

# IRELAND LOSING BRITISH HOLIDAYMAKERS



According to hotel operators, the major challenge for Ireland's struggling tourism industry is to bring back British holidaymakers.

Irish Hotels Federation (IHF) aims to attract more visitors from the UK after their number dropped by 100,000 in 2012 to 2.7 million. **Since 2007, the number of visitors from Ireland's nearest neighbors has fallen by 30 pc, or 1 million.**

Tim Fenn, Chief Executive of IHF, said that the total number of British visitors rose by 3 percent in 2011, but that last year's drop meant it was only a temporary improvement. He further said that the decrease was a sheer reminder of the ground that had been lost since 2007 and the pressing need to bring around the most crucial tourism market. Fenn added that the target set by the tourism industry to attract 200,000 more visitors from the UK each year by 2016 was too low.

In 2012, the total number of foreign visitors increased by 0.2pc overall while revenue generated by the tourism industry was the same as that of the previous year, €5.7bn. Visitors from Ireland occupied almost three-quarters of space in hotels.

Mr. Fenn said that there was need to adopt a more aggressive approach with campaigns geared towards attracting visitors from across the regions as well as promoting particular reasons to visit - whether focusing on the country's heritage and culture or activities. Six out of ten hotels and guesthouses expressed their dissatisfaction with the quality of Irish tourism information provided by Central Statistics Office.

A study by IHF said that tourist operators were being put at a "considerable competitive disadvantage" by the lack of accurate statistics. It further said that it lacked the tools necessary to target marketing efforts, or learn from promotion mistakes that may have failed to work.

According to IHF President Michael Vaughan, it was incredible that **the tourism industry, a €6bn sector of the country's economy which employs 11pc of the total workers, lacked the necessary tools for measuring its performance.** He said that the previous year's final regional figures had only just been made available but they did not give information regarding the length of stay of foreign visitors or reasons for visiting certain sights. Vaughan further said that there were no details on specific activities and events that attracted visitors to Ireland or quality of their experience while in the country. He concluded by saying that the lack of detailed statistics meant that they knew more about travel patterns of the island's 6.8 million cows than they did about the 6.5 million holidaymakers that visited the shores each year.

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