

# Developing cultural experiences – a how-to guide

*Karan Thompson* guides us through the background and inception of the *Tourism Toolkit for Ireland's Cultural Experiences* she created during 2012 for Fáilte Ireland – Ireland's National Tourism Development agency

I developed the *Toolkit* as one of the outputs of my role as Project Mentor for the Cultural Insights Project. This project commenced in 2011 and to date has helped to develop a cultural tourism focus with over 40 cultural providers (rural and urban) across Ireland.

The *Cultural Experiences Toolkit* was designed as a resource for cultural organisations and individuals working in the cultural sector – e.g. those developing events and festivals, managing cultural attractions or cultural activities etc.

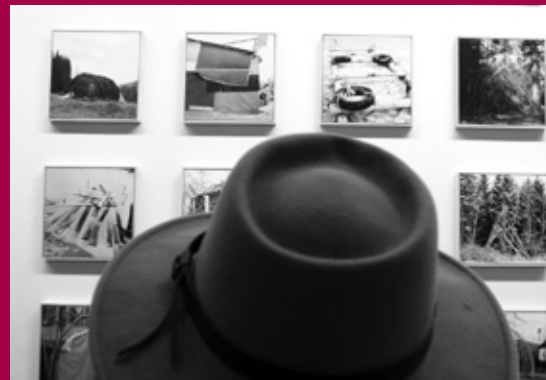
Research carried out by Fáilte Ireland<sup>1</sup> during 2011 highlighted an interest from visitors in experiencing Ireland's traditional and contemporary culture, its unique cultural identity and distinct sense of place. It was also evident that special interest tourists were seeking out participation in new and deep cultural experiences including innovative arts programming, creativity and living culture, and that they were willing to travel to find these attractions and stay longer in their chosen destination, thus giving cultural organisations a compelling reason to attract the cultural visitor as a core audience.

The Cultural Insights Project provided the opportunity for Fáilte Ireland to work closely with cultural providers to respond to this identified need from market segments actively choosing to visit Ireland. This work was carried out via bespoke interventions between each identified provider and a specialist cultural mentor, and opportunities for collective thinking and partnership development between providers.

Learning from the Cultural Insights Project in 2011 identified that cultural organisations, in the main, focused their marketing efforts on engaging with their specialist audiences within their artistic or creative frame of reference, rather than taking a destination focus for their product/experience.

The *Tourism Toolkit* was designed to assist such organisations to:

- Develop their understanding of the tourism landscape in Ireland and their own destination,



> EXAMPLES OF CASE STUDIES PRESENTED ALONGSIDE TEMPLATES AND EXERCISES IN THE *TOOLKIT*

## Where does my organisation fit with tourism? Theatre Royal Regional Theatre Co. Waterford

### Objectives

- Increase awareness of the venue and its programme to local and regional audiences and the visitor to the region
- Assess the impact from the incidental tourist to Waterford on the Theatre

- Increase audience attendance

### Results

- Increased awareness of the venue and its programme for visitors
- Increase in ticket sales
- Identification of potential web development to reflect tourism

audience data collection and their needs

- Identification of new ways to increase visitor numbers through online marketing

## Case study: Communicating your message effectively Lewis Glucksman Gallery, University College, Co. Cork

### Objectives

- Enhance communications channels for the visitor to Cork who would not consider the Gallery in their itinerary
- Develop a sense of belonging within the Gallery for local people and the wider University

community to stimulate word of mouth

- Increase visitor numbers to the Gallery

### Results

- Increase in attendance at events and to Gallery generally
- Increase in pick up rate of information for Glucksman in other galleries
- Increase in visits to website and posts on social media channels

## Case study: Working in partnership in your destination National Craft Gallery and Butler Gallery, Co. Kilkenny

### Objective

Both organisations realised that while tourist numbers to Kilkenny are strong, this was not reflected in the numbers coming through their doors. In many instances coach tours alight outside their respective premises to visit the Castle but fail to realise that either of the Galleries exist. Their challenge was to draw audience from those visiting Kilkenny and Kilkenny Castle in particular.

### Approach

Develop an invited audience event for tourism providers in the region. Sharing information on programmes and events combined with an exhibition of the work in each of the respective galleries and a talk by each Gallery Curator.

### Results

The event helped raise awareness of both galleries and their location.

It also provided an opportunity to share information on programmes and events that would appeal to the tourist providers' domestic and international visitors. It also facilitated the gathering of data to build targeted email communications with tourism providers post event and was effective in developing local partnerships with established tourism providers.

- identify international and domestic audiences for their offer,
- develop what they have to offer the visitor,
- grow new audiences from tourism, and
- develop collaborative working practices and partnerships within their destination to attract the cultural visitor.

The approach used in the *Toolkit* is to provide the cultural provider with a practical guide and approach to developing a cultural tourism strategy, implementing it successfully and monitoring and evaluating its success over time. The information in the *Toolkit* provides a step-by-step approach to:

- Understanding cultural tourism and how it can benefit the cultural business,
- developing an understanding of the tourist visiting their region,
- gaining insights into the most effective ways to engage with the cultural tourist,
- data collection – key information to collect from the tourist,
- developing a tourism message,
- developing their experience for the visitor,
- integrating what they have to offer into what is currently on offer in their region,
- working in partnership with other cultural providers and those working in the tourism sector,
- evaluating their success.

The information is supported by exercises and templates which can be applied to individual organisations to help them to assess their current approach and develop new approaches to accessing the cultural tourist.

Alongside the exercises are case studies which provide examples of best practice from cultural organisations who had taken part in the Cultural Insights Project, and who had implemented changes in their organisation from their project learning, to develop awareness of their offer and enhance their audiences from tourism. The case studies section of this feature provides an overview of a few of these studies. Their approach and outcomes can be accessed in full in the *Tourism Toolkit*.

Since its development, the *Toolkit* has proved to be an effective tool for cultural organisations in assisting their cultural tourism development. In order to maximise the impact of the *Toolkit* and to assist in the development of cultural experiences in Ireland, I've also developed a series of *Building Cultural Experiences Workshops* on behalf of Fáilte Ireland as part of the Cultural Insights Project. These workshops enable cultural providers to come together to share their approach to cultural tourism development, create partnerships, build new experiences for visitors, and understand online and offline marketing channels for success and thus create opportunities to develop new audiences for their respective businesses. ■

#### FOOTNOTE

1. *Fáilte Ireland Holiday-Maker Port Attitude Survey 2011*, Millward Brown, Dublin, 2011



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**Karan Thompson**, (MA, H.Dip.Ed., Dip. Arts Admin., Dip.WCM, MII), is the author of the *Tourism Toolkit for Ireland's Cultural Experiences* and is the Consultant Project Mentor for Fáilte Ireland's Cultural Insights Project alongside the internal Fáilte Ireland destination development team.

She is the Director of Karan Thompson Consulting Ltd (KTCL) a consultancy practice established in 2001 which provides assistance to a wide range of businesses across the arts, culture, creative and tourism sectors in Ireland and Europe. KTCL provides business planning, strategic marketing and communications to innovative product development, facilitation and mentoring to these clients.

Previous roles as an arts manager and practitioner, Board member and Events Manager for Ireland's National Concert Hall position Karan as a professional with 27 years of experience across the cultural, creative and tourism industries. This experience places her in the distinctive position of understanding the complexities of managing, developing and marketing businesses in these sectors to drive their creative potential onward development.

#### Tourism Toolkit for Ireland's Cultural Experiences:

[http://issuu.com/designtactics/docs/fi-22203-12\\_culture\\_tourism\\_toolkit\\_\\_issuu\\_?mode=embed&layout=http%3A%2F%2Fskin.issuu.com%2Fv%2Fflight%2Flayout.xml&showFlipBtn=true](http://issuu.com/designtactics/docs/fi-22203-12_culture_tourism_toolkit__issuu_?mode=embed&layout=http%3A%2F%2Fskin.issuu.com%2Fv%2Fflight%2Flayout.xml&showFlipBtn=true)