

destinations : wellbeing tourism



Action Plan Wellbeing Tourism – Ireland

Momentum

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Introduction to DETOUR Destination Wellbeing Regions Project

DETOUR empowers tourism destinations to develop and embed well-being philosophy and capitalise on the tourism and economic benefits which follow such as increased consumer spending, additional employment opportunities and contributions to GDP. It will upskill VET educators and Tourism SMEs about the potential of wellbeing tourism as an emerging European Tourism Megatrend which can increase their competitiveness, inspire new wellbeing tourism products/services and develop even stronger unique value propositions. (*VisitBritain, 2014, World Travel and Tourism Council, 2014, Deloitte, 2013*).

Wellbeing tourism is an expanding niche market globally, providing specific business opportunities through products that promote or maintain health. In 2017, tourism centred on health and wellbeing grew by more than 9%, almost 50% faster than overall global tourism. Today, a return to nature, renewed awareness of the environment, the rediscovery of local identity, and the search for both physical and psychological wellbeing have resulted in new wellbeing and slow tourism opportunities for tourism destinations and providers, and importantly for the destinations, they are embedded in.

DETOUR emerges in the context of consumer trends changing the tourism landscape. DETOUR recognises that European Tourism SMEs are ideally placed to capitalise on the opportunities that wellbeing and slow tourism pose. Reports which suggest that OECD countries are seeing a slow-down in the rate of growth in tourism (to the potential detriment of national economic growth and especially of the growth in employment opportunities) evidence the need for innovation and future-proofing in the sector, concerning tourism SME's who need to be at the cutting edge of the development of new products and destinations to remain competitive.

The DETOUR project addresses the needs of the following groups:

- VET and HE Organisations
- Tourism Development and Policy Stakeholders – local governments and tourism and economic development stakeholders
- Tourism SMEs
- Communities With Tourism Potential – Community Groups, Marketing Organisations, Development Groups, Special Interest Networks
- Students Of Tourism

To help remedy the situation, Detour aims to provide VET, tourism development stakeholders and tourism SMEs with the knowledge and skills to capitalize on current and future wellbeing and slow tourism opportunities, to increase innovation, market diversification and sustainable growth in regional tourism economies. DETOUR responds to these needs through the four different strategic resources designed for VET tourism educators, policymakers, tourism bodies and stakeholders to learn the necessary components and tactics required to create regional wellbeing destinations. DETOUR has developed four resources to assist regions how to manage, develop, promote and understand Wellbeing Tourism Regions in Europe

DETOUR Resources 1 include three [DETOUR Regional Wellbeing Development Resource Packs](#)

1. [Exploit the Wellbeing Tourism Megatrend](#). It begins with an overview of wellbeing tourism and explains how European businesses, regions, and governments can innovatively consider, plan, develop, and successfully exploit this sustainable megatrend.
2. [Create a Wellbeing Tourism Destination or Region](#). This resource is designed to assist regions in developing regional wellness destinations focusing on the integration of important tourism players,



stakeholders, communities, and government. This resource covers four key sections each with a spotlight on case study examples across European destinations, regions and islands looking at different approaches, strategies and recommended best practices. Examples include supplementary videos, articles, research papers, and applications.

3. [Creating a Wellbeing Tourism Festival or Event](#). This resource has been written to provide a source of reference for those planning and organising community, destination or regional festival or event, in the wellbeing tourism context. It is a tool to provide a greater understanding of events and festival management and organisers in terms of planning, managing, financing, and marketing.

DETOUR Resources 2 The [DETOUR Wellbeing Tourism Destinations Communities of Practice Guides](#) provides three mechanisms for collaboration between educational institutions, tourism SMEs, economic development agencies and other stakeholders, to enable participants to share information, knowledge and skills through a regional community of practice and agree on concrete actions for the development of a wellbeing tourism destination in their region. It has been developed by key actions from Scotland, the Azores, Iceland, Slovenia and Ireland who;

- Undertook a [Regional Audit](#) of wellbeing tourism, including a survey of stakeholders
- Developed a well-being tourism [Destination Map For Each Country](#)
- Created an [Action Plan](#) for the development of well-being tourism

This document covers Ireland's Action Plan and how to develop a well-being tourism region in the Irish context. More information on Ireland's Action Plan below.

DETOUR Resources 3 [DETOUR Wellbeing Tourism Courses](#) include a suite of learning materials are specifically designed to help equip users with a deeper understanding and knowledge of the skills to capitalize on current and future well-being and slow tourism opportunities, to increase innovation, market diversification and sustainable growth in regional tourism economies. This training program is available in two formats which can be 1) delivered by tourism education providers and 2) direct online training modalities via the DETOUR MOOC

We hope the project will impact at a regional level, through innovative resources, DETOUR empowers tourism destinations to develop and embed well-being philosophy and capitalise on the tourism and economic benefits which follow such as increased consumer spending, additional employment opportunities and contributions to GDP.

DETOUR will impact at a national level as the project is responsive to and supports the development of national sectoral skills strategies to future proof European tourism destinations and give them a competitive edge, especially through the production of IO1 Wellbeing Tourism Opportunities for Regions Resource Pack.

<https://www.detourproject.eu/what-is-wellbeing-tourism/>

Introduction to Action Plan

Well-being tourism is a relatively new but fast-paced phenomenon in Ireland; however, it currently has little or no formal acknowledgement or support in official national Tourism Strategies and Policies. Regardless of this lack of acknowledgement, enterprises and communities have paved the way. Many are already diversifying their businesses to respond to this growing tourism megatrend.



According to a recent report by research firm Euromonitor, *the global wellness tourism market was valued at US\$641.298 billion in 2019. This has now boosted to US\$735.8 billion in 2021. Unlike medical tourism, which involves treating already diagnosed conditions, wellness tourism services emphasise a healthy lifestyle and improved quality of life. The growth of this market has been driven by the rising middle-class population and the consumer's desire to adopt a wellness lifestyle.*

This **Irish Regional Action Plan** will demonstrate how wellbeing tourism from an Irish Regional Context can;

- Support the development of an Irish Tourism Wellbeing Regions and encourage the creation of further regional development across Europe
- Develop, encourage and create an environment for innovation, enterprise and entrepreneurship including around wellbeing tourism communities and networks
- Promote collaborative development of stakeholder engagement, regional development and foster new wellbeing tourism enterprises with growth potential
- Develop linkages with third level knowledge providers and support experts, training and education, business centres to provide a programme of targeted supports
- Identify and develop potential growth for wellbeing tourism businesses and sectors
- Support rural tourism business sectors and develop linkages across related businesses building on collaborative promotional opportunities in partnership and co-operatively
- Promote Ireland internationally through collaboration with appropriate regional promotion and support
- Support, promote and develop enterprise and innovation through sustainable tourism infrastructure

Defining the Region in the Wellbeing Tourism Context

A tourism region is a geographical region that has been designated by a governmental organization or tourism bureau as having common cultural or environmental characteristics. These regions are often named after historical or current administrative and geographical regions. Other tourism regions have names created specifically for tourism purposes. We use a tourism region focus and context around the tourism purpose of 'wellbeing tourism' and how to concentrate it on a geographical area or region. The approach is to evoke certain positive qualities of the area and suggest a coherent wellbeing tourism experience to visitors. In addition to drawing the attention of potential well-being tourists, these tourism regions often provide tourists who are otherwise unfamiliar with an area with a manageable number of attractive options in the wellbeing tourism context.

The DETOUR Action Plan can include a tourism network, tourism destination or regional approach which each will provide significant advantages when considering the particular dynamics involved in building a well-being tourism regions. It can start with a community, then include a network and proceed to a region as a building process. By taking a regional rather than a local approach, it is advised to invite and include your tourism sector even those who are outside the immediate wellbeing tourism realm. A good place to start is the Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs) who exist in most existing regions and tourism areas. These are independent, industry-led, not-for-profit organizations responsible for working with tourism partners to enhance and grow each region's tourism products and marketing activities. By providing regional leadership and coordination, RTOs help build and support competitive and sustainable tourism regions that are better able to attract more visitors, generate more economic activity and create more jobs.

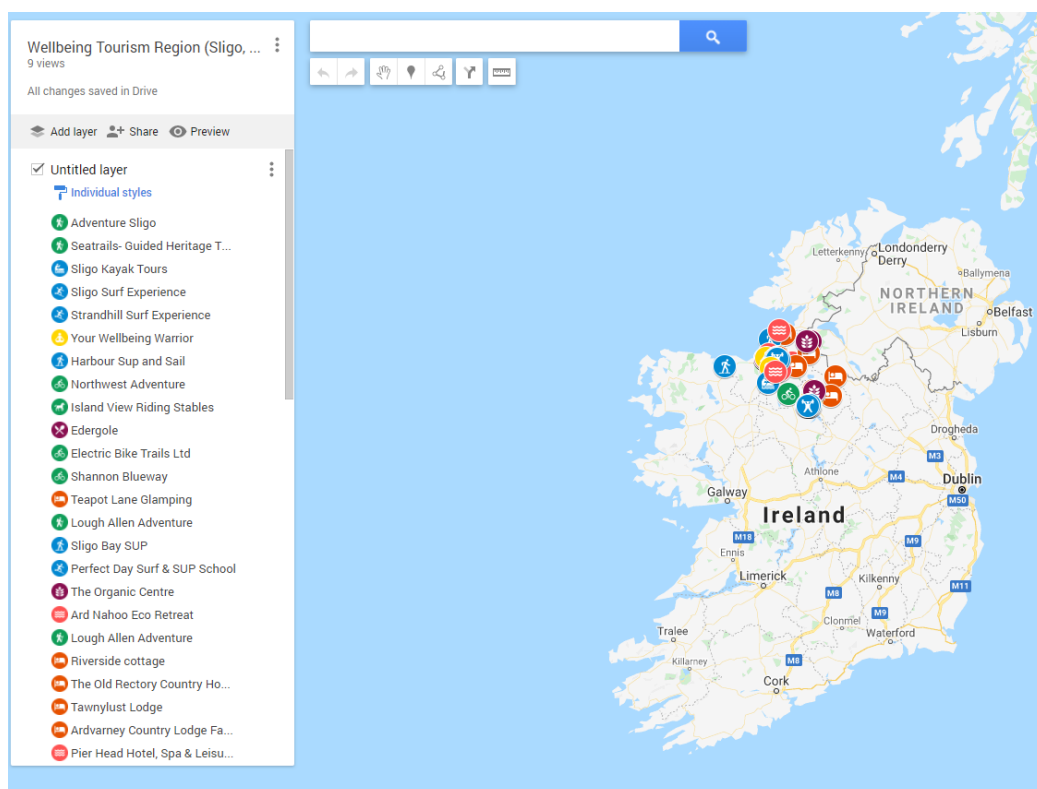


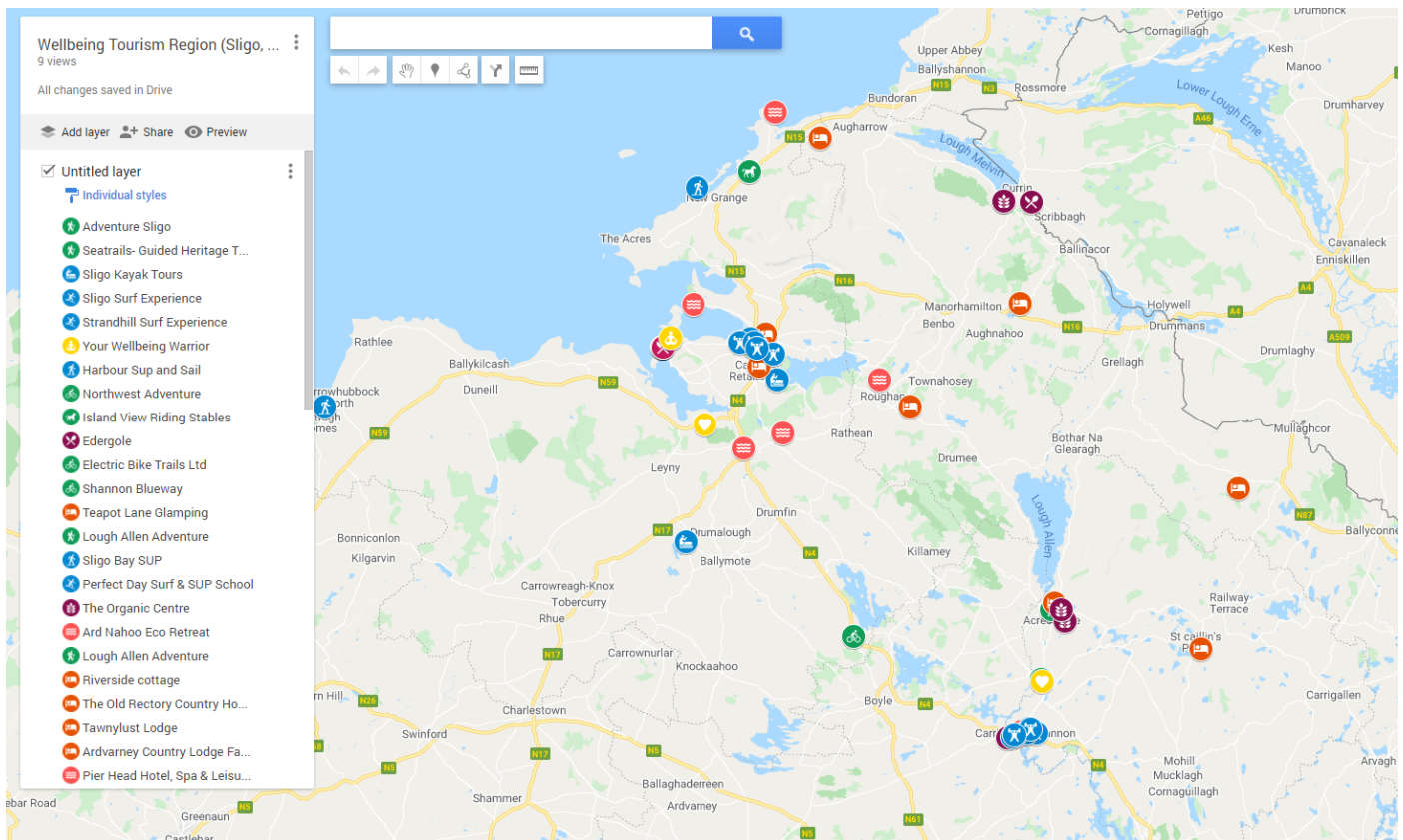
Keep in mind that this is very much a business term. “Regional Tourism” is a goal for many countries. It’s the idea of attracting tourists and in this case well-being tourists to a region of a country. Typically any “region” has a special trait that the country’s government recognizes as being distinct. Think of the wellbeing tourism areas or regions as having a “collective brand” and that brand is then marketed to tourists. And the better the brand marketing the more likely tourist income will flow to that region.

Below is an example of an Irish Wellbeing Tourism Region in the North West of Ireland, inclusive of the two counties of Leitrim and Sligo using the Google Maps tool. These counties can stand alone as a regional tourism destination (i.e. Sligo Wellbeing Tourism Region separate to Leitrim Wellbeing Tourism Region) or combine as one North West Region. Both counties form one region with each having its distinct natural characteristics but also complement each other to form a holistic wellbeing tourism region. Below are some examples of the types of businesses that can make up such a region. In this context, the businesses are unique to this part of the country, the resources, infrastructure, unique natural characteristics available. Click for [link](#) to map e.g. Sligo Kayak Tours, Organic Center Leitrim, Edergole Kitchen Leitrim.

County Sligo is predominantly a low populated county with 65,535 people and is known for the legacy of local poet W.B. Yeats. In terms of wellbeing, it is famous for the Benbulbin Mountain, Lough Gill, Wild Atlantic Way, surfing, Sligo Town which is the capital, forest walks and plenty of lakes.

County Leitrim is also on the Wild Atlantic Way, known as a boating hub in its capital Carrick on Shannon. It has a population of 32,044 people, quaint villages, water sports, Glencar Valley, Dartry Mountains, waterfalls and so much more. The information gathered based on the Northwest Region shows the different types of attractions, accommodations, experiences and facilities that exist in each county. The Google Maps tool was used to develop and plot what currently existed in the area in a visual format. These maps included the following...





Irish Wellness Economy

The wellness economy is in a strong position in Ireland. The market is mainly being driven by consumers and their quest for healthier lifestyles and habits, some of which have been triggered by bettering their minds, bodies, and souls. Whether domestic or international, wellbeing tourism holidays are changing our holiday and living habits for the better.

Irish tourism enterprises and regions understand that their customers and potential markets no longer just want to come and eat, sleep, drink and engage in an activity or two. Their requirements and expectations have changed; people now want experiences that deliver on physical, emotional, and spiritual levels. Wellbeing, stress relief or relaxation holidays are no longer just reserved for spa breaks. The market is growing and inclusive of not just people who want a massage or a facial. Wellbeing target markets want to learn something new and exciting, engage in self-development or self-discovery. They wish to detox mentally, physically, emotionally, including technology. The market does not only include women or couples who need a relaxing break away. It extends to families, solo travellers, adventure seekers, and the older market. Irish tourism is responding to accommodate these needs, evolving its understanding of wellbeing from the traditional 'spa' and 'retreat' break to include experiences in the outdoors, nature, adventure activities, alternative therapies, alternative retreats, nutrition, and education and so on.

Ireland has developed a diverse offering of wellbeing experiences spanning therapies, activities and experiences that focus on relaxation and rejuvenation of the mind-body and spirit. From luxury and alternative spa treatments, yoga, mindful practices, mediation, and other alternative wellbeing activities, mainly outdoors on beaches, open natural spaces and mountain tops. Other experiences include nutritional organic food, retreats, seaweed baths, digital detox, pilgrimages, Sei-Ki Shiatsu, Tuina Chinese mesotherapy, Tibetan (Himalayan) sound therapy, eco retreats, healing through food, wellbeing education, specialised



workshops, treatments, cooking courses, psychotherapy, mental health activities, acupuncture, reflexology, forest bathing, Shamanic, Reiki, Psychic Clairvoyant, Ayahuasca Healing, Emotional Healing, Vibrance Yoga, festivals and events, adventure and sporting events, and Slow Adventure.

Wellbeing tourism in Ireland is also predominantly strong in the wellbeing adventure tourism category. Adventure and the benefits of outdoor activities and engaging in the outdoors is where Ireland thrives as a well-being destination. Ireland is blessed to be made up of scenic, rural landscapes that are full of natural beauty, heritage, culture, history, beauty, mountains, lakes, stunning beaches inspiring visitors to engage and explore either by walking, biking, climbing, driving, by horseback and by water activities (boating, fishing, kayaking, canoeing, SUP, surfing...).

In response, Irish travel companies have gone a step further to cater to the demand for wellness holidays, offering new experiences*, packages and locations which seek to alleviate their guests stress and improving their overall wellbeing: -

- [Macalla Farm](#), Clare Island, is a retreat centre and organic farm that run several retreats combining yoga with vegetarian cooking, meditation and horse riding.
- [New Wave Adventure](#) is an award-winning therapeutic intervention grounded in the disciplines of psychotherapy, counselling or social work, which uses outdoor activities.
- [Mental Health and Wellbeing Summit](#), Dublin, focuses solely on providing practical advice, tools, and information managing mental health.
- Top Irish wellbeing breaks appeal to any age group, from families taking a 3-day cycling holiday around Connemara and the Great Western Greenway in Mayo or a couple going on a 3-day yoga and meditation retreat in The Burren engaging in eco-friendly practices, leaving behind a minimal footprint, and engaging in 'feel good' experiences. These experiences demonstrate, educate, and transform people to understand holistic wellness, mindfulness and sustainable living. The knock-on effect is that wellbeing activities and practices are often continued in the home environment.

Existing Irish Wellbeing Tourism Policies

Wellbeing tourism is a potential fit as a recovery mechanism for the Irish tourism industry. Through our research, it is evident that wellbeing tourism is not formally recognised under current national Tourism strategies, policies, enterprise or regional support initiatives, development frameworks and economic or environmental stimulation activities. However, with the growing popularity of this trend, particularly in cognizance of Covid-19, this could soon change.

In this Action Plan development, four areas were identified as the key wellbeing tourism supports in Ireland. There is room for further development from a Government and local Government approach, particularly because of its potential as part of the post-Covid recovery for the Irish tourism sector.

1. Fáilte Ireland Wellness Categorisation System (2009)
2. European Destination of Excellence Awards (2019)
3. Outdoor Recreation Plan for Public Lands and Waters In Ireland 2017-2021 Report
4. Discover Ireland recognition of 'Health and Wellbeing' as a holiday



1. Wellness Categorisation System (2009)

Faite Ireland, National Tourism Development Authority's role is to support the long-term sustainable growth in the economic, social, cultural, and environmental contribution of tourism to Ireland. They work in partnership with Government, State agencies, Local Authorities, representative groups, and industry to develop tourism across Ireland by creating destination development plans and networks, investing in infrastructure, activities, visitor attractions and festivals. Fáilte Ireland also provides consumer and buyer insights, mentoring, business supports, training programmes, and buyer platforms to help tourism businesses innovate and grow.

Faite Ireland Developed a Categorisation System and Platform For Health and Wellness Offerings In Ireland. In 2008, Fáilte Ireland recognised the potential of the wellness sector and developed a categorisation system and platform for health and wellness offerings in Ireland. Since then, the health and wellness sector has grown into a highly significant domestic and international tourism trade area.

Initially, 72 properties were categorised under the new system to help existing and prospective customers better understand the variety of health and wellness offerings available. Ireland was the first country in Europe to launch such a complete categorisation. Under the categorisation system, the broad range of health and wellness retreats were first defined under the following categories: hotel spas, destination spas, resort spas, and specialised retreats. The aim was to develop a representative categorisation system that is meaningful to consumers, reflects the nuance of different supplier offerings, and incorporates all elements of the spa 'experience'. Using the system, spa-goers and wellbeing travellers can make informed choices on their break away and find the products that best suit their needs. This system has since updated and evolved to include other types of wellbeing experiences.

2. European Destination of Excellence Awards | EDEN (2019)

In 2019, Faite Ireland launched its 9th European Destination of Excellence EDEN Awards with the Theme Health and Wellbeing Tourism to find and investigate Irish destinations offering sustainable and well developed 'health and wellbeing' tourist experiences in their regions as a potential to grow visitor numbers. Regions and businesses included those along the Wild Atlantic Way, Irelands Ancient East, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, and Dublin that offer a variety of health and wellbeing tourism activities, including yoga and meditation, sport and fitness, and nutritional programmes provided by various services and facilities from spa resorts to activity providers.

The EDEN initiative aims to bring greater visibility to the lesser-known. Eligible destinations were those where the visitor density is low; where the tourism product has been developed using local and regional health and wellbeing tourism while protecting the environment and meeting the needs of visitors and residents; and where the tourism offer is managed in such a way as to ensure its social, cultural, and environmental sustainability.

Eligible destinations were those:

1. That was “small” or “emerging”, “off the beaten track”, and “nontraditional” (the visitor numbers rating from low to very low in comparison with the national
2. average). The national average is estimated to be 16,000 overnights
3. by overseas visitors per annum.
4. The specific offer should have been implemented at least since 2017.



5. That offers authentic tourism experiences.
6. That is represented by a Management Destination Organisation that has a capacity in sustainable tourism management.
7. That has local authorities manage their destination to ensure social, cultural, and environmental sustainability.
8. That shall have agencies, NGOs, or authorities in charge to protect and promote the natural and cultural heritage with a capacity to adopt sustainable tourism practices.
9. Destinations that have a well-developed Health & Well-Being Tourism offering that is characteristic of the reg

The four Irish Health and Wellbeing Destination finalists were:

1. Adventure Sligo & Northwest Wellness (Sligo)
2. Strandhill Community Development Association (Sligo) (overall winner)
3. Slow Adventure Leitrim (Leitrim)
4. Trim Tourism Network (Meath)

Strandhill European Award Winner for Best Health and Wellbeing Tourism Destination also integrate sustainable and climate change principles into all its wellbeing experiences, such as the wonderful local producer's food market ([Strandhill Airport Hanger](#)), the delicious eateries ([Shells](#)), sea trails ([Seatrails](#)) along Killaspugbrone route, surfing ([Perfect Day Surf School](#)), yoga ([Soul Yoga Studio](#)), its thriving cultural scene, and its iconic heritage sites into its wellbeing destination.

Fiona Monaghan, Fáilte Ireland's Head of Activities, said:

"We are delighted to announce the four Irish finalists shortlisted in this year's EDEN competition. Each of these applicants in Sligo, Leitrim, and Meath has demonstrated the best examples of how Health and Well-Being tourism have been used to benefit both tourists and local communities. These destinations offer various health and wellbeing tourism activities, including yoga and meditation, sport and fitness, and nutritional programmes."

"The EDEN competition not only draws attention to emerging tourist destinations, but it also shines a light on businesses using sustainable practices to provide unique tourist experiences that extend the traditional tourist season – this aligns perfectly with what Fáilte Ireland is trying to achieve."

3. Outdoor Recreation Plan for Public Lands and Waters In Ireland 2017-2021 Report

Coillte - National State Land and Forestry Management. Coillte manages Irelands forests and recreation sites for public use for exercise, recreation, and business. They link forests, rivers, lakes, canals, Blueways, national parks, nature reserves across the entire country while simultaneously providing significant public good benefits in terms of health, wellbeing, environment, heritage, and conservation. It will also underpin the country's reputation for outdoor activity, allowing Ireland to compete with other destinations and attract high-profile international outdoor recreation events. According to their [Outdoor Recreation Plan for Public Lands and Waters In Ireland 2017-2021 Report](#), their goal is to focus on health and wellbeing by using public lands, trails and facilities for free, and that.



*'Outdoor recreation provides very considerable benefits in terms of health and wellbeing generally. In addition to the **direct health benefits**, **user quality of life is enhanced in various ways by the experience of being outdoors**. The utility value or economic value of 'wellbeing' associated with access to the existing public landowning is estimated to be at least €500 million per year. Indeed, this amount represents just a portion of the real benefits people realise from public lands and waterways. These benefits apply to local people, such as forests or canals, and familiar or iconic landscapes and destinations in Ireland. The ORP will contribute to users' overall wellbeing and strengthen the economic value attributed to it'.*

4. Discover Ireland Website

Discover Ireland is a consumer website operated by Fáilte Ireland, the tourism board of the Republic of Ireland. It features information and listings for Irish accommodation, activities, events, tourist attractions and Irish holiday special offers. It has identified over 109 'Health and Wellbeing' experiences, including Autumn Sea Swimming, Waterford Camino Tours, Ard Nahoo Retreat, Belleek Nature Trail, Revas Spa in Adare Burren Yoga and Meditation Centre.

Destination & Regional Level Opportunities and Actions

This Action Plan aims to lower the barriers to entry and teach regional wellbeing tourism entrepreneurs and destinations what they need to know when it comes to developing a wellbeing tourism region. It focuses on how working together as a region can assist in the learning, development, training, enterprise support and engagement development process. It is important to find out what is going on in your own region in terms of wellbeing tourism, conduct a gap, strengths and opportunities analysis.

The benefits of considering the following actions and incorporating them as a development framework for wellbeing tourism is that they can provide a long-term sustainable tourism solution to developing and established destinations. It is a cost-effective way to diversify existing businesses and regions, putting them back on top as high demand competitive destinations attract high yield and long stay markets. It complements when aligned with existing Irish tourism policies, values, code of ethics to embrace minimal environmental impact, protect heritage, culture, history, and pristine environments. These actions can be applied across most regions of Ireland, mainly rural regions, balancing and supporting livelihoods, businesses, and communities in urban and rural Ireland to benefit both tourists and communities. Well-being tourism is also a potential solution to the challenge and recovery from the impacts of Brexit and COVID-19 as Ireland eagerly tries to capture a share of new source tourism markets.

This section will cover how local tourism enterprises, communities and actors can form a well-being destination network or partnership to work together more effectively and efficiently. They can pool resources, identify opportunities and solutions to challenges in their area and establish and implement destination-specific goals and objectives under the overall Tourism Strategy.



Action 1 Create a Regional Partnership Network

Partnerships play a significant role in Ireland's wellbeing tourism development. It should have a holistic approach and have equal community representation. Partners should include tourism and wellbeing tourism businesses, volunteers, local organisations and communities who can contribute to the development of the wellbeing tourism offering in the region. They should be actively involved and supportive in the decision making and its development. Partnering with other regions is also a good practice as you are more robust in numbers, and there is vast potential for more influence in the public sector. Together you can come up with strategic marketing plans, packages, and development proposals. The primary purpose of creating a destination partnership is to

- Improve and enable better flow of communication and ensure destination approach to wellbeing tourism offerings is cohesive,
- Encourage joint decision making that is agreed by the majority (e.g. infrastructure and social initiatives)
- Activate coordination and networking
- Strengthen brand identity, destination image and reputation by marketing as a region
- Implement more cost-effective marketing and enhance market viability and reputation
- Improve data and information gathering
- Invest better in innovative product development
- Be able to influence public sector decision making as a community.

Action 2 Develop a Regional Sustainable Development Plan

World Tourism Organisation defines sustainable tourism as: *“Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.”*

Well-being tourism could be considered as part of your regional **Sustainable Development Plan**. The quality of Ireland's natural landscape and countryside, combined with its physical heritage, are areas in which the Irish tourism industry and State have a crucial role. The definition above highlights the interdependency of critical elements of wellbeing tourism sustainability: social, environmental, and economic. Well-being tourism has the potential to contribute to regional sustainable development, provide closer linkages to other sectors, and create employment opportunities and generate trade opportunities. Well-being tourism can assist in the preservation and sustainability of tourism regions in a way that enhances the visitor and tourists overall experience.

A **Regional Sustainable Development Plan** should be developed to identify and understand the destination development priorities now and in the future. This can influence decision making at the local and Government level public sector. Partnering together can assist in achieving cohesive, sustainable developments that are beneficial to all. Destination stakeholders can understand through wellbeing ethics and approaches how they can collectively protect their unique natural resources, examples;

- By recycling and only using them at a rate, they can regenerate
- Save energy by using renewable energy resources
- How to protect ecosystems and species by avoiding pollution



- How to promote an environmental and eco-friendly destination

Each region should develop a Sustainable Development Plan unique to their destination or region and consider outlining the following areas to build their plan.

- Identifying specific challenges, potential problems and solutions to particular regions
- Develop and analyse cause and effect chains that currently exist (e.g. pollution) and modify them to rectify
- Build social networks and strive together to strengthen the basic needs of each region
- Decide and use ecologically friendly products and production processes
- Demonstrate how to improve the information flow so that effective communication and objectives are achieved between businesses, communities, Government and citizens
- How to measure and monitor sustainable performance in areas
- How to improve data to inform decision making and ensure an intelligent wellbeing tourism planning is achieved
- Identify areas of improvement and manage risks effectively
- Prioritise action projects and develop them starting with researching existing best practice examples

Action 3 Develop a Regional Action Plan

It is advisable to develop a Wellbeing Tourism Regional Action Plan (this document could be used as a starting point) highlighting. This is where partnerships at the destination level collaborate and develop an agreed development roadmap, decide on a set of common goals, ensure transparency in decision-making, and formulate a collaborative agreement for all involved. When designing the Action Plan, it should be considered vital opportunities, priorities, and challenges that are unique to your region.

- How you can pool resources and package together*
- How you can promote collectively as a destination and cooperatively advertise*
- Scope to improve seasonality and extend weekend stay market and turn 'days into stays' as an economic priority
- How you can develop a regional wellbeing festival or event*
- Invest in infrastructure priorities (e.g. information centre,

*([DETOUR Resource 2](#) explains how to package, promote and market as a destination)

*([DETOUR Resource 3](#) explains how to develop and promote wellbeing festivals and events)

Action 4 Approach Public Sector as a Partnership to Demonstrate Commitment

As a regional partnership network, there is an opportunity to demonstrate a cohesive and robust commitment to the Public Sector. Once you have created your partnership, created your Action Plan and other plans, it is always good to present them to the Public Sector. You now have the opportunity to demonstrate the potentially best development approaches that are unique to your region's potential. Working as a partnership or network will demonstrate to the public sector that you are working as a community. You have aligned and agreed on your development priorities as a community. It also provides a welcomed opportunity to discuss and evaluate the potential to develop your wellbeing tourism offering further.



Action 5 Package as a Destination and Create a Destination Card

A wellbeing destination card is a way provider' can be connected to the same system. They can share promotions, share data, track visitor movement, segment their guests, see the duration of stay, stay, the most engaged services and least engaged services. It is good practice to allocate a percentage of the overall earnings to infrastructure provision (e.g., seamless destination experience booking system). Partners could implement a customer survey to monitor visitors' priorities in terms of infrastructure development. It is also a great tool to assist governments in understanding destination needs and formulate policy. You will be more successful in developing better, more strategic customer-focused experiences year on year, constantly improving in the right direction. Such cards are an excellent way to demonstrate to guests their experiences and level of satisfaction matter to you, therefore, attracting more tourists to the destination and others returning. You can also include the local community to get involved and use the card with special 'local discounts' or 'year-round cards' or 'frequent usage bonus points etc.

Action 6 Develop Seamless Destination Experiences

Well-being visitors expect a seamless experience. Destinations include a comprehensive set of experiences delivered by different service providers (e.g. taxi driver, hotelier, therapist). If the experience is positive and the service chain is seamless, the customer doesn't even think about how many different service providers and staff members are involved in the process. Tourism product and services should be looked at from the customers POV and the service providers POV. The necessary communications, cooperation activities, joint market activities are seamless and consistent at each possible interaction on the destination level. This also relates to the infrastructure and services owned by the public sector (e.g. car parks, public toilets, parks and green areas...) is of a high standard ensuring the quality of life of the customer experience is achieved. Also, consider all technologies used throughout the customer process and the devices and mediums they require for bookings, making reservations, payments, ticketing etc.

Action 7 Manage Destination Reputation and Service Quality

Well-being tourism destinations and regions should provide quality services and standards for customer confidence and reputation building. Providing good quality service is an essential requirement for a well-being destination or individual business to succeed. According to WelDest primary research report concerning the provision of services enhancing health and wellbeing, customers were asked, ***'What was the overall reason for coming to this destination?'***. The main 'reasons' starting 1 as the highest overall

1. To do something for his or her health
2. Natural scenery and its nature
3. Reputation and image of the destination
4. Suitable accommodation
5. Price level
6. Culture
7. VFR (Visiting, Friends and Relatives)

It is also evident from the study that they appreciated diversity, beauty, pampering and outdoor sports and an attractive environment. The list of services and activities they valued the most in the destination, the most popular starting at 1



1. Diverse beauty and pampering treatments
2. Attractive environment
3. Diverse sauna, pool and steam bathing
4. Hiking, walking, outdoors
5. Comfortable accommodation
6. Curatives treatments
7. Healthy food
8. Professionally skilled staff
9. Fitness activities
10. Preventative services
11. Services for mind and soul
12. Diverse entertainment and cultural services

1. **Audit Service Quality.** It is recommended to conduct an audit of your region to identify the gaps in your services. In other words that you understand the difference between customer expectations (what they believe should and will happen and their perceptions relative to what they received. You need to understand those expectations. Look at the key areas identified to assess how you are performing. You can audit and evaluate through surveys, collecting complaints, direct conversation, focus groups...

- Do you offering something for health (relaxation, pampering, spa, outdoor activities)
- Have you got stunning scenery (mountains, lakes, beaches, landscapes)
- Is the accommodation suitable
- Do you provide healthy food
- Do you provide appropriate communication, signage,
- Is there an absence of customer service driven standards,
- Are the prices fair in comparison to the standard of experience delivered,
- Do staff have appropriate training
- What is their image of the destination pre and post-visit)

2. **Implement a Destination Standard System.** Well-being tourists have high expectations, and the industry has high standards to meet. It is important that regional experiences are up to standard and can remain memorable top-quality experiences. An option is to provide a regional wellbeing tourism quality symbol that is identified with a set of standards under a Regional Standards Framework so that consumers are reassured of t quality. It is also a great way to assist and endorse regional marketing efforts, and support product development. Once the standard is achieved, wellbeing businesses receive a quality assured logo, branding and signage. This logo and branding become an instantaneous reminder to consumers that your wellbeing tourism business and region meet top quality standards. The Regional Standards Framework could include mystery shoppers, independent on-site assessment visit carried out by experienced assessors to benchmark where a business stands concerning the required quality standards which consumers value against industry standards and your local competitors. The inclusion and achievement of the standard should include promotion in Tourist Information Offices, Community Tourist Offices, and Visitor Information Points around the region.



Having a Regional Standards Framework is a highly valuable and beneficial mechanism to ensure all stakeholders and SMEs understand the wellbeing tourism industry in their particular destinations. It must involve all actors and stakeholders in the destination. It aligns the sector and provides clear criteria by identifying and grouping the different types of wellbeing tourism business categories and types. They should all understand the wellbeing concepts and the expectations of the target markets through this form of dedicated framework. Operational activities need to be constantly improved with regular wellbeing development training, quality control measures, and improvements. To support achieving and maintaining standards, it would be beneficial to incorporate strategic wellbeing standard and quality programmes so businesses have access to expert knowledge, participate in workshops, sales training, and mentoring.

3. **Enhance Image by Cohesively Promoting the Irish 'Warm Welcome'.** Ireland's positive destination reputation plays a significant role in influencing wellbeing target markets decisions, especially during COVID-19. Ireland is seen as a safe, clean and friendly destination. Ireland provides a range of wellbeing services from a low price point to luxury and alternative offerings in between. We are known for our warm welcome, 'The Land of a Thousand Welcomes'. Ensure stakeholders and residents are engaged and ensure they understand the importance of wellbeing tourism in the destination. Educate them how they can be involved in the welcome to well-being visitors and impact everyone positively with their hospitality. Integrate it into marketing campaigns, critical messaging, online platforms, social media and other marketing activities.

Action 8 Implement Destination Wide Training

Provide wellbeing training so that staff are highly trained and competent staff across the whole destination. This is a critical point of success and will ensure guest satisfaction and that the perception and brand reputation of the destination is supported. Training should be continuing and encourage feedback so that service gaps are recognised. An orientation and induction training should be mandatory as well as understanding and meeting the expectations of the well-being of customers. Performance management and awards-based training is also an option. All staff, managers, partnership representatives and stakeholders should be trained in areas such as;

- Destination goals, vision, values and mission
- Wellbeing tourism ethics and concepts
- Focus on a culture of care, trust, responsibility, fairness, teamwork...
- Employee service delivery standards, attitudes, requirements, presentation skills, communication skills
- Performance standards and customer expectations
- Existing and future products, experiences and packages are described and explained to the market and promote accordingly.
- Professional skills in wellbeing treatments, e.g. massages, fitness and cooking classes, nutrition advice and procedures...



Action 9 Package and Promote with Local Culture, Heritage

Well-being tourism offers an opportunity to promote Irish culture and heritage further.

Well-being tourists increasingly value local culture, heritage, and authenticity. They want to experience genuine and unique, authentic Irish local culture, history, heritage, and traditions, including tasting Irish food and beverages, interact with the locals, hear the stories, experiencing indigenous treatments (e.g., seaweed baths), engage in natural environments and activities. Well-being tourism can enhance and promote Ireland's natural, cultural and heritage assets by integrating them into its experiences. It is advised that both the wellbeing tourism and culture and heritage tourism sectors work together to do this. That wellbeing providers and actors work with the guides, minders, and curators of these experiences. This can be done by collaborative communication, developing key messages and engaging in cooperative marketing initiatives and developing packages together. This can unlock potential for both sectors to work together to protect and preserve and stimulate consumer demand.

Action 10 – Include as Part of the COVID-19 Recovery and Brexit Management Strategies

Ireland's tourism and hospitality industry has been disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic in the last 12 months, with an estimated 90% drop in revenue and a staggering 160,000 job losses. (ITIC)

From an Irish context, it is expected that the recovery for the Irish tourism industry could take up to 2025 to get back to 2019 tourism levels. Well-being tourism is a potential solution to aid the COVID crisis recovery in the current tourism sector environment. Implementing wellbeing tourism concepts into regional tourism strategies can be easily adapted to COVID recovery plans and roadmaps (social distancing, outdoor activities, high spend, low volume visitors) and achieve industry aspirations of maintaining and supporting the quality of our natural environment.

Businesses are scrambling to find alternative business models and offerings to suit their current target markets, which are mainly domestic tourists. These businesses are looking for recovery options that have minimum investment requirements, can meet domestic and international (when accessible) target market needs, can generate a profitable income, and yet still fit within flexible COVID-19 moving restrictions.

2020 was the year of the pandemic: 2021 will be the year of aftershock and stabilisation, while 2022 should be the year that real recovery commences in earnest. Should the optimistic scenario come to pass, then overseas tourism volume and value to Ireland, despite the greatest ever shock to global travel and tourism, can recover to 2019 levels by 2025.

Well-being tourism can build Ireland's regional tourism competitiveness and assist recovery post-Brexit and Covid. Ireland's regions can provide the unique and compelling visitor and tourist experience visitors are currently demanding so they can escape to natural, safe environments that have as few people as possible. Existing regions are in a position to offer target markets somewhere open, peaceful and natural to go to. They can experience something different that will help them destress and recover from the pandemic and make them 'feel good' again both physically and mentally. Irish regions can help markets to reconnect with loved ones and get 'back to normal'. Wellbeing tourism in Ireland essentially consists of all these elements and can assist in meeting these new motivations.

Amid the COVID-19 crisis, the global market for Wellness Tourism in 2020, estimated at US\$735.8 Billion, is projected to reach a revised size of US\$1.2 Trillion by 2027, growing at a CAGR of 6.6% over the period 2020-2027. ([prnewswire.com](https://www.prnewswire.com))



Regional well-being tourism should be considered a potential fit to latch onto this growing trend as it can be applied to most tourism business types in the short term or long term to facilitate recovery. It can significantly impact the sector and improve recovery by developing a competitive tourism offering—wellbeing tourism regions have the capacity that;

- **Appeals to the Irish domestic market**, particularly those cooped up in cities and suburban areas. Who now wants to 'escape' and 'be in a peaceful and safe environment' outdoors. They want to escape their busy lifestyles, relax and destress in the countryside, near the sea, climb a mountain or just be in a peaceful rural setting. This is especially appealing when international target markets are temporarily inaccessible.
- Has the **potential to be added or diversify existing businesses** either temporarily or long term by adding or implementing low investment in experiences (yoga, cooking, education), in equipment for adventure activities (biking, canoeing, surfing) etc.
- It can also be considered a **new type of business** for emerging tourism entrepreneurs or entrepreneurs who have lost their businesses due to the pandemic.
- **Fits the Irish tourism geographical landscape**. Wellbeing tourism is best suited to the Irish countryside, open spaces or rural areas with plenty of natural, peaceful spaces in nature with fresh unpolluted air.
- **Flexible to social distancing and COVID-19 measures**. It can be applied easily to wellbeing tourism high yield target markets willing to pay extra for isolated accommodation and spaces that involve little to no interaction with others, perfect for easy implementation of social distancing measures. They often have a car or 'transport' so don't need public transport options. These markets also value sustainable, environmental living, digital detox and often alternative low impact accommodations (pods, glamping, cabins), which means investing in low-cost temporary accommodation alternatives, no technology infrastructure and the ability to implement compost recyclable waste measures.
- Well-being tourism is **predominantly and inherently a 'feel good' experience** encouraging relaxation, rejuvenation and focusing on mental and physical wellbeing, often involving minimal effort and high levels of reinvigoration. The positive effects wellbeing tourism and its experiences have on people are evident and well document, adding to the increasing uptake in this global megatrend. They are inclined to continue practising what improves their mental and physical health when they get home, improving their children's quality of life.
- Other **emerging and stagnant destinations are beginning to diversify** into wellbeing tourism as a competitive, reputation building yet positive tourism destination approaches.



Conclusion

We have covered in this Action plan 20 compelling opportunities Ireland should consider in developing a thriving wellbeing destination or region regardless if they intend this megatrend to be part of the sectors COVID-19 recovery. These 20 identified opportunities in this Action plan will enable wellbeing tourism in Ireland to develop and facilitate wellbeing experiences. Starting with proper understanding and being included in the national tourism strategy will mean tourism enterprises, local governments, communities, and regions will have the ability to start planning and working with the Irish Government to grow the wellbeing tourism sector. A strategy with identified goals, objectives, values, and ethics from an Irish perspective will be developed in a competitive, economical, and environmentally sustainable way. For this Action Plan to be developed and implemented successfully, it will require all actors from wellbeing communities and enterprises to the government level to consider the best way forward to maximise this sector's wellbeing tourism potential essentially.

- developing national, regional and local strategies, plans and frameworks
- developing national, regional and public sector partnerships
- considering and prioritising Ireland's unique opportunities,
- come up with the right solutions to the main challenges and issues,
- develop the relevant corresponding regional and enterprise-focused development frameworks, policies, standards and evaluations



Destination & Regional Level Opportunities and Actions

Actions	Priority	Responsibility
Action 1 Create a Regional Partnership Network	High – Step 1	Tourism SMEs, RTOs, DMOs, Local Community Groups
Action 2 Develop a Regional Sustainable Development Plan	Medium	Tourism SMEs, RTOs, DMOs, Local Community Groups, Local Government, Local Environment Protection Agencies, Planning and Development
Action 3 Develop a Regional Action Plan	High	Tourism SMEs, RTOs, DMOs, Local Community Groups, Local Government
Action 4 Approach Public Sector as a Partnership	Medium	Tourism SMEs, RTOs, DMOs, Local Community Groups, Local Government
Action 5 Package as a Destination and Create a Destination Card	Low	Tourism SMEs, RTOs, DMOs, Regional Tourism Marketing Support Organisations e.g. Failte Ireland
Action 6 Develop Seamless Destination Experiences	High	Tourism SMEs, RTOs, DMOs, Local Enterprise Office, HEI, VET, Tertiary Training Bodies
Action 7 Manage Destination Reputation and Service Quality	High	Tourism SMEs, RTOs, DMOs, Local Community Groups, Local Government, Local Council
Action 8 Implement Destination Wide Training	Medium	Tourism SMEs, RTOs, DMOs, Local Enterprise Office, HEI, VET, Tertiary Training Bodies
Action 9 Package and Promote with Local Culture, Heritage	Low	Tourism SMEs, RTOs, DMOs, Local Heritage and Culture Networks, groups and representatives
Action 11 Include as Part of the COVID-19 Recovery and Brexit Management Strategies	High	Tourism SMEs, RTOs, DMOs, Local Enterprise Offices