate the collective vision for Mayo's future as a tourism destination.

The formal consultations asked three specific questions of those who attended, with the most popular responses summarised in the below table.

#### What attracts visitors to Mayo?

##### ACTIVITY TOURISM

- Great Western Greenway
- Walking product
- Water based activities

##### HERITAGE

- Archaeology
- Religious heritage
- Genealogy
- Museums
- Legendary figures of Mayo

##### LANDSCAPE

- Coastline - cliffs, islands, Clew Bay, beaches
- Croagh Patrick
- Wilderness, remote landscape

##### PEOPLE

- Friendly welcome
- Family/Diaspora
- Hospitality

## What new opportunities could increase the number of visitor to Mayo?

### MARKETING

- Destination branding
- Targeted social media and online presence
- Marketing activity should be targeted at Diaspora and key markets for IWAK
- Tourism ambassadors at home and abroad

### TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE

- Tourist Information Offices required or expanded services required, specifically at Foxford and Cong
- Leisure infrastructure for water-based activities, including pier, harbour and beach facilities, especially along Blueways
- Accessible facilities at some coastal locations
- Marine leisure access pontoons and marinas

Issues relating to tourism infrastructure development were most notably raised in relation to Achill Island and North Mayo

### WALKING/CYCLING TRAILS

- Further Greenway development, specifically on Achill Island, along Clew Bay and on the Monasteries of the Moy
- Connect new and existing walking/cycling trails to create a circular looped trail around the county
- Religious/spiritual themed walking trails
- Dedicated Equestrian trails

### THEMED TOURS

- Suggested themes included food, Irish language/Gaeltacht, religious heritage, culture and heritage, legendary figures of Mayo

### VISITOR ATTRACTIONS

- Additional all-weather and/or family friendly visitor attractions are required
- Specific visitor attractions suggested include The Mary Robinson Centre, Westport Walled Garden, North Mayo Angling academy, Achill gondola, Mulranny luge, famine museum/Diaspora centre, Moore Hall Walled Garden, Cong Canal, Spiritual Trails

Issues relating to lack of visitor attractions were most notably raised in relation to Achill Island and North and East Mayo

### ACTIVITY PRODUCTS

- Authentic activity tours, including a Day at the Bog, local nature tours, sheep shearing, etc.
- Signature activity products suggested included salmon fishing, underground caving/potholing, velo-rail, skate park
- Activity products should be family friendly and where possible, all-weather

## What do we have to do as a community to make Mayo a premier destination for tourists?

### COLLABORATION

- Regular networking
- Working together - tourism industry and wider community and business community groups
- Collaborative marketing and communications, both local and countywide
- Involve Diaspora and Mayo's ambassadors in collaborative marketing efforts

### OWNERSHIP

- Communities must take ownership of their local areas and have pride in their tourism product
- Positivity, participation and pride are essential
- Mayo needs local champions to drive the community effort to make Mayo a premier tourism destination
- Stakeholder buy in needs to be fostered and nurtured, starting with schools, volunteer programmes, ambassador programmes

### MARKETING SUPPORT

- Support in marketing Mayo as a destination, targeting travel trade, travel media and overseas markets
- Support in reaching out to intermediaries and create attractive packages that will engage their clients
- Support to reach visitors directly via a range of channels, including Tourist Information Offices, online and through brochures

### EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT

- Create themed experiences - food, heritage, activities, culture, festivals
- Create packaged offerings - based around a destination, an activity or a festival
- Create a database of resources such as heritage guides, walking guides, guide books, maps, interpretation, etc.

### COMMUNICATION

- An industry-wide communications platform is essential, allowing for news dissemination, updates, discussion, etc.
- The tourism industry and wider stakeholder and community groups should be aware of and familiar with the tourism product in Mayo, key events and attractions and news from the industry.

## 3.6 Visioning

The strengths of Mayo's existing tourism product were clearly articulated at all scoping, research and consultative phases of this project. There is broad consensus that Mayo as a tourism destination is a green destination, both in landscape and ideology, having natural beauty with scenic landscapes, iconic mountains, an unforgettable coastline and tranquil lakes. It is accepted that Mayo can be considered a premier adventure tourism destination - the walking and cycling capital of Ireland - with an exceptional array of high quality and varied cycling and walking trails to enjoy, augmented by a rapidly expanding range of adventure sports including kayaking, coasteering, stand-up paddle boarding (SUP), snorkelling, surfing and more. A rich calendar of festivals and events, along with concerts and theatres and arts centres, located throughout the county, add additional layers of activity and entertainment to enrich the Mayo tourist experience.

The Wild Atlantic Way brand is a perfect synergy with Mayo's positioning as a destination to domestic and overseas visitors, with Mayo's longest coastline and location at the heart of this long-distance touring route considered to offer enviable advantage. Importantly, it was also recognised that a unique characteristic of Mayo's tourism product is its authenticity - that at the heart of the industry lie real opportunities for tourists to engage with locals, experience local living and discover a heritage and culture that remain vibrant and true to life today.

To move forward and futureproof Mayo as a tourism destination, success involves optimising the destination's strengths and creating a message that will be meaningful to Mayo's primary target markets and encourage them to add Mayo as a 'must visit' destination for their next holiday. In doing this, there is a need to articulate a singular identity that reflects all elements of Mayo's success story, combined and shaped to create a single memorable narrative for the county as a destination - Wild Mayo.



With a clear identity that encapsulates the key attributes of Mayo's tourism product, the vital next step is to ensure Mayo, its communities and tourism industry all embrace and share this story as a collective destination message. Successful collaboration and stakeholder adoption of this destination message will involve communities identifying with and understanding the message, followed by their adoption and articulation of the message.

Often considered a hidden gem, much of Mayo's tourism product remains an undiscovered secret, offering great potential to grow visitor numbers to Mayo and a clearly articulated destination message will offer immeasurable assistance in delivering on this objective.



## 3.7 Wild Mayo - Principal Pillars Of Success

### 3.7.1 WALKING AND CYCLING TOURISM

Walking and cycling are popular tourism activities with high growth potential. The European Commission estimate the value of the European walking and cycling tourism market is €54 billion per annum.

According to Fáilte Ireland<sup>12</sup>, 1,205,000 overseas visitors to Ireland engaged in hiking/walking and 290,000 engaged in cycling in 2014. The principal overseas markets were Britain, USA, France and Germany. In addition, significant numbers of domestic visitors engaged in walking (22%) and cycling (8%) - the latter most evident on the Great Western Greenway.

Walking and cycling tourism make significant contributions to an economy. A report<sup>13</sup> by Cardiff University identified that the Wales All-Coastal Path attracted almost three million visitors in its first year of operation (2012/2013), generating £16 million for the local economy, primarily through food, accommodation and transport services. It was reported that, in this period, over 102,000 persons visited the Pembrokeshire section of the path and determined that one job is sustained for every £32,000 spent by visitors.

Economic analysis of the Great Western Greenway undertaken by Fitzpatrick & Associates in 2011 determined that in its first year of operation alone, the Greenway contributed €7.2 million to the local economy and created 38 full time jobs and sustained 56 part time jobs.

#### Walking

Walking attracts more visitors than any other holiday activity and contributes significantly to motivating visitors to choose Ireland as their holiday destination. Walking offers the highest potential of any activity for Ireland for both domestic and overseas markets. Trails that offer landscape variety, a range of physical challenges (both high and low level walks) and facilities/services are necessary attributes in meeting user expectations.

According to Fáilte Ireland research on walking trends, the more popular walks tend to be short circular loops ranging from 5km to 10km as well as themed trails (e.g. historical, spiritual etc.). The most popular walks are located in the South West and West, with 40% of overseas walking tourists utilising these trails. Walkers tend to be middle aged, affluent and discerning, and stay longer than typical visitors - an average 16.1 nights. The greatest potential markets for Ireland include the UK and mainland Europe, both serviced with direct air access to IWAK.

<sup>12</sup> Tourism Facts, Fáilte Ireland 2014

<sup>13</sup> The Economic Impact of Wales Coast Path Visitor Spending on Wales 2012, Welsh Economy Research Unit



Spiritual walking - where the journey itself is the reward - is a niche but growing market. Iconic examples of spiritual trails internationally include the Camino de Santiago in Spain (attracting over 200,000 participants in 2013) and the Inca Trail, and they offer a unique experience for the traveller looking for a holiday with a difference. There is growing evidence that spiritual walking offers the type of experiential travel that the next generation of tourist is seeking.

Ireland's walking product is competing with world class international walking destinations and iconic walking products such as the All Wales National Coastal Path, spiritual trails such as the Camino de Santiago, the Way of St Francis and internationally renowned heritage paths such as Hadrian's Wall.

The draft National Trails Strategy proposes a national walking partnership structure, the consolidation of the walking product and the development of a number of great Irish journeys or themed routes, traversing areas of outstanding scenic beauty, attractive towns and areas of cultural/spiritual importance.

The key requirements for Mayo in attracting additional walkers is to develop a number of iconic or themed routes of scale routed through areas of stunning beauty and attractive towns which could form part of a national Irish journey. This strategy seeks to develop walking journeys with exceptional user services, striking trail features and authentic experiences.



## Cycling

Traditionally the West and the South West of Ireland have been the most popular destinations for overseas cyclists. However, satisfaction levels among touring cyclists in particular have declined due to a number of factors<sup>14</sup>, but primarily as a result of a lack of defined product, cycle infrastructure deficiencies, traffic levels and road safety concerns.

Studies by Fáilte Ireland<sup>15</sup> confirm that the global cycling market is growing, with huge latent demand for cycling holidays in Ireland, with untapped potential particularly from mainland Europe and the UK. Germany alone has over 11 million potential cycling tourists, followed by the UK (over 4 million), Holland (3 million) and France (2 million). There also exists a significant domestic market for cycle tourism, with a potential Irish market of 1 million persons.

The cycling tourism market is lucrative. The overseas cycling visitor spends over 45% more than a typical visitor and stays longer in Ireland - an average of two weeks. On ranking destinations, overseas cyclists consider scenic landscapes, cycle routes through attractive towns and the availability of other outdoor activities as most important. On ranking routes, good scenery and traffic free, safe routes with access to towns and wilderness areas were considered important.

<sup>14</sup> Strategy for the Development of Irish Cycle Tourism, West Report, Fáilte Ireland, 2006

<sup>15</sup> Fáilte Ireland Cycling Research, Strategic Marketing, May 2013

The development of cycling infrastructure such as Fáilte Ireland's proposed National Cycle Network (Strategy for the Development of Irish Cycle Tourism, 2006) and/or the development of EuroVelo routes are crucially important infrastructure required to ensure Ireland competes with international cycling destinations. The development of cycling infrastructure in Mayo therefore needs to adhere to these national and international routes.

The two key requirements for Mayo in attracting national and international cycling visitors are ease of access and having a cycling product of sufficient scale and quality. This strategy seeks to develop a long continuous off road cycling network of 200km minimum, with world class user services, routed through areas of scenic beauty and attractive towns along the routes identified in the NRA's National Cycle Network (2010) and the Fáilte Ireland tourism cycle network (2006).

### **Walking Opportunities in Mayo**

- Consolidate and improve existing trails, with focus on two types of walks in particular - short looped walks and long-distance walking experiences
- Develop 5 iconic walks and promote nationally and internationally
- Develop visitor experiences and ancillary services around the walking product (bundling of packages)
- Include a Great Mayo Journey in the National Trails Strategy Great Irish Walking Journeys product
- Engage with travel writers to promote Mayo's eclectic range of walking routes
- Support a range of walking festivals and events, with particular emphasis on balanced regional and seasonal distribution
- Develop a walking trail of European significance (e.g. Grand Randonnée walking trail)
- Develop spiritual trails of international significance similar to the Camino de Santiago - link existing spiritual locations such as Croagh Patrick with Knock Shrine and align with the story of St Patrick
- Continue the development of the National Coastal Path in the county
- Improve walker facilities at trailheads for all of Mayo's popular hiking routes
- Target destination and activity marketing that aligns Mayo's walking product with the Wild Mayo identity and communicate through all intermediary and media channels
- Incorporate striking design features on the existing trail network, such as suspension rope bridges, skywalks, bothys and suspended walkways
- Increase awareness of the level of walks through booklets and web.
- Collaborate with communities and development groups in ensuring the availability of trained guides.
- Develop in partnership with Coillte an access to Nephin
- Plan and develop a trail Peak2Peak linking Mayo's highest peaks
- Develop and implement an ongoing programme of interpretation on existing trails (including interpretation that tells local history and the story of the local community)

- Develop a mobile app or appropriate mobile content for Mayo's walking and wider adventure product
- Develop walks through isolated rural areas (wilderness areas, walk combined with fishing, hunting, bird-watching, etc.)

### Cycling Opportunities in Mayo

- Consolidate and improve the existing cycle route network and subject to funding extend the Great Western Greenway and complete the Monasteries of the Moy Greenway.
- Develop a range of iconic cycle trails, including a Great Mayo Cycling Journey (possibly the Great Western Greenway) and promote nationally and internationally
- Develop visitor experiences and ancillary services around the cycling product (bundling of packages)
- Development of services such as rain shelters, water points and toilets (activity services ) every 12km
- Engage with travel writers to promote Mayo's range of cycling routes
- Support a range of cycling races and events/duathlons/marathons/ triathlons with particular emphasis on balanced regional and seasonal distribution
- Develop cycling routes of European significance (e.g. EuroVelo cycle route)
- Develop a range of mountain biking trails
- Improve cycling facilities at trailheads for all of Mayo's popular cycling routes
- Target destination and activity marketing that aligns Mayo's cycling product with the Wild Mayo identity and communicate through all intermediary and media channels
- Develop infrastructural features on the existing trail network, such as suspension rope bridges, skywalks, bothys and suspended walkways
- Develop and implement an ongoing programme of interpretation on existing trails (including interpretation that tells local history and the story of the local community)
- Develop a mobile app or appropriate mobile content for Mayo's cycling and wider adventure product
- Develop cycle trails through isolated rural areas (wilderness areas, cycling combined with fishing, hunting, bird-watching, etc.)
- Target marketing, international touring links, ongoing promotion including all media streams

### 3.7.2 ANGLING TOURISM

406,000 people (113,000 from overseas) participated in recreational angling in 2012 with an overall economic impact estimated at €755 million to the Irish economy. Market research undertaken by Fáilte Ireland in 2013 on Angling has identified the best potential angling opportunities in the domestic market (approx. 500,000 anglers) and overseas in the UK, France and Germany with a combined core market of almost 6.2 million people. The angling markets have different preferences; there is a clear preference for game angling with anglers from the





UK and Northern Ireland, the domestic angler is seeking both game and sea angling opportunities while the overseas angler is likely to be interested in Salmon Angling and Sea angling. Mayo therefore has considerable appeal for anglers due to the availability of game and sea angling product and an abundance of productive lake, river and sea angling fisheries compared to other regions in Western European with the Moy the most productive salmonoid river in Ireland and high Salmon fisheries located at Carrowmore, Errif, Beltra and Furnace. The county has some of Ireland's greatest lakes in Conn, Cullen, Mask and Corrib all with excellent quality angling - predominantly brown trout and pike (the number one sports fish in Europe). Additionally the availability of sea angling produce (mackerel, sea trout, cod and pollock) in the waters of Killala Bay, Clew Bay, Achill and Belmullet all contributes to a large variety of angling product to suit the different preferences of the angling markets. In addition to the quality and variety of fishing product available Irish fisheries offer excellent value for money, in particular for salmon angling, when compared to other competing angling destinations such as Norway, Scotland and Iceland.

Positioned as a high quality, value for money offering, Mayo has the potential to develop a number of Centres of Excellence that reflect this reputation, including the Salmon Life Centre in Ballina and the proposed Angling Academy in North Mayo.

## Angling Opportunities in Mayo

- Sustainable management of fisheries and waterways
- Develop an interpretation centre telling the story of the River Moy and Ballina's position as Salmon Capital of Europe, the Salmon Life Centre
- Develop a world-class angling academy in North Mayo
- Develop appropriate access and infrastructure for angling on Mayo's inland waterways, including fishing posts, pontoons, marinas and berthing facilities, aligned where possible with Activity Service Centres for other water-based activities
- Identify and package a range of angling locations to promote Mayo as a leading angling destination to international markets
- Plan and support a range of angling events and competitions to showcase the quality of facilities and experience on offer to visiting anglers in Mayo
- Promote the use of local fish as part of Mayo's gourmet food experience
- Support the development of high quality ancillary services for anglers, such as tackle shops, ghillies, boat hire, etc.
- Target destination and activity marketing that aligns Mayo's angling product with the Wild Mayo identity and communicate through all intermediary and media channels
- Develop visitor experiences, attractive accommodation offerings and ancillary services around the angling product (bundling of packages)
- Engage with travel writers to promote Mayo's angling product
- Develop a mobile app or appropriate mobile content for Mayo's angling and wider adventure product

### 3.7.3 GOLF TOURISM

Mayo has a very good reputation as a golfing destination having 12 golf courses within the county. Courses are well dispersed across the county and present various challenges to the visiting golfer. The county can also boast of having one of the finest links courses in the world at Carne - 27 holes set in a spectacular Atlantic setting. There are 10 parkland courses in the county, including the championship parkland course at Westport. There are also a number of smaller courses which are popular with visitors staying in the locality. Combining this golf product with its scenic landscape, culture, magnificent sea views and renowned 19<sup>th</sup> hole charm, Mayo has much to offer the golfing visitor.

Mayo's golf offering for visitors can be broadly split into two segments - the links golf played at Carne and in nearby Enniscrone and the parkland offerings around the county. Both segments attract visitors to the county, typically staying several days and playing a number of courses during their stay. Demand for good quality golf in Ireland is strong in both market segments, and Mayo arguably has great potential to further develop here.

For the more lucrative links golf market, there is merit in exploring the potential demand for additional links golf courses in the county, thereby encouraging high end visitors to stay longer. In the parkland market, exploring marketing and packaging opportunities with UK based tour operators with air access via IWAK offers real potential for growing this segment and again merits further investigation.



## Golf Opportunities in Mayo

- Undertake an exploration of potential demand for further links golf course development in Mayo
- Support golf club participation in Fáilte Ireland's Golf Club Accreditation Scheme
- Develop the marketing potential and bundling of packages for the second **and** third tier golf clubs in the county, targeted to both consumers and inbound operators
- Target destination and activity marketing that aligns Mayo's golf product with the Wild Mayo identity and communicate through all intermediary and media channels
- Develop visitor experiences, attractive accommodation offerings and ancillary services around the golf tourism product (bundling of packages)
- Engage with golf travel writers to promote Mayo's range of golf courses and experiences
- Support a range of golfing events, tournaments and professional tournaments to showcase Mayo as a golfing destination, with particular emphasis on balanced regional and seasonal distribution
- Develop a mobile app or appropriate mobile content for Mayo's golf and adventure product

### 3.7.4 ADVENTURE TOURISM

According to Fáilte Ireland research (2013)<sup>16</sup> adventure tourism is a high growth market segment. In 2012 almost 920,000 overseas visitors participated in adventure activities contributing €1.2 billion to the economy. The adventure sector is a high yield segment with the average activity participant spending 40% more and staying two days longer than average holidaymakers.

Mayo is well positioned as a destination of choice within Ireland for Adventure. According to Fáilte Ireland research the county is ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> for adventure - after Dublin and Galway. Mayo lends itself well to adventure activities due to its impressively wild landscape, rugged coastline and the wide availability of adventure product in the county. Mayo can boast of having the most extensive network of recreational cycling and walks in Ireland, a renowned angling product and a reputation in the provision of adventure activities which goes back thirty years. Mayo has a number of nationally known Adventure Centres at Delphi, Killary, Achill and Westport. Additionally there has been a surge in participation in activity challenges in the county such as Gaelforce, Sea2Summit, Pink Ribbon, Achill Roar, Race to Glory etc. all of which are attracting visitors, primarily domestic, to the county.

#### Adventure - Water Sports

According to Fáilte Ireland the potential for water sports activities amongst the British, French, German and domestic markets is very good with a combined core market potential of almost 16 million. This market however is open to very strong competition from warm weather countries in particular France and Spain. In the domestic market raising awareness of the product is a key requirement as is availability of trained guides.



<sup>16</sup> Source: Fáilte Ireland "What do those seeking adventure really want?"



## Adventure - Horse Riding

Horse trekking is a niche activity market. In 2011 approximately 71,000 overseas visitors engaged in equestrian pursuits worth €76m to the Irish economy. The British and the domestic market offers the greatest potential for horse riding and pony trekking with a core potential market of approx. 2.5 million people. Due to price awareness in the British core market the opportunities should be value or low cost in order to tap into the British market potential.

Mayo is well positioned to target this market given the availability of equestrian centres in the county, the availability of large stretches of tracks in the areas of Achill and Westport and the availability of direct flight links between Britain and IWAK.



## Adventure - Bird Watching

Bird watching is a very niche tourism activity in Mayo given the uniqueness of areas of the county for birdwatching particularly Erris and Achill. There are large areas of the county with a great diversity of habitats and unique landscapes from the precipitous cliffs of Slieve Mór and Erris Head, the bogs of Erris, and a myriad of lakes, beaches and estuaries. Resident birds such as chough, merlin, twite and peregrine threatened by man's activities in more densely populated areas breed on Erris Head undisturbed. The strategic location of Mayo lends to an array of arctic species, the Mullet Peninsula is the most southerly nesting site of the red-necked phalarope and the majority of the few recent snowy owls sighted in Ireland have been reported from the Mullet and the islands. The Mullet is also home in the summer to the endangered corncrake, its rasping call can be heard in suitable meadowlands, especially after sunset. Seabirds, such as terns petrels, shearwaters, gulls and auks make their way to Erris every year to breed on its safe beaches, islands and cliffs and species such as little terns are present in nationally important numbers. In winter, Blacksod Bay, with its large areas of intertidal mudflats, supports large populations of waders, such as bar-tailed godwit, curlew, redshank, dunlin and ringed plovers. Wintering waterfowl are also a regular feature and the wild areas of Mayo offers excellent viewing opportunities for brent, white fronted, greylag and barnacle geese.

Achill also boasts healthy populations of peregrine, kestrels, merlin, and sparrowhawk. Visiting winter birds include whooper and bewick swan, duck and the odd American species blown in hurricane winds add to the appeal of Achill as a birding hot spot.

It is difficult to quantify the potential for bird watching considering that there has been little market research undertaken on this by Fáilte Ireland. There are an estimated 2 million bird watching enthusiasts in the UK alone, which is a large untapped and nearby market with direct flight access to Mayo.



## Adventure - Sailing

Sailing including yachting, cruising, sail and motor boating is a niche tourism product in Ireland primarily as the domestic market has low participation rates in this activity. In 2012 almost 30,000 overseas visitors participated in inland and coastal sailing in Ireland. The greatest potential for sailing in Ireland exists in the French and domestic markets with a combined core market of almost 4.3 million. Mayo has the longest coastline of any county in Ireland and has some of the largest inland water bodies. However, apart from areas such as Clew and Galway Bay, the west coast of Ireland is exposed and offers a more difficult/challenging experience to an overseas sailing enthusiast. The Glenans Sailing Club located on Collanmore Island and supported by Bord Fáilte as a sailing school in the 1970's is currently on the market.

There is potential in the sheltered Clew Bay area for attracting sailing enthusiasts to safe docking points in Westport (or Rosmoney). There is merit in exploring the potential of the Glenans facility as a sailing academy/adventure academy of national importance.



## Adventure Opportunities in Mayo

- Target destination and activity marketing that aligns Mayo's adventure product with the Wild Mayo identity and communicate through all intermediary and media channels.
- Develop visitor experiences, attractive accommodation offerings and ancillary services around the adventure tourism product (bundling of packages)
- Consolidate adventure activities with other activities and centralise facilities around trailheads and Activity Service Centres
- Support European or World Adventure Championships being hosted in Mayo



- Support ongoing innovation among activity operators to ensure Mayo retains its present first mover advantage in the industry
- Engage with travel writers to promote Mayo's range of adventure activities and experiences
- Support a range of adventure races, festivals and events, with particular emphasis on balanced regional and seasonal distribution
- Develop a mobile app or appropriate mobile content for Mayo's adventure product
- Raise awareness of adventure products through use of print, travel writers and media streams
- Expand and develop the Blueway water trails to other coastal areas
- Develop an Outdoor Pursuits Centre of national importance within the county
- Develop novel adventure facilities, such as VeloRail or similar, within the county
- Explore the possibility of developing Glenan's Sailing facility into a Sailing/Adventure Academy of national importance
- Collaborate with Coillte and National Parks and Wildlife Service to develop a Mayo Wilderness Park in the county
- Develop a mountain bike trail of local/regional importance within the county

### 3.7.5 WILD ATLANTIC WAY

In many ways Mayo is perfectly aligned with the Wild Atlantic Way brand, offering the most quintessential appeals of this journey - vast, wild, raw, isolated landscapes and seascapes. Indeed the vast wilderness of the North Mayo area contributes significantly to the brand allure. The Wild Atlantic Way, of which Mayo is the midpoint and heartbeat, offers huge opportunities to showcase the county's wealth of scenery, heritage and culture to international visitors.



## Wild Atlantic Way Opportunities in Mayo

- Target destination and activity marketing that aligns Mayo's position as the heartbeat of the Wild Atlantic Way with the Wild Mayo identity and communicate through all intermediary and media channels
- Develop visitor experiences, attractive accommodation offerings and ancillary services around the adventure tourism product (bundling of packages)
- Develop Discovery Points and Signature Discovery Points as outstanding visitor experiences on the Wild Atlantic Way, collaborating with agencies and communities to develop memorable experiences along the route
- Develop linkages and collaborations with neighbouring local authority tourism organisations
- Facilitate linkages between trade operators along the WAW zones (clusters of product innovation)
- Develop a range of high quality attractions within the county which can be marketed to WAW visitors
- Collaborate with other local authorities to develop the section of the WAW north of Galway as a "Must See" section of the WAW
- Carry out remedial works on WAW Discovery Points and develop striking and innovative Signature Discovery Points in Mayo that will be iconic 'must see/do' sights, highlights for those touring the route.





### 3.7.6 PILGRIMAGE & SPIRITUAL TOURISM

Mayo has considerable appeal as a spiritual tourism destination, with 1.6 million people travelling to Mayo annually to visit Knock Shrine. Added to this, Mayo has a rich sacred landscape, with many religious heritage sites from the Monasteries of the Moy to Caher Island, Ballintubber Abbey and Croagh Patrick among the key offerings.

The majority of spiritual visitors to Mayo visit Knock Shrine as a day trip only, and are domestic visitors. The potential to further develop this market is twofold - to magnetise current visitors to stay overnight in the county and secondly to attract overseas visitors to visit Knock Shrine and explore the religious product in the county during their stay.



#### Pilgrimage & Spiritual Tourism Opportunities in Mayo

- Develop a long distance Spiritual Trail linking Croagh Patrick, Ballintubber Abbey and Knock Shrine. Investigate the potential of linking this trail to Burriscarra, Cong, Turlough and the Monasteries of the Moy.
- Develop the marketing potential and bundling of packages for accommodation providers and operators near to Knock Shrine and facilitate their introduction to key decision makers in travel planning (tour operators and parish/diocesan organisers)
- Target destination and activity marketing in the overseas market
- Develop visitor experiences, attractive accommodation offerings and ancillary services around the spiritual tourism product (bundling of packages)
- Support a range of spiritual walking and pilgrimage events to showcase Mayo as a spiritual tourism destination, with particular emphasis on generating overnight stays for visitors to Knock Shrine

### 3.7.7 FOOD TOURISM

Recent years have seen a huge shift in attitudes and awareness of food. Traditional flavours and products are being re-discovered and people are being drawn towards locally produced natural and wholesome foods. Mayo with its clean waters, natural scenery and untamed wildness has great food and hospitality at its core. *Premium quality, hand-made, natural, wholesome, organic, artisan and delicious* are words that come to mind when describing the food products that are produced in the county by artisan producers and large scale food industries alike. Over seventy producers have been identified around the county with products ranging across the spectrum, including seafood, sausages, meats, mountain lamb, farmhouse cheese, farmhouse butter, pestos, sea salt, hedgerow infused vinegars, chocolate, nougat, natural still and sparkling water, green tea sparkling water and craft beers.

There are synergies being developed between the food sector and the tourism trade. However much more needs to be done. It can be difficult to purchase locally produced foods in towns and there needs to be increased use of Mayo produce in Mayo restaurants and hotels. Additionally artisan food needs to be incorporated more often into initiatives and events.

Examples of good practice include the Gourmet Greenway, a food trail along the Great Western Greenway, created by Mulranny Park Hotel and local food producers to showcase the areas' artisan foods and the strong presence of food producers at festivals such as Féile na Tuaithe, Westport and Ballina food festivals.



## Food Tourism Opportunities in Mayo

- Develop and integrate the food sector into the tourism sector as appropriate
- Facilitate communities in coming together to support each other and to develop and promote the local food sector. Encourage many local shops to stock local produce and similarly encourage hotels, restaurants, cafes and bars to offering local produce.
- Encourage and assist the food service sector and all accommodation providers (hostel, B&B, guest houses, hotels etc) to use local produce in their menus
- Facilitate and promote food tour packages. Encourage the development and promotion of food related activities such as food courses (e.g. butter making, cheese making, bread making, smoking, beekeeping, foraging, healthy eating) and food trails as part of tourism packages
- Develop a regional food festival in Mayo
- Facilitate and promote a high quality county food trail.
- Promotion of Food Ambassadors
- Encourage IWAK to retail local food at the airport both through food service offerings and in the duty free shop

### 3.7.8 FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Just under 150 festivals and events are held annually in Mayo - a remarkable calendar of festivals and events. Largely attributable to successful community engagement in tourism in Mayo, many of these festivals have long histories and have become part of the fabric of life in Mayo's towns and villages, often playing an important role in drawing Mayo's Diaspora home on holiday. These festivals offer an authentic experience and a genuine engagement opportunity for visitors.

Festivals are predominantly small, community managed and ranging from historical/heritage themes to music, arts, horseracing, regattas, walking festivals and agricultural shows. In recent years there has been a noticeable increase in activity challenge events including marathons, duathlons, triathlons and adventure challenges involving various combinations of cycling, running and water-based activities. Examples include Gaelforce, Sea2Summit, Battle for the Lake, Mayo Mud Run, Race to Glory etc. These events are growing in popularity with an estimated 36,000 people participating in Mayo challenge events in 2014 alone.

If Mayo's festivals and events are to draw visitors to the county and deliver real economic benefit for the host destination, a review of the festival offering is required, benchmarking it against that of similar destinations in terms of variety, themes, dates and quality. Such an activity would determine the optimal spread of festivals for seasonal and regional distribution and identify new themes and offerings for festival organisers to consider. A series of workshops to upskill and build innovation and capacity in community groups would also add to the county's festival offering and help attract additional visitors to Mayo.





## Festival Opportunities

- Provide blanket insurance to community managed festivals
- Development of a toolkit on organising and managing festivals for beginners
- Develop festival capacity building and knowledge within communities
- Engage the expertise of a cultural tourism coordinator and programmer to benchmark the Mayo festival offering, identify new themes and build capacity within Mayo communities.
- Extension of existing events into one or two day festivals (e.g. St Patrick's Week in July to include participation in the annual Reek Pilgrimage, Tóchar Phádraic pilgrimage, Spiritual trail etc. Similarly, St Patrick's Day Parades and events in the county could be broadened to include a full day or weekend of celebration with carnivals, art and music augmenting the parade itself)
- There is great scope to develop new festival themes aligned to the needs of Wild Atlantic Way markets including Saint Patrick, Gráinne Mhaol, Celtic Traditional Music, French Mayo and Cairde Amigo - a festival with an Argentine flair.
- Exploit the potential of annual regatta and ocean yacht racing, including seeking to attract the Venture Cup Ocean Race to Mayo.

## 4.0 CREATING A STRATEGY FOR MAYO TOURISM 2021

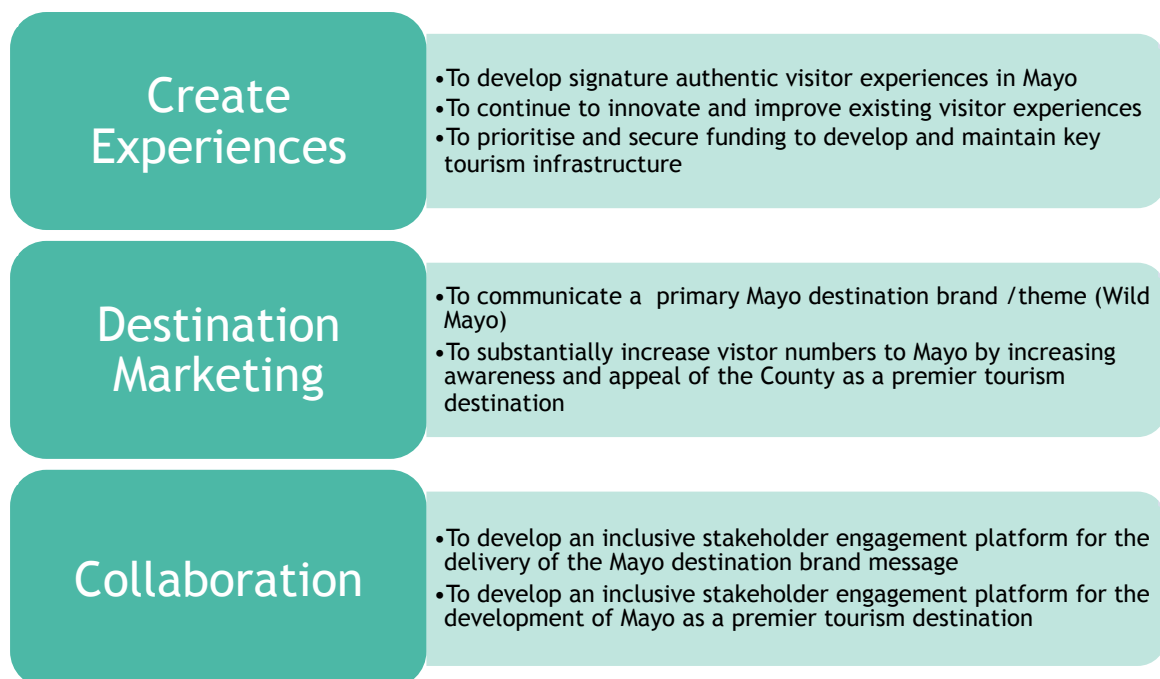
Mayo's natural landscape and marine environment are clear strengths and compelling draws for domestic and international visitors alike. Products such as walking and cycling, along with water based sports like surfing, kayaking and extreme adventure activities are proven attractors, popular with visitors to the county and supporting tourism infrastructure in both Mayo's larger tourism hubs and rural communities.

Branding initiatives such as the Wild Atlantic Way, Greenways and Blueways add to the attraction for Mayo's visitors. Additional products such as Mayo's rich heritage and authentic cultural offerings generate additional vital tourism revenue for the local economy along with festivals and events and the MICE<sup>17</sup> sector, particularly in Westport and Castlebar.

### 4.1 The Vision

This strategy has as its vision for Mayo Tourism 2021 to develop Mayo as a premier tourism destination, coupling authenticity with world-class activities, exceptional heritage and cultural attractions and high quality experiences attractive to domestic and international visitors alike.

### 4.2 The Objectives



<sup>17</sup> Meetings, Incentives, Conferencing and Events



## 4.3 The Targets

- **To grow visitor numbers to Mayo and associated tourism revenue**
  - Medium term target: 80% growth by end 2018 (current County Clare levels)
  - Long term target: 350% growth by end 2021 (current County Kerry levels)
- **To support and grow sustainable employment in the tourism industry in Mayo**
  - Medium term target: 350 new jobs
  - Long term target: 1,000 new jobs
- **To increase the number of festivals and events in the county by 50% by 2021**

## 4.4 The Strategies - How to Make This Vision a Reality?

Destination Mayo - Tourism Strategy 2021 is designed to provide a strategic plan for tourism product and experience development as well as destination marketing from the present day to 2021. The strategy includes a detailed practical Tourism Action Plan that forms the basis of a work programme for the tourism activities of Mayo County Council's EIU up to 2021.

The Tourism Action Plan outlines the actions required to deliver the vision for Mayo Tourism Strategy 2021. Actions are grouped here into key themes and industry sectors, with additional groupings for actions relating to tourism facilities, infrastructure and enterprise and investment actions required to deliver this vision.

Spearheaded by Mayo County Council's Enterprise & Investment Unit, this vision will be articulated through an inclusive and coordinated approach with the cooperation of the Municipal District Authorities and tourist sector stakeholders in the county.

Key to the effective delivery of this Tourism Strategy is the creation of a Mayo Tourism Forum, an inclusive platform for collaboration, which should include key stakeholders and allow for wide-ranging industry and community engagement to ensure optimum buy-in from the wider Mayo tourism industry community.

#### **4.4.1 TOURISM ACTION PLAN**

The Tourism Action Plan that accompanies this Destination Mayo Tourism Strategy consists of a detailed programme of actions required to deliver on the vision and objectives of the Strategy.

The actions included are practical in nature, focused on product and experience development actions designed to ensure Mayo's tourism offering develops to meet the needs of the next generation of tourists. Marketing activities are recommended along with identity and destination messaging, intended to reach Mayo's primary target markets most effectively and deliver on the targets of growing visitor numbers and associated revenue to reinforce Mayo's position as a premier activity and authentic tourism destination. Woven into each segment of the Tourism Action Plan are collaborative activity platforms to facilitate industry and community participation, a critical factor in the successful delivery of this strategy.

#### **4.4.2 PRINCIPAL MAYO TOURISM THEME**

A seamless destination message and its adoption is a central focus of the Tourism Action Plan, recommending the use of the Wild Mayo as a primary theme/brand, which reflects the core components of Mayo's tourism product. Actions are outlined in all product segments designed to facilitate the adoption of this brand and signature brand experiences such as Greenways, Blueways and the Wild Atlantic Way by the wider Mayo tourism industry.

Feedback from existing visitors to Mayo is generally positive, with many visitors surprised to discover the extent and quality of visitor experiences on offer. This indicates that real benefit can be achieved by increasing visitor numbers in Mayo, with a strong potential for repeat visits and positive word of mouth recommendations from past visitors.

Aligned to the destination message, the Tourism Action Plan also includes a series of actions intended to align Mayo with best practice industry standards for quality assurance, responsible tourism and service delivery. Ensuring that Mayo retains a position as a high quality destination is vital to visitor satisfaction and continued growth in visitor numbers.

#### **4.4.3 KEY TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE**

The plan includes a programme of infrastructural improvements to meet gaps in the existing tourist product and to address future product needs. Programme delivery will be dependent of meeting planning requirements and securing external grant funding.

## **Flagship Products**

The Programme of Infrastructural improvements will include the delivery of a number of flagship tourism projects throughout the county which are designed to provide new and innovative activities. These projects will help differentiate the Mayo tourism offering from those in other areas of the country and thereby attract the attention of national and international media and visitors. Additionally these projects will provide the necessary platform from which small tourism enterprises can operate and grow, helping to create jobs and regenerate rural areas throughout the county.

### **Wild Atlantic Way - Discovery Points**

The Wild Atlantic Way presents excellent opportunities for Mayo as a tourism destination, diverting tourists from heavily trafficked areas to remote and rural destinations and providing high quality experiential offerings along the way. Pivotal to the success of the initiative is investment in necessary infrastructure along the way, including signage and parking facilities in the first instance.

In addition, investment in interpretation at no less than 31 Discovery Points along the Mayo coastline will add considerably to the draw for visitors to experience the sights along Mayo's coast and engage with its culture and people. Principal among these are the Signature Discovery points located in areas which best capture spirit of place and which have the potential to offer outstanding visitor experiences. Signature Discovery Points are worthy of significant investment. The Signature Discovery Point at Downpatrick Head is currently attracting 36,000 visitors per annum. Planning and design of a unique and architecturally striking interpretation at Keem Bay is currently being advanced, which offers the opportunity to transform the tourism industry in Achill.

## **Walking**

Walking is Mayo's signature activity product, and Mayo has successfully positioned itself as the Walking Capital of Ireland. As such, Mayo's walking product is a primary focus of the Tourism Action Plan. Infrastructural developments included in the Tourism Action Plan include the consolidation, development and enhancement of trailhead facilities, combining with other activities such as cycling and water based activities to optimise the infrastructural investment.

Ongoing investment in the maintenance and upkeep of existing trails to international best practice standard is recommended, along with the further development of long-distance iconic walking trails such as the coastal trail. Development of interpretation, particularly along signature walking trails is also included as an action to ensure Mayo's walking product engages visitors and adds to their experience.

## **Greenways**

Investment in Greenway development has proved extraordinarily beneficial for Mayo tourism in the past, and continued investment in greenway development is detailed in the Tourism Action Plan.

The extension of the Greenway network to other areas of the county will be progressed subject to the availability of external funding and in accordance with the National Cycle Network of the National Roads Authority and Fáilte Ireland.

Aligned with Mayo's walking product, there are real opportunities to develop communal trailhead facilities for walkers and cyclists, optimising budgetary spend and enhancing the overall experience for users.

## **Marine Facilities**

With the importance of Mayo's coastline and waterways to the tourism product, a considerable number of actions relating to water sports in the Tourism Action Plan include infrastructural development, ranging from car park enhancements, the addition of toilet, changing and shower facilities to more comprehensive Activity Service Centres, designed to provide centralised activity hub facilities for multiple activity users, making these destinations more attractive to a wider range of activity enthusiasts. Marina, pontoon and mooring facilities are also an important addition for marine leisure/tourism hubs and their development is also outlined in the Tourism Action Plan.

## **Adventure**

A considerable number of actions in the Plan relate to infrastructural works which will underpin the objective of Mayo being a premier destination for Adventure and include infrastructural development of a National Outdoors Pursuits Centre in central Mayo, VeloRail or similar facility in east Mayo, extension of the Blueway water trails and the development of "Get out There" services centre at strategic adventure locations in the county.

The above proposed developments are investment heavy and will be subject to external grant funding being available to Mayo County Council.

## **Lakes of Mayo**

In addition to Mayo's lengthy coastline, Mayo's lakes are also popular with leisure tourism and water sports enthusiasts, primarily for boating, kayaking, angling and swimming. Access to the lakes can be problematic, and so, a series of infrastructural developments, primarily the installation of pontoons, marina and angling post facilities, are included in the Tourism Action Plan.

Mayo's lakes also have potential for land-based activity usage too, with the potential to develop and enhance circumnavigatory cycling and walking trails. Parking facilities and laybys

in scenic areas are also included in the Tourism Action Plan, designed to allow visitors enjoy scenic areas along themed touring routes around the county.



## 4.5 Collaboration - Blueprint for Success

Tourism is everyone's business yet it is a multifaceted industry with many players and stakeholders operating within a fragmented industry, all contributing to the overall Mayo product. Stakeholders such as trade providers, local communities and development groups, Chambers of Commerce, development agencies, IWAK and local and national authorities are all making an important contribution. Leader companies, through the Leader Programme and their work in rural recreation, have worked successfully with communities and enterprises in developing key rural tourism and development projects in the county. Collaboration has resulted in many great achievements such as the Mayo 5000 initiative - a combined Fáilte Ireland, Mayo Naturally and local authority partnership which raised the profile of the county nationally as well as set the seed for Riverdance.

The Gathering initiative in 2013 highlighted the yearning of communities to be involved in the development of tourism and the development of job creation in the county. A desire to contribute is also displayed through the work of volunteers on the ground, Tourism Ambassadors and the growth of community tourism and promotional groups, such as Love Achill and Love Castlebar.

Collaboration is central to the success of the Tourism Strategy. Mayo has a key strength compared to other areas in Ireland in the level and extent of collaborations that are in place throughout the county. Fáilte Ireland promoted trade collaborations are paying dividends through increased levels of packaging and bundling of offers, development of artisan food trails etc. In the tourism field there is a significantly high level of volunteerism and co-operation between the main stakeholders involved. This is best exemplified in the success of tourism initiatives at both national and international level including the repeat successes of Westport in winning the National Tidy Overall Town Award, the community of Mulranny winning the National Best Tourism Town award and success for Mayo communities in national Pride of Place categories, winning LAMA awards and selection as a National Smarter Travel Demonstration Area, Irish Times Best Place to go Wild and Best Place to Live awards. Partnership is alive in Mayo!

Significantly collaboration does not end at this level in Mayo. The Great Western Greenway is an example of a community and 160 landowners coming together for the benefit of their local economy. The permissive access agreement model has worked in Mayo not just making the Greenway possible in the county but also enabled the development of an extensive network of 130 trails and the development of the largest outdoor Public Arts trail in Ireland - Tir Sáile Sculpture Trail - to be developed as a tourism offering in Mayo.

There are additional collaborations working on developing and maintaining tourism products such as the Green Patrol - comprising of Rural Social Scheme/TUS members - who maintain and manage the Great Western Greenway. Partnerships such as these between local authorities, development agencies and RSS/FÁS schemes have been formed on solid foundations but they will require additional support and formalisation in order to achieve the targets and objectives set out in this strategy. Ní neart go cur le chéile.

### 4.5.1 MAYO TOURISM FORUM

Successful tourism destinations are inclusive, involving the whole tourism industry and the wider community, with a common vision of developing and promoting the destination through a unified message. As such, realising this vision for Mayo Tourism depends on participation from the wider Mayo tourism community and their embracing this future vision for tourism in Mayo. The role of Mayo County Council and the EIU is in many cases a facilitating role, as much of the Tourism Action Plan requires buy in and individual responsibility from Mayo's tourism providers for delivery. It is envisaged that the resources of the Council's EIU Tourism Team be used very much at strategic level, developing tourism infrastructure and delivering long-term destination development projects, while also providing guidance and support for the wider tourism industry in delivering the more tactical and sales-oriented aspects of the plan.

Drawing on the successes of Mayo's past collaborative initiatives, it is recommended that the Mayo Tourism Forum be created using a 'bottom up' approach to secure wide-reaching industry commitment to implement the Tourism Strategy & Action Plan.

### 4.5.2 PROPOSED FORMAT OF MAYO TOURISM FORUM

The following structure is recommended for Mayo Tourism Forum:

<b>General Destination Forum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wide-reaching, general forum, open to all in the tourism industry</li> <li>• Used to facilitate industry briefings and collective workshops</li> <li>• Participation by open invitation</li> </ul>
<b>Product Specific Forums</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted, focused approach for key product areas and themes (e.g. Walks Partnerships, etc.)</li> <li>• Participation by nomination or invitation as required</li> </ul>

All tourism forums convened should include representation from the EIU, local development companies, the tourism industry, community groups, Fáilte Ireland, IWAK and other stakeholders as required and should have a regular meeting schedule (quarterly meetings are recommended). It is envisaged that the Mayo Tourism Forum meetings would include representation from Mayo County Council, the relevant State agencies working in the county, local tourism and community groups, destination marketing groups, tourism product providers and interested parties. The Product Specific Forums should include a Walking Forum, Cycling Forum, Food Forum and others, functioning as working groups to develop product and initiatives relevant to specific product sectors. Each forum should initially be led by one of the Tourism team members.

### 4.5.3 MAYO TOURISM FORUM OUTPUTS

Mayo Tourism Forum outputs are outlined below here, categorised into actions (led by the EIU) and facilitations (requiring industry support to deliver). Each category is further divided into general and product specific actions and facilitations. Essential to the success of Mayo's Tourism Forums will be the use of regular industry-wide communication sharing news, updates, product development and discussions with the wider industry.

Outputs	<b>General</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an enterprise friendly environment that allows for job creation in the tourism industry</li> <li>• Support destination marketing groups (Destination Westport, Erris Beo, Mayo North and Achill Tourism and others that arise) to increase local buy-in and align industry marketing activities to common theme/message</li> <li>• Reinforce Mayo's key brands, including MAYO.IE, Wild Mayo, Heartbeat of the Wild Atlantic Way, premier adventure destination, Home of the Greenway and Walking and Adventure Capital of Ireland</li> </ul>
	<b>Product Specific</b>
	<b>FOOD</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create the opportunity for Mayo's indigenous food sector to expand their retail footprint within the county</li> <li>• Develop a Mayo food network &amp; market signature food experiences around the county, including artisan food trails</li> </ul>
	<b>WALKING &amp; CYCLING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Position Mayo as Ireland's leading walking &amp; cycling destination</li> <li>• Develop signature/iconic walking and cycling trails as attractive promotional tools</li> <li>• Develop a long distance spiritual trail/journey through the county (a Great Mayo Walking Journey) with potential to link into a greater national journey</li> </ul>
	<b>ADVENTURE TOURISM</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further develop Mayo as a leading adventure tourism destination</li> <li>• Futureproof the adventure tourism industry - identify future trends, support innovation &amp; emerging adventure products in Mayo</li> <li>• Develop VeloRail or similar in east Mayo</li> <li>• Develop a mountain bike trail in the county</li> <li>• Develop a National Outdoor Pursuits Centre</li> </ul>
	<b>HERITAGE, ARTS &amp; CULTURE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop themed trails telling Mayo's story in an authentic &amp; engaging way (e.g. Sacred Landscapes)</li> <li>• Use of the heritage, arts &amp; culture product to deliver regional &amp; seasonal balance of tourists</li> <li>• Support the development of strategically located family friendly all-weather visitor attractions</li> <li>• Input into an inclusive programme of events and initiatives to mark Ireland's Decade of Commemorations.</li> <li>• Progress the development of the Mary Robinson Centre</li> <li>• Develop a Famine Memorial Trail</li> </ul>

Facilitations	<b>General</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased networking between Mayo's tourism providers</li> <li>Facilitate familiarisation visits for stakeholders, industry professionals, school goers and community groups in order that Mayo people are familiar with the tourism offering in their local area</li> <li>Collaborative approach to product development and marketing between providers</li> <li>Product providers take ownership of and promote Mayo's key tourism themes and messages</li> <li>Increased collaboration with public transport providers to make Mayo more accessible to tourists relying on public transport</li> <li>Develop training programmes for jobseekers and small scale tourism operators to equip the industry with the skills and personnel required to drive sustainable growth in the sector</li> <li>Foster ownership and volunteerism, with a view to generating widespread buy in and civic pride from local communities, community groups and local businesses.</li> <li>Strategic partnerships with events and organisations that can assist in positioning Mayo as a high quality tourism destination, e.g. Web Summit, Red Bull Adventurers, National Geographic</li> </ul>
	<b>Product Specific</b>
	<b>FESTIVALS &amp; EVENTS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a diverse and vibrant calendar of festivals and events</li> <li>Balanced regional and seasonal focus on event scheduling festivals and events create a compelling call to action for potential visitors</li> <li>Support community groups in developing high quality, innovative festivals that will draw visitors to the county</li> <li>Support community groups in developing their festivals, focusing on identifying revenue and sponsorship opportunities, marketing activities and capacity building</li> <li>Continue to support community and diaspora related festivals and events designed to create compelling reasons for diaspora to visit and harness for future opportunities</li> <li>Support creative and innovative festival idea generation</li> </ul>
	<b>FOOD</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrate Mayo's indigenous food sector into the tourism industry</li> <li>Position Mayo as a food destination</li> <li>Showcase Mayo's seafood as a key component of the Wild Atlantic Way offering</li> </ul>
	<b>WALKING &amp; CYCLING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Position Mayo as Ireland's leading walking &amp; cycling destination</li> </ul>
	<b>ADVENTURE TOURISM</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop Mayo as an adventure tourism destination</li> <li>Develop a challenge, festival and events calendar that is diverse, exciting and innovative</li> <li>Futureproof the adventure tourism industry - identify future trends, support innovation &amp; emerging adventure products in Mayo</li> </ul>
	<b>FISHING &amp; ANGLING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure Mayo's position as a leading international fishing &amp; angling destination</li> <li>Facilitate and promote the creation of Centres of Excellence for angling in the county.</li> </ul>
	<b>GOLF</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Position Mayo as a leading destination for domestic and international golfers</li> <li>Develop partnerships with IGTOA and IAGTO to grow Mayo's golf potential</li> </ul>

	<b>COUNTRY PURSUITS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop Mayo as a sustainable, responsibly managed hunting &amp; shooting destination</li> </ul>
	<b>HERITAGE, ARTS &amp; CULTURE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of the heritage, arts &amp; culture product to deliver regional &amp; seasonal balance of tourists</li> <li>• Expand the current offering within Mayo's visitor attractions, utilising showcases, seasonal galleries and retail opportunities for local art, craft and traditional skills</li> <li>• Identify and support the development of strategically located family friendly all-weather visitor attractions</li> </ul>

#### 4.5.4 STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE FOR TOURISM & FOOD

The Strategic Policy Committee for Tourism and Food has been established with a role to assist and advise the Council in relation to policy relating to Tourism and Food in County Mayo and thereby give a role to both Councillors and relevant sectoral interests an opportunity for full involvement in the policy making process for the benefit of the community.

The SPC has already met on six occasions and inputted into the formulation of the Tourism Strategy at a workshop in January 2015.

The SPC includes Councillors and relevant sectoral interests and its membership includes:

- Councillor Gerry Coyle (Chair)
- Councillor Michael Loftus
- Councillor Paul McNamara (succeeding Councillor John Caulfield)
- Councillor John O'Hara
- Councillor Tereasa McGuire
- Councillor Thérèse Ruane
- Councillor Seamus Weir (succeeding Councillor Frank Durcan)
- Mr Michael Lennon
- Mr Padraig Heverin
- Mr Patrick Chambers
- Mr Michael Carey

The mission of the Strategic Policy Committee for Tourism and Food (SPC) is to promote Mayo as a destination of choice that excels in offering a world-class visitor experience with great food and hospitality at its core.

The objectives of the SPC in relation to tourism are to develop the tourism offering in County Mayo, development of experience on the Wild Atlantic Way, creation of a spiritual visitor journey through the county and the development of Mayo as the Adventure Capital of Ireland/Europe.

The objective of the SPC in relation to food is that Mayo becomes nationally recognised as a leading producer of quality authentic food.



The SPC members play a significantly important role as ambassadors for the tourism strategy in their local communities, raising awareness of tourism related opportunities and promoting community and agency collaborations to achieve Strategy targets and outcomes.

## 5.0 DELIVERING THE TOURISM ACTION PLAN

The EIU, with assistance from the Municipal Districts within the Council, will play a key role in delivering the Tourism Action Plan. The Tourism Team will be instrumental in retaining Mayo's prime position as an industry leader in the development of high quality tourism products, activity facilities as well as high quality tourism related infrastructure.

Researching industry developments, idea generation and product innovation is critical to maintaining that position, ensuring that Mayo is well placed to adapt to shifting trends in tourism demands. Keeping abreast of tourism trends will also empower the Tourism Team to think strategically about Mayo's future potential, assisting in creating future strategies and development plans for the sector, ensuring Mayo continues to grow and succeed as a destination.

The Tourism Team have had remarkable successes in mobilising communities for tourism related initiatives, from Greenway developments to The Gathering festivals and events. Capitalising on this community goodwill towards the tourism industry is essential, recognising the vital role communities play in enhancing the tourism offering in Mayo's towns and villages.

Capacity building in communities, facilitating community led initiatives and supporting community led enterprise will ensure the continued effective engagement of communities with the tourism industry. In addition, the EIU Tourism Team will facilitate the delivery of the Tourism Strategy by coordinating the actions required for delivery and mobilising the Mayo Tourism Forum.

Within the Unit, the Tourism Manager will have primary responsibility, with additional personnel resources required as outlined below here:

<b>Tourism Manager</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinating delivery of the Tourism Action Plan</li> <li>• Creating Mayo Tourism Forum</li> <li>• Mobilising Mayo's tourism community</li> <li>• Coordinating tourism infrastructural development</li> </ul>
<b>Tourism Activities Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activating the Tourism Action Plan for the outdoor activity sector</li> <li>• Leading Mayo Tourism Forum's outdoor activity sub-forums</li> <li>• Coordinating marketing activities for Mayo's outdoor activity sector</li> </ul>
<b>Heritage &amp; Culture/Festivals &amp; Events Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activating the Tourism Action Plan for the heritage &amp; culture and festivals &amp; events sectors</li> <li>• Leading Mayo Tourism Forum's heritage &amp; culture and festivals &amp; events sub-forums</li> <li>• Coordinating marketing activities for Mayo's heritage &amp; culture and festivals &amp; events sector</li> </ul>

Food Tourism Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activating the Tourism Action Plan for the food tourism sector</li> <li>• Leading Mayo Tourism Forum's food tourism sub-forum</li> <li>• Coordinating marketing activities for Mayo's food tourism sector</li> </ul>
Administration Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is envisaged that the Tourism Manager will require additional administrative support given the level of administration required to activate the Tourism Action Plan</li> </ul>

In addition to the personnel resources outlined, a marketing budget will also be required to develop a Mayo destination brand and execute a marketing plan that communicates the key destination messages to Mayo's target markets. The Tourism Team could also benefit from additional resources to assist in the delivery of two specific areas with high potential to deliver growth in overseas visitors to the county and associated revenues:

#### 1. Cultural Tourism Coordinator - Innovation and Programming

Intended as a facilitatory role, over a short term basis, to assist Mayo's festival and events sector to further develop the county's festival offering, it is envisaged that the coordinator could benchmark Mayo's festivals against industry leading festivals, assist with scheduling and developing marketing plans for festivals, identifying funding and sponsorship opportunities and capacity building among community festival organisers. In addition, this role should also facilitate innovative idea generation workshops with the festivals sector in Mayo with a view to developing innovative, high quality festivals and events that will attract domestic and overseas visitors to the county.

#### 2. Marketing and Sales Coordinator

Envisaged primarily as a business to business role, over a short term basis, this coordinator will be responsible for marketing Mayo as a destination to the overseas travel trade and generating sales leads and enquiries for Mayo's tourism providers through the presentation of high quality, attractive packaged offerings. It will involve close collaboration with the tourism industry in Mayo and the overseas travel trade, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Additionally, this role will be responsible for the coordination of destination marketing and advertising activities, intended to raise awareness of Mayo as a destination and communicate tactical messages for specific events and offerings in the county.

There is also merit in considering training and upskilling for the Tourism Team in areas such as travel trade engagement, understanding the overseas markets, and the most effective ways to work with Tourism Ireland to reach them. Fáilte Ireland offer such programmes via their Trade Engagement team, and it is recommended that a workshop should be arranged to avail of this training.

## 5.1 Destination Marketing

A destination brand for Mayo (MAYO.IE) has recently been redeveloped to promote Mayo as a destination for tourism, investment and as a platform for engaging with Mayo's diaspora. Add to that the Wild Mayo destination identity, and Mayo now has a clear message to communicate about the destination and a platform on which to do so. The Visit channel of MAYO.IE reflects well the wild, unspoilt, raw elements of Mayo that the Wild Mayo identity seeks to communicate - a clear and compelling identity, communicating a strong message of Mayo as a fresh, innovative and beautiful destination, rich in authentic and memorable experiences.

The Wild Mayo identity is a strong tool to build a marketing campaign around. It evokes a strong emotive response and is easily conveyed via a range of statements that challenge the audience to think differently about Mayo as a destination (wild nature, raw adventure, unspoiled landscape, pure culture, natural people and authentic heritage). High quality destination imagery reflects this emotive challenge and perfectly illustrates the strong attributes articulated for the identity, thereby presenting great opportunity for Mayo to showcase the county as a destination at home and abroad.

Equally compelling for its target diaspora audience is the MAYO.IE brand and online platform, presenting an engaging and innovative vehicle for diaspora to connect with their home place. From a tourism perspective, this is a valuable tool to keep the message of visiting home and the hooks to draw the diaspora back at the forefront of their minds.

As outlined in the Tourism Strategy, a collaborative approach is crucial to successfully growing Mayo as a tourism destination. An essential part of this activity will be collaborative marketing. As such, it is recommended that the EIU adopt a collaborative framework similar to that used by Tourism Ireland for their destination marketing activities, inviting industry partners to participate in marketing activities for a nominal fee, thereby contributing to costs, enabling the EIU to seamlessly promote the Mayo destination brand and present a greater showcase of Mayo's tourism product in all marketing activities.

A secondary benefit of this approach is that it supports Mayo businesses and destination marketing groups in reaching new overseas markets, thereby extending the reach of the EIU in its remit of supporting the creation of an environment for job creation in the county. Diversification into new markets is essential to build on visitor numbers and strengthen the tourism base within the county, particularly in parts where there is a strong reliance on the domestic and/or Diaspora markets, thereby assisting local businesses in those areas to develop sustainability.

Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland have produced detailed profiling of Ireland's key target markets, identifying the most suitable means of engaging with those markets. Of these, the target markets most attracted to Mayo's offering include the Culturally Curious and Great Escapers in the domestic, UK, France and Germany markets. Targeting those overseas markets and highlighting direct access routes to IWAK creates an attractive proposition for those prospective visitors and should deliver the greatest return for marketing investment.

The Tourism Forums recommended in this Action Plan will also provide another avenue to assist Mayo's tourism industry in reaching intermediaries and develop appropriately attractive experiential packages to promote their products and destinations. The EIU, together with Fáilte Ireland, should assist in introducing operators to intermediaries with potential to deliver real growth for Mayo's tourism industry, such as national and international travel trade and media, as well as providing avenues for operators to reach priority target markets directly. Fáilte Ireland's Trade Engagement workshops and Wild Atlantic Way Experience Development workshops are useful tools in understanding what is required to effectively reach these audiences, and should be pursued.

The Western Region Tourism Marketing Programme would be a welcome addition to the destination marketing activities of the EIU for Mayo as a whole. A greater marketing footprint for the Western Seaboard and areas within reach of IWAK will add immeasurably to visitor numbers and associated revenues generated in the region, as illustrated in 2012 when the Programme was last run. A structured multi-annual programme would be particularly welcome, as there is proven evidence from Dublin and Shannon Airports that new route development delivers tourism growth in a very short space of time, and a multi-annual programme would further strengthen the viability of IWAK. Such a programme could now also give consideration to attracting further transatlantic travel to Mayo via IWAK airport, presenting real growth opportunities in this market.

The key message of any destination marketing should convey the unique attraction that holidaying in Mayo has, focusing on authenticity, the green and blue of Mayo's wild rural landscape and reinforce the high quality experiential offering for the key market segments of the Culturally Curious, Great Escapers, Social Energisers and Top Tanners, aligned to the Wild Atlantic Way brand where appropriate and specifically focused on high potential markets such as the UK, Germany and France. An adequately funded and resourced multi-annual marketing plan to promote Destination Mayo will reap rewards for the wider tourism industry and Mayo as a whole, supporting the economic sustainability of many small towns and villages in the county.

Great potential exists to exploit existing themes for tourism promotion, such as the Great Western Greenway, Gourmet Greenway, the Blueways, Salmon Capital of Europe, Wild Atlantic Way and Heartbeat of the Wild Atlantic Way, Adventure Capital and more. Some themes are familiar while others are relatively new, yet each appeals to a distinctive audience and communicates a clear and appealing message. Additional themes with which to present Mayo's tourism product to receptive audiences are outlined in the Tourism Action Plan and will be showcased on [www.mayo.ie](http://www.mayo.ie). The additional benefit of these themes is that they can be shaped in a strategic way to ensure optimal benefit in a balanced way.



Festivals and events are important marketing tools for any destination, adding to the product offering in a uniquely attractive way. This is much more so in Mayo than in many other counties, as illustrated by the remarkable success of The Gathering in Mayo, home to more Gathering events than any other county. The legacy of this is a vibrant landscape of community festivals and events throughout the county, many of which have a clear draw for the overseas diaspora. These festivals are vital to draw the diaspora home, and many can also be used to assist in tactical marketing campaigns to drive visitors to parts of Mayo's rural tourism product.





WWW.MAYO.IE

VISIT

MANY PLACES

MANY PEOPLE

MANY PARTS