

# GAME OF THRONES – BEST MARKETING CAMPAIGN FOR SPAIN, IRELAND, AND CROATIA



While the eighth and final season of Game of Thrones is being broadcast, the tourist offices of Northern Ireland, Spain, and Croatia are rubbing their hands. Tourists flock in large numbers to see the filming locations of the series, which is a perfect tourism marketing project.

Launched in 2011 on the American channel HBO, the Game of Thrones series has become a real phenomenon. **It is broadcast in 200 countries around the world and Season 7 alone was watched by nearly 31 million viewers.** Like Harry Potter or the Lord of the Rings, Game of Thrones has a large community of fans, with more than 23 million fans on the official Facebook page, more than 8 million subscribers on Twitter and nearly 9 million followers on Instagram. Fans ready to travel miles to filming locations of cult scenes – an ideal tourism marketing opportunity.

Since 2011, Northern Ireland has been reaping the full benefits of the series: according to a survey conducted by the Tourist Office last year, one in six tourists reported coming to Northern Ireland driven by Game of Thrones, or about 350,000 people, out of a total of over 2.2 million foreign visitors in 2017.

While Northern Ireland has already hosted a number of international film and television productions, the global Game of Thrones phenomenon has transformed the country into a film tourism destination. The region is home to the series' main studios in Belfast and Banbridge as well as 26 major film locations. The destination has even published a special app to allow fans to explore the iconic kingdoms of Westeros and Essos.

The same enthusiasm for Croatia and more particularly for Dubrovnik, the capital of the imaginary kingdom of Westeros. "It is difficult to know how many people come to Dubrovnik just because of the great success of the series," says the Tourist Office, while at the same time noting "an increase in Dubrovnik's popularity as a tourist destination. Like Northern Ireland, the Croatian Tourist Office has published a map of Dubrovnik with 16 film locations, from Jesuit stairs to the Island of Lokrum. Fans will even be able to sit in the real iron throne used in the series!

Similarly, Spain lures great numbers of the series fans. For instance, the small island of San Juan de Gaztelugatxe, was the set of "Dragonstone", the family seat of the Targaryens. Before the "Game of Thrones" hype, about 2000 visitors found their way to the small island a year. After filming in 2017, there were about 150,000 tourists and the numbers are similar today.

The coastal town of Bermeo has also adapted to the "Game of Thrones" guests. The local innkeepers tried to combine the series with the region's famous cuisine with pintxos, the Basque tapas. When the seventh season of the series was released in 2017, the bar owners launched a "Game of Thrones" pintxos route through the town. Each store had a different pintxo that was always tailored to a character in the series. Other Spanish cities that reap the benefits of the series is the Catalan city of Girona and Seville in Andalusia.

In Northern Ireland as in Croatia, the receptives are also on the ranks, with a host of themed tours. Northern Ireland has had 25 since 2013, from bus tours to gastronomic tours. "Due to the demand, bus companies have increased the capacity of their tours by setting up daily tours during the high season," notes the Northern Irish Tourist office. And several receptives have launched themselves especially into the niche, such as Game of Thrones Tours in Belfast or King's Landings Dubrovnik, which offers four tours in Dubrovnik as well as an Escape Room on the theme of the series.

**The Tourist Office is in any case ready to surf on the craze in the long term, even if the series will reach its final point in a few weeks.** Linen Mill Studios of Banbridge announces the opening of a Studio Tour during spring 2020, based on the Harry Potter Studio in the Warner Studios in London. Special mention also for the Croatian TO Unforgettable Croatia which offered itself a nice publicity among Game of Thrones fans by offering a trip to the one who will guess the end of the series.

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