

Skellig Coast Visitor Experience Development Plan

Plean Forbartha Chósta an Sceilig ar Eispéireas Cuairteora



Photograph by @storytravelers

FINAL December 2016



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY Achoimre Feidhmiúcháin

The Skellig Coast

Visitor Experience Development Plan

VISION: Extend the season and attract visitors to engage with the true essence and story of the Skellig Coast without compromising the environment or culture of the region.

TARGET MARKETS: Culturally Curious
Great Escapers

BRAND PROMISE: Come for the beauty, leave with the spirit of the Skelligs

UNIQUE SELLING POINTS: A journey or quest, with links to a Skellig Coast story, that provide moments of reflection and a reward for effort

SKELLIG STORIES: Journeys Inspired by the Skellig Monks
The Cradle of Irish Nationhood
A History of Global Connections
Ocean Meets Sky at the Edge of the World

SIGNATURE EXPERIENCES:

1. Follow the Story of the Monks to the Edge of the World
2. Take a Pilgrimage (Like Saint Fionán)
3. Be Inspired by the Spirit of Human Endeavour
4. Discover How Our Story was Shaped
5. Make the Global Connection
6. Innovation and Trade at the Edge of the World
7. Feel the Power of the Edge
8. Have an Up-close Marine Encounter
9. Find Nature's Window to the Past

The Skellig Coast in County Kerry – stretching from Kells to Castlecove on the Wild Atlantic Way – is famous for its journeys taking travellers to and from the ‘edge of the world’. Today, the opportunity exists to create new journeys that inspire modern visitors to share their story.

To inspire visitors to share your story requires more than just a good idea. It requires a consistent application of key messages and an engaging story that keeps the audience emotionally connected to the ideas that underpin it. Those ideas and related experiences have to be meaningful and rewarding for the customer.

For the Skellig Coast, its central idea relates to a core element of the Wild Atlantic Way – how Life is Shaped by the Atlantic and the elements surrounding it that create uniquely ‘Skellig’ experiences (known as the unique selling points). These are the basis for building opportunities that will overcome the key challenges faced by the region (as identified through the development of this Plan) and for creating memorable moments, which can only be achieved by knowing what the customer is seeking, and delivering it.

The primary target markets for the Skellig Coast Experience are the Culturally Curious and Great Escapers who are seeking:

CULTURALLY CURIOUS TRAVELLERS	GREAT ESCAPERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ To meet the locals and to get to know their story➤ Engage in activities and experiences that help them develop as a person➤ Do things that are different, and authentic or unique to a place➤ Participate, they don't just hear the story but also want to be involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Escape the everyday, find a place to get away from it all➤ Find places and experiences that are life enriching➤ Do things that are different, and authentic or unique to a place➤ Participate, they don't just hear the story but also want to be involved

For the Skellig Coast to create memorable moments and to meet the needs of the target markets (i.e. those who are seeking life enriching experiences that help them to develop as a person) it needs more than just infrastructure. Collaboration between stakeholders is also needed as well as an in-depth understanding of the current challenges that are likely to hold the region back from achieving its vision.



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Visitation to the Skellig Coast is growing. While quantitative data is difficult to access for this area, feedback from businesses suggest 2016 has been the best season ever with more interest in Skellig Michael from international exposure through Star Wars and an overall growth in visitor numbers to Ireland and County Kerry. Whilst the businesses are coping with the demand, this growing volume is creating a range of challenges, and from those, opportunities (see below):

Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limitations on the number of people that can visit Skellig Michael • The seasonality of visitation, particularly the short season for visiting Skellig Michael • The 'Star Wars' effect attracting visitors with little connection to the rest of the Skellig Coast • An overwhelming number of stories and ideas that are not easily explained on returning home • Passive engagement in the destination, or simply skimming the surface without getting the full story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broaden the focus from a visit to Skellig Michael to the story of the Monks with real alternatives to landing on the rock • Encouraging activities and events that are best experienced out of peak season • Engage Star Wars fans in the story of the Monks and its link to why Star Wars was filmed at the 'edge of the world' • Better organise the stories around a few central themes to create 'bucket list' experiences for others • Create a series of iconic journeys that deliver a depth of personal experience

The way forward for the Skellig Coast is through partnerships, connectivity of the products to experiences and a focus on getting the story to the customer – inspiring them to travel off-season, stay longer and enjoy the essence of the Skellig Coast.

To help achieve this, **ten Catalyst Projects** have been identified, along with a range of supporting recommendations and **seven Enablers of Success**. The implementation of the Visitor Experience Development Plan (VEDP) rests primarily with trade and the proposed Skellig Coast Tourism Network. Trade need to embrace the Skellig Stories, connect with other products to create Hero Experiences, and share their stories with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland, who will in turn share them with the world. This plan does not guarantee future funding, and is designed to encourage businesses to be proactive in creating unique experiences.

Vital to the success of the Plan will be the implementation of the **Kerry Tourism Strategy** priorities and local funding, and the involvement of **industry development partners** such as South Kerry Development Partnership (SKDP), Údarás na Gaeltachta and Kerry's Local Enterprise Office (LEO).

CATALYST PROJECTS:

1. Examine the potential of improving the delivery of the **Monks Trail Walk** in Baile an Sceilg/Ballinskelligs with signage, a brochure and points of interest
2. Renew and reopen the **Skellig Experience Centre** as both a day and night attraction
3. Identify a **Daniel O'Connell Touring Route** linking the Old Barracks, Memorial Park, the church, his original home, Valentia Island, Portmagee and Cathair Dónall
4. Develop **workshops for visitors to learn about the Irish language, arts, crafts and photography** which can happen off-season
5. Create an interactive experience of the **Transatlantic Cable story**, supporting the UNESCO World Heritage status application and future development of the Cable Station
6. Examine the potential of **delivering the Greenway** from Glenbeigh to Renard
7. Create a **food touring route map** to showcase local and regional produce and the history of exporting quality goods from County Kerry
8. Deliver **Dark Skies programmes** for visitors and tour operators with the local communities
9. Examine the potential of delivering a **Sea/Wild Atlantic Centre** that is dedicated to the sea based in Waterville and a **Marine Education and Citizen Science Facility (WEAVE)** in Cahersiveen
10. Support the continued operation of a **marine eco-tour from Portmagee, Cahersiveen or Valentia Island** as an alternative or addition to the Skellig Boat journey

ENABLERS OF SUCCESS:

- Establish a **Skellig Coast Tourism Network**
- Through facilitated workshops agree on the roles and make-up of **an Implementation Group**
- Rollout of the **Workbook and suite of hard copy training and support materials** for operators
- Undertake **Skellig Coast Business Support** delivered by the agencies
- Develop a series of **themed itineraries** (by market segment) including storm season itineraries and tours
- Review the **Skellig Coast Map and App**

Note: For the above where proposals are progressed to feasibility stage consultation with relevant interested parties will take place.



*I am Kerry like my mother before me,
And my mother's mother and her man.
Now I sit on an office stool remembering,
And the memory of them like a fan
Soothes the embers into flame.
I am Kerry and proud of my name.*

*My heart is looped around the rutted hills,
That shoulder the stars out of the sky,
And about the wasp-yellow fields,
And the strands where kelp-streamers lie;
Where, soft as lovers' Gaelic, the rain falls,
Sweeping into silver the lacy mountain walls.*

*My grandfather tended the turf fire,
And, leaning backward into legend, spoke,
Of doings old before quills inked history.
I saw dark heroes fighting in the smoke,
Diarmuid dead inside his Iveragh cave,
And Deirdrie caoining upon Naoise's grave.*

*I see the wise face now with its hundred wrinkles,
And every wrinkle held a thousand tales,
Of Finn and Oscar and Conawn Maol,
And sea-proud Niall whose conquering sails,
Raiding France for slaves and wine,
Brought Patrick to mind Milchu's swine.*

*I should have put a noose about the throat of time,
And choked the passing of the hob-nailed years,
And stayed young always, shouting in the hills,
Where life held only fairy fears,
When I was young my feet were bare,
But I drove cattle to the fair.*

*'Twas thus I lived, skin to skin with the earth,
Elbowed by the hills, drenched by the billows,
Watching the wild geese making black wedges,
By Skelligs far west and Annascaul of the willows.
Their voices came on every little wind,
Whispering across the half-door of the mind,
For always I am Kerry.*

Sigerson Clifford (1955)

I am Kerry...

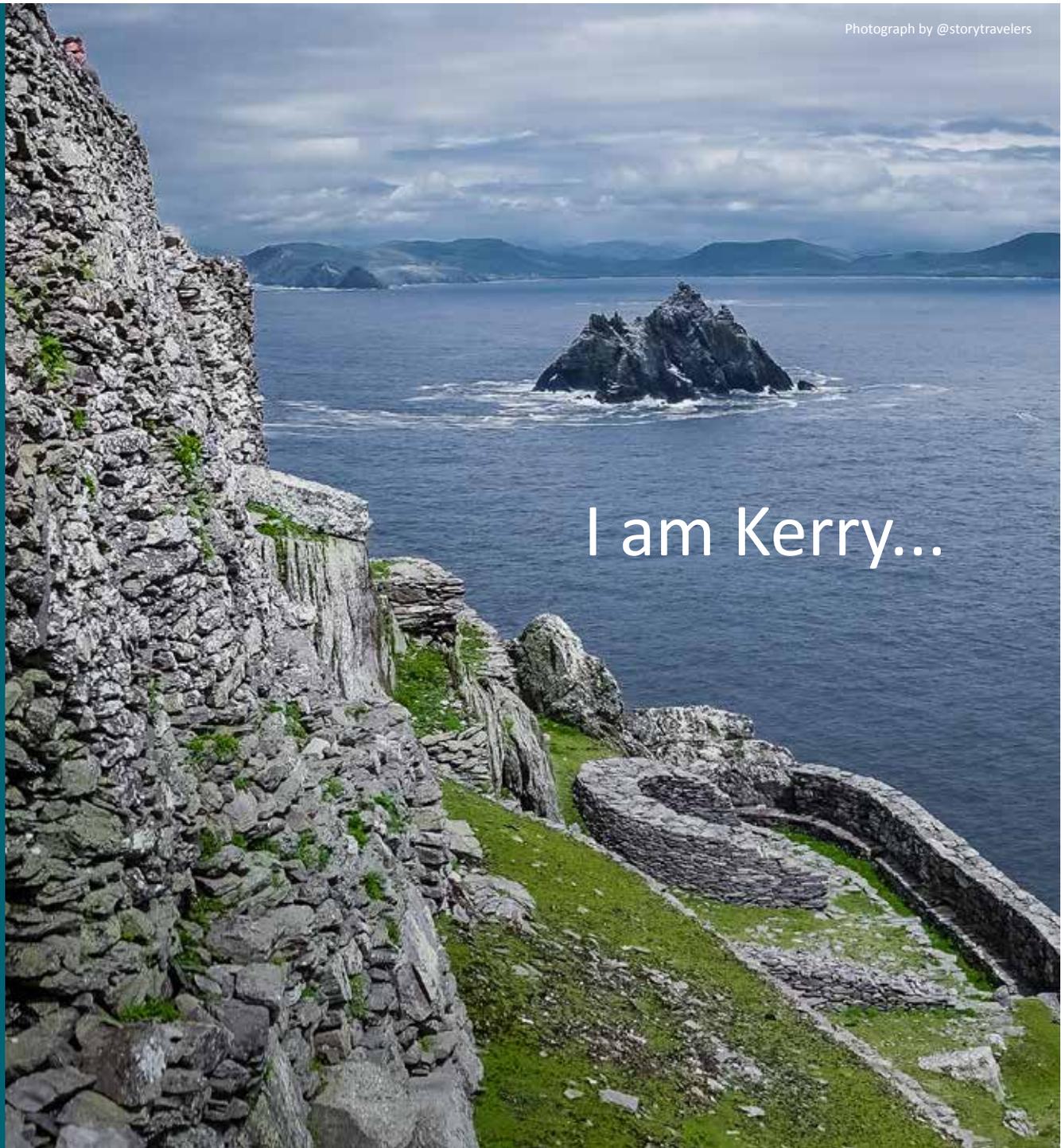


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Disclaimer

The following Visitor Experience Development Plan has been prepared on behalf of Fáilte Ireland by a project team comprised of Team Tourism, EarthCheck Pty Ltd and Boland Marketing. Any representation, statement, opinion or advice, expressed or implied in this document is made in good faith but on the basis that this project team is not liable (whether by reason of negligence, lack of care or otherwise) to any person for any damage or loss whatsoever which has occurred or may occur in relation to that person taking or not taking (as the case may be) action in respect of any representation, statement or advice referred to in this document.

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Introduction Réamhrá

The Skellig Coast – stretching from Kells to Castlecove on the Wild Atlantic Way – is famous for its journeys taking travellers to and from the ‘edge of the world’. Today, the opportunity exists for tourism businesses to create new journeys that inspire modern poetry, art, photography and stories, shared not only through travel experiences, but also on social media both by the Trade and in partnership with the Wild Atlantic Way.

Located in the far west tip of the Iveragh Peninsula, the region boasts the World Heritage Listed Skellig Michael and the only Gold Tier Dark Skies Reserve in Europe, rich natural and cultural landscapes, monastic and medieval history, the Iveragh (Uíbh Ráthach) Gaeltacht where the Irish language can be heard and quirky ‘off-the-beaten track’ experiences – all set against the stunning coastal backdrop of the Wild Atlantic Way.

Recognising the need for better delivery and promotion of the area’s unique features to achieve increased international cut-through, Fáilte Ireland have developed a Visitor Experience Development Plan for the Skellig Coast region. The Plan provides a clear direction towards strengthening and growing the revenue for the Skellig Coast’s international market share through the delivery of signature experiences.

Figure 1: Map of the Skellig Coast



Source: Google Maps



This Plan has been guided by a project Working Group and has been prepared in alignment with Fáilte Ireland’s Guidelines for Experience Development Plans, which are based on a best-practice approach of collaboration, research, planning and activation. It has been written to inspire and assist tourism businesses and stakeholders to deliver new and improve existing visitor experiences.

Experience Development Plan Aims and Objectives

The key objectives of the Skellig Coast Visitor Experience Development Plan are to develop signature experiences for the Skellig Coast that will:

- motivate visitors to **stay longer and spend more**;
- **extend the length of the season**;
- align to relevant **brand, target markets and segments**;
- **sustain and increase job creation** in the local area; and
- **protect the special environmental character** of the region.

The Plan is supported by recommendations required to create an **internationally recognised visitor experience**.

Through the delivery of the Visitor Experience Development Plan, it is also the aim to:

- encourage and **engage businesses and local partners**;
- maintain **business engagement beyond the project** lifetime; and
- **build lasting links** between national partners and local tourism experiences.

As the first Visitor Experience Development Plan in Ireland, the underlying planning process sought to establish a replicable development planning approach for further plans, while being responsive to the Skellig Coast’s circumstances.

Environmental Considerations Ceisteanna Timpeallachta

Implementation

Implementation of this Plan shall be consistent with and conform with the provisions of all adopted/approved Statutory Policies, Strategies, Plans and Programmes that have direct influence on this Plan (e.g. the County Kerry Development Plan). This includes for provisions for the protection and management of the environment.

The progression of projects by Fáilte Ireland's partners is required to be subject to planning, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and AA (Appropriate Assessment) processes as appropriate.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

This Plan has been examined for the need to undertake Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). SEA requirements apply to the plans and programmes of public authorities that, inter alia, set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annexes I and II to European Directive 85/337/EEC. The Skellig Coast Plan does not create such a framework, therefore requirements in relation to SEA do not apply.

Appropriate Assessment

The Plan has been examined for the need to undertake Appropriate Assessment (AA) and it has been determined Stage 2 AA is not required. An AA Screening Report has been prepared that accompanies the Plan.

Projects Referred to by this Plan

There are various projects relating to land use and infrastructural development referred to within this Plan, including those relating to development of land or on land and the carrying out of land use activities. While many of these projects have been completed some have not yet been progressed.

The Statutory Policies, Strategies, Plans and Programmes that provide for different projects undergo a variety of environmental assessments. These assessments ensure that environmental effects are considered, including: those arising from new and intensified uses and activities; and those arising from various sectors such as tourism.

Any projects referred to in this Plan that have not yet been progressed are provided for by Statutory Policies, Strategies, Plans and Programmes that have been adopted/approved and subjected to appropriate levels of SEA and/or AA, as relevant. Although reference to such projects is made in this Plan no re-interpretation of the projects has been undertaken and no detail on these projects additional to that included in the other Plans/Strategies is included.

Funding

Fáilte Ireland provides funding for sustainable tourism projects. As of the date on which this Plan was published, none of the projects referred to within the Plan have secured funding from Fáilte Ireland. Reference made to projects in this Plan does not guarantee funding. While funding is provided to certain projects, Fáilte Ireland is not the developer. Developers are required to comply with relevant legislation and the provisions of Statutory Policies, Strategies, Plans and Programmes, including those relating to environment and planning.



1

Understanding the Customer Ag Tuiscint an Chustaiméara



People want to experience an off the beaten track experience that genuinely immerses them in multiple ways so that they feel stimulated, energised and uplifted.

- Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme 2015-2019

Who's Coming Now? Cé Atá ag Teacht Anois?

The latest data from Fáilte Ireland indicates that County Kerry receives 1.7 million visitors (of which 61% are international) and €388 million in visitor spend. At present, there is little data available which specifically relates to the Skellig Coast region, with County Kerry data providing the only indicator of visitor patterns within its boundaries. Although there are likely similarities in visitor patterns between the Skellig Coast region and the wider county, it should be noted that the information below is likely to be heavily influenced by Ring of Kerry visitors and may not be a true representation of Skellig Coast visitors:



The main **reasons to visit** are for a **holiday (67%)** or to **visit friends and relatives (21%)**



Visitors are mainly made up of **couples** who are **aged 45 years and over**



The majority (60%) are **first time visitors** to the region



Visitors **spend at least one night** in Kerry



Visitors source their **pre-travel information** through the **internet (76%)**



International visitors spend on average **€550 per person** and **domestic** visitors spend an average of **€238 per person**

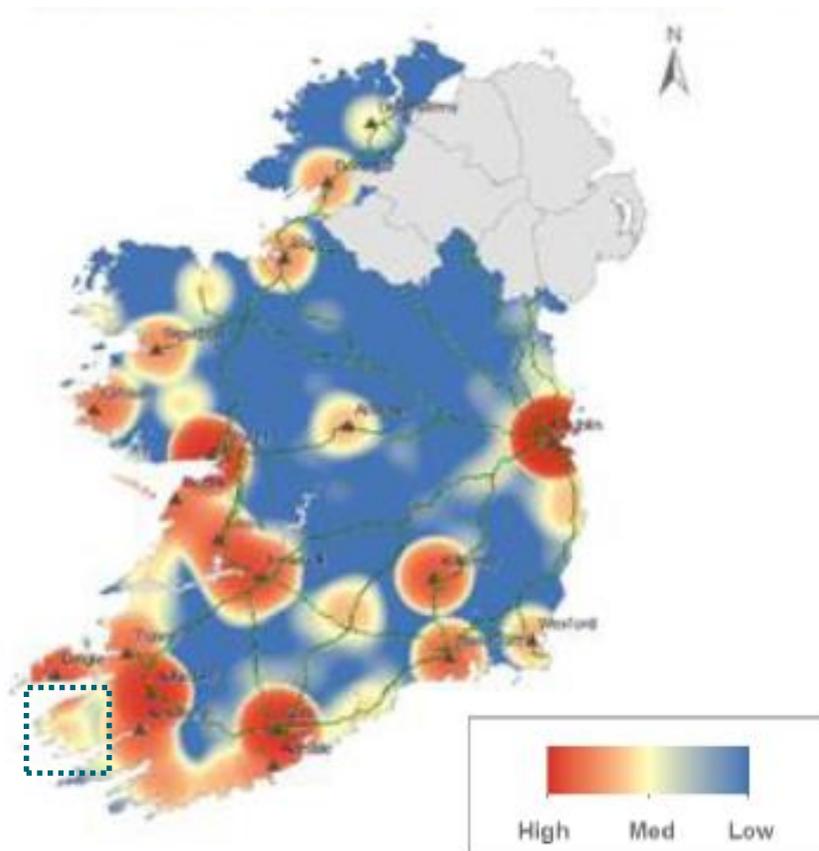


There is a preference to visit **during the summer months** (July and August)



Visitors get their **information from official websites (28%)** and **word of mouth (29%)**

Figure 2: Hotspot Map of Overseas Visitors Travelling for a Holiday



Source (including image): Fáilte Ireland, *Regional Tourism Performance in 2014*, February 2016

Source: Fáilte Ireland, *Holidaymaker Survey - Ring of Kerry*, 2014

Source: Fáilte Ireland, *Brand Tracker Visitor Experiences*, 2015

What Motivates Their Travel Patterns?

Cad a Thugann Spreagadh dá bPatrúin Taistil?

Having a detailed understanding of what motivates visitors to travel to Ireland, not just their needs, can help to grow market share through more effective targeted marketing.

Recognising the benefits of global consumer market segmentation, Fáilte Ireland has recently undertaken significant research on the destination's key consumer segments, including their travel motivations, lifestyle, values, interests, and travel information sources.

Through this research, the following key market segments have been identified:



Culturally Curious – Are very independently minded and are interested in places of historic and cultural interest.



Great Escapers – Want to get away from it all, renewing family bonds and spending time together in a beautiful place.

Please Refer to the **Skellig Coast Operator Workbook for more information on these Market Segments.*

Table 1: Components of a Memorable Experience

Culturally Curious	Great Escapers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal development Different, authentic Participative experiences Meet the locals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get away from it all Enriching moments Different, authentic Participative

What They Need?



Friendly, hospitable people



A **secure and safe** destination



Beautiful scenery with a range of **natural attractions**



Plenty of **things to see, do and experience**



Interesting **history and culture**



Relaxed and easy pace



Value for money

*“Isolated by sea
but not isolated
by the world”*

Source: Fáilte Ireland, *Visitor Attitudes Survey – Main Markets*, 2015

Source: Fáilte Ireland, *Global Segmentation Toolkit*, 2016

2

An Experience Development Framework Creatlach Forbartha Eispéiris



Setting the right scene and providing the right environment is important to trigger the right emotions within visitors.

- National Experience Development Framework

What is Experience Development? Cad is Forbairt Eispéiris ann?

Experience Development is the art and science of delivering a consistent message that inspires consumers throughout their travel experience – providing something that not only motivates visitors to become ambassadors for your destination, but also gives them the tools to help tell it.

The concept of experience development extends beyond just simply providing an enjoyable experience for visitors. To achieve international cut-through in today's 'sharing economy', experiences need to utilise thematic interpretation techniques that evoke a positive emotional response in visitors, making them want to brag about their experience with family and friends and to experience it again and again. By embedding these experiences with the unique selling features, or 'signatures', of a destination, visitors will associate that experience specifically with that destination and become advocates for these experiences with others.

Figure 3: The Experience Development Approach



What Makes a Signature Experience?

- Motivational for visitors
- Unified by a compelling story
- Has at least one 'hero product' at its heart
- Is of scale
- Capable of increasing dwell-time and/or driving economic benefit

Developing an experience requires a shift away from the traditional product versus price mentality. It's about delivering life-changing moments that inspire visitors to not only share their experience with others, but also makes them want to return.

The Experiences of Ireland Eispéiris d'Éire

Ireland's Unique Selling Propositions

Sitting underneath the Brand Ireland pillars are three key propositions (or experience brands) which represent the destination's areas of strategic importance. These three areas are:



Wild Atlantic Way – Experience one of the wildest, most enchanting and culturally rich coastal touring routes in the world. Wherever you travel along the Wild Atlantic Way you'll find magic, adventure, history and beauty in abundance.



Ireland's Ancient East – When you explore Ireland's Ancient East, you wander through 5,000 years of history. In these lush, green lands, tales of feuding dynasties hide behind crumbling Gothic architecture; ghostly tombs predate the pyramids; and knights, kings, monks and Vikings loom large in incredible stories.



Dublin A Breath of Fresh Air – Visiting Dublin is like taking a great big breath of fresh air. Always invigorating, this Viking city is at once modern and historic, exciting and relaxing.

Source: Fáilte Ireland, *National Experience Development Framework*, 2014

What is an Experience Brand?

Ireland's *Experience Brands* are at the heart of 'Tourism Brand Ireland'. They bring it to life, create the motivation for visitors to visit the Island of Ireland by defining its diverse character in a way potential visitors can understand. The Experience Brands provide the competitive advantage that separates us from our competitors.

An *Experience Brand* therefore must be unique enough to stand out in the international marketplace and stimulate demand. Each *Experience Brand* must have a clear consumer lead proposition which ensures that a consistent approach is taken to the identification and development of memorable tourism experiences within these brands. Each *Experience Brand* must be distinctive in the international marketplace and differentiate itself from other *Experience Brands* within the Island of Ireland and in other destinations.

An Experience Brand must:

- Be **grounded** in the consumer (travel values, social values, behaviours)
- Be **motivational** for international visitors
- Be **of scale** – made up of a critical mass of related attractions and supporting experiences which are purchasable and accessible – supported by appropriate tourism infrastructure
- Be **more than one experience**, and usually a combination of supporting experiences which underpin one or two lead experiences
- Be **unified by a compelling story** – one which has international relevance
- Be capable of **increasing dwell-time** and/or driving **economic benefit**
- Have a **consumer led** proposition, values, etc.
- Be **market-led** and tested

The Wild Atlantic Way Slí an Atlantaigh Fhiáin



*The Wild Atlantic Way on Ireland's west coast leads you through **one of the world's most dramatic coastal landscapes**, a landscape on the edge of Europe that has shaped the development of its people, communities and settlements, a landscape that has inspired its own particular language, literature, art, song and dance. It's a place of many natural features - seascapes, sea-life, cliffs, mountains, glens, loughs, trails and pathways. It's a place to experience nature at its wildest, a place to explore the history of the Gaels and their religion; a place to experience great events, great food and drink, great music and the craic.*

The Wild Atlantic Way is the Skellig Coast's over-arching proposition and delivers the Brand Ireland pillars.

Wild Atlantic Way Brand Promise

*The Wild Atlantic Way on Ireland's Western Coast off the Western **Edge of Europe**, captivates you with its **wild landscape** that continuously shapes its **living history**; and engages you with its creative and **vibrant communities**, whose **stories and culture** stimulate you, so you are freed up to relax, enjoy and leave feeling refreshed, renewed and uplifted.*

This brand promise is delivered through three themes which highlight the unique features of the Wild Atlantic Way. Key to the success of the Wild Atlantic Way as an *Experience Brand* is that we deliver on the brand promise at every point of interaction with the visitor. It needs to be:

- **Real** – based on genuine and authentic assets. It needs to be truly delivered by the tourism businesses included in the brand. The industry needs to buy-into the brand and 'live it' to truly deliver on its promise.
- **Relevant** – developed with the potential visitor in mind and able to satisfy their needs and motivations.
- **Related** - to the other Experience Brands on the Island of Ireland but unique enough to stand out alongside them individually.

Wild Atlantic Way Themes

Life Shaped by the Atlantic – You can get up close and personal with traditions and spiritual Gaelic Ireland and immerse yourself in the real Ireland where the traditions of the past are very much alive in the music, the song, the dance, storytelling, games and the Irish language.

Where Land Meets Sea – On the very edge of Europe, the ocean's force has carved a coast of wild, raw beauty. Huge Atlantic rollers crash and churn, shaping jagged ocean crags, islands and the sheer granite of Europe's tallest sea cliffs. It provides a breathtaking backdrop for active exploration of untamed land and seascapes. Enjoy up close encounters with the elements.

Connectedness – The feeling of connecting to the people and the landscape, of being a part of something 'bigger' and reflecting on what is important in your life. Feeling renewed and energised by the place, its people and its story. Your reward from a journey of discovery and being immersed in an ancient landscape.

If the potential visitor to the Island of Ireland is offered a clear menu of individual but equally appealing Experience Brands the likelihood of them choosing to visit for longer is increased.

It's up to each business to embrace the themes of the Wild Atlantic Way and give the customer a clear choice.

3

What Sets the Skellig Coast Apart on the Wild Atlantic Way

An Rud atá Uathúil faoi Chósta an Sceilig ar
Shlí an Atlantaigh Fhiáin



'Be different or be dead. Memorable experiences are about creating value. Value is the defining factor. When there is no difference in value people buy on price alone. You can only compete on price for so long but you can compete on value forever.'

- Pine and Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*, 1999

The Skellig Coast Story Scéal Cósta an Sceilig

The Skellig Coast: a story of journey, reflection and inspiration – shaped by the forces of the Atlantic

Cósta an Sceilig: scéal faoi aistear, smaoineamh, agus inspioráid-cruthaithe ag fórsaí an Atlantaigh

The story of the Skellig Coast starts with its geographical location – at the edge of the world – where the brave and true sought refuge, gained inspiration and replenished themselves to face their next quest.

The region's topography, with its mountains sweeping down to the sea and its most western peak rising out of the Atlantic Ocean as an island unlike any other, creates a stage of striking beauty and a landscape of bold contrasts. The weather rolling in from the ocean is forever changing the light and shade, adding to the poignancy of the Skellig Coast Story and to the enigmatic allure of the region.

This is a story that focuses on a life shaped by the forces of the Atlantic, one that connects visitors from a spiritual, economic, political, geopolitical, or cultural perspective, while at the same time embraces the power of isolation and the deep sense of personal energy and tranquillity that can be derived from the Skellig Coast's location 'at the edge of the world'.

It is a place that inspires visitors to make a difference, not only for themselves but also for those around them – perhaps gleaned from a gratitude for the gifts of nature or from the inspiring stories passed down through the ages.

The Skellig Coast's unique story elements of journey, reflection and inspiration come from the building blocks of Ireland's unique story – its landscape, Irish language and culture. It will be imperative that the Skellig Coast tourism industry adopt these three concepts to create a unique and remarkable place that will bring visitors from around the world and turn them into lifelong ambassadors.

The essence and personality of the Skellig Coast Story is driven by its unique people, places and stories, which help the region to stand out as a destination, while still seamlessly supporting the overarching themes of the Wild Atlantic Way.

The Skellig Coast's story is one that is essentially the story of its people, whose lives have been crafted by the benefits, beauty and vulnerabilities of a **life shaped by the Atlantic**. Fuelled by the spirit of human endeavour and its connections with people from worlds away, these triumphs and struggles live on today in the Irish language, songs, stories and sporting events of its quaint coastal villages.

The Skellig Coast story further unfolds with its intimate relationship with the Atlantic – the synergy of **where land meets sea**. Despite being located on the edge of the world, the resilience and determination of the people in this landscape over time have embedded a deep awareness, understanding and appreciation of the coast's geology and marine ecology that locals are just waiting to share with the world.

Finally, despite its seemingly isolated location, the Skellig Coast story is one of **connectedness**. Driven by the historical facts and legends of monks from centuries past, their journeys have left an abundance of holy sites and sacred trails – connecting today's visitors with not only their innermost thoughts, but also with the wonders of the universe under uninterrupted dark skies.

Come for the beauty, leave with the spirit of the Skelligs
Tar chugainn don áilleacht agus imeóidh tú le spiorad na Sceilge id' chroí istigh

Dominick O'Byrne – The Old School House B&B

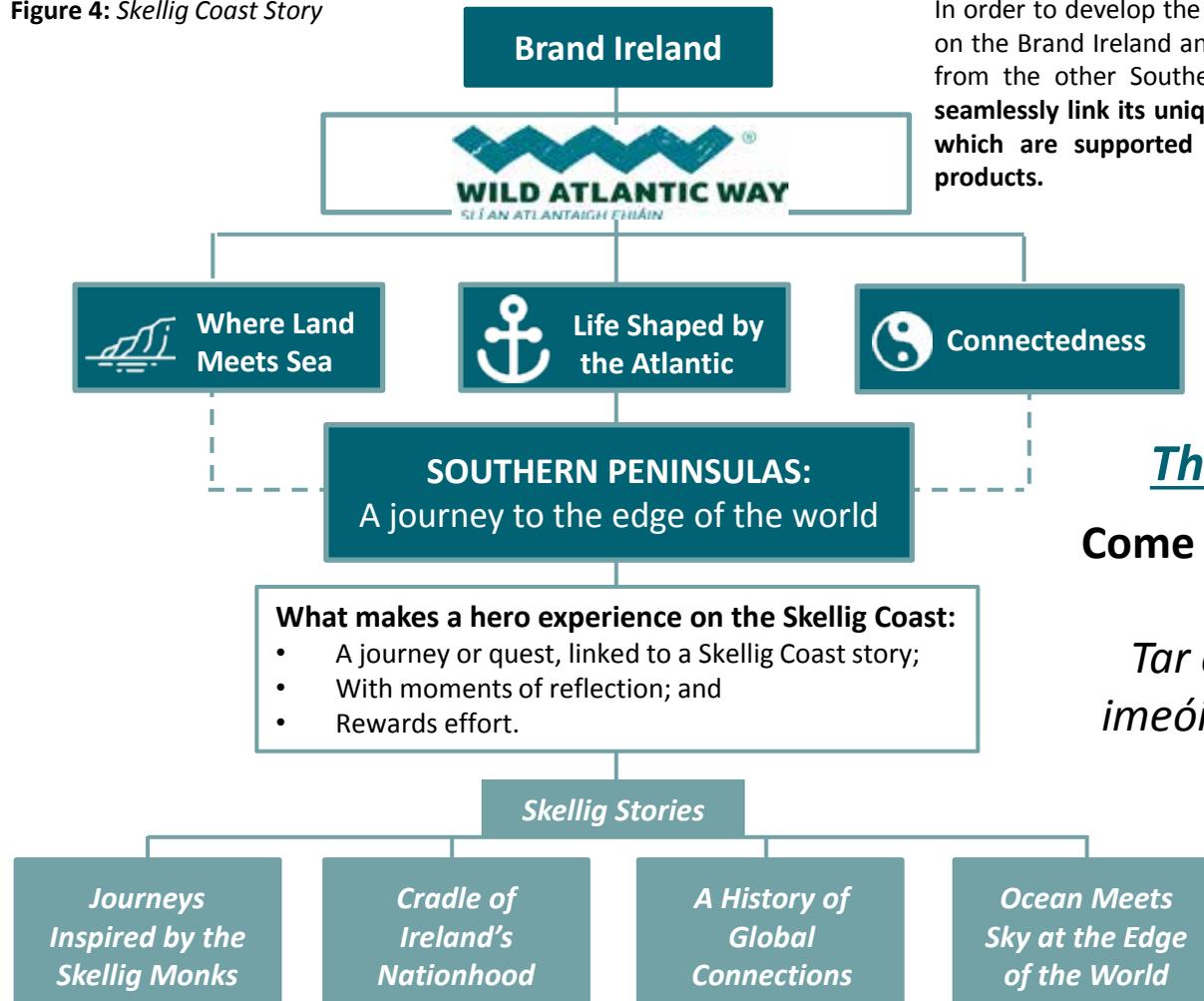


Developing The Skellig Coast Story Ag Forbairt Scéil Cósta an Sceilig

The core fundamentals of Ireland's story revolve around its brand positioning, which cascades down through the Wild Atlantic Way proposition, its sub-regions and its core themes.

While all regions within the Wild Atlantic Way draw on the proposition's three core themes, **the Skellig Coast's principle theme of Life Shaped by the Atlantic is driven by the unique features of the Southern Peninsulas**, which provide visitors with that 'Edge of the World' feeling.

Figure 4: Skellig Coast Story



In order to develop the Skellig Coast's signature story that not only delivers on the Brand Ireland and Wild Atlantic Way promises, but also sets it apart from the other Southern Peninsula regions, the **Skellig Coast needs to seamlessly link its unique story elements into rich and inviting story lines which are supported by a range of signature experiences and hero products.**

The Skellig Coast Promise:

Come for the beauty, leave with the spirit of the Skelligs

Tar chugainn don áilleacht agus imeóidh tú le spiorad na Sceilge id' chroí istigh



The Skellig Coast Story Scéal Cósta an Sceilig

STORY 1 – Journeys Inspired by the Skellig Monks

Aistir Spreagtha ag Manaigh na Sceilge

You **cannot help but find inspiration** in this place, with its power woven deep into the sights, sounds and stories of the region. Just as the monks' quest for spiritual connection led them on a journey to the remote corners of the 'Edge of the World', it is easy to appreciate today how the landscape still **sparks an urge for reflection and self-discovery** for many who grace its shores.

The **age-old holy trails, sacred sites, Irish language and sense of tranquillity** that exist harmoniously with all the forces of the Wild Atlantic Way have a transcendent power that is hard to resist – one that can truly reinvigorate the soul.

Signature Experiences

The *Journeys Inspired by the Skellig Monks* story can be found through the following Signature Experiences:



Follow the Story of the Monks to the Edge of the World

Lean Scéal na Manaigh go hImeall an Domnain

Retrace the steps of Ireland's monastic forefathers as they set out on a quest for deep spirituality and connection with their Creator to be found within a state of awe-inspiring isolation at the edge of the world.

Hero Product:

- Journey from Portmagee or Baile an Sceilig/Ballinskelligs to **Skellig Michael and Monks Trail** at Baile an Sceilig/Ballinskelligs (proposed).
- **Discovery Points** linked to Skellig Michael (Coomanaspic Pass, Kerry Cliffs, Bray Head, Geokaun Mountain).
- Viewing the **sites used by Star Wars**, inspired by the Monks, or have your own Star Wars experience at the Skellig Experience Centre (proposed), The Bridge Bar & The Moorings, Portmagee or at Waterville Craft Market.



Take a Pilgrimage (Like Saint Fionán)

Tóg Oilithreachta (Cosúil le Naomh Fionán)

Embark upon a journey of self-discovery like no other as you find inspiration along the holy trails and sacred sites of the Skellig Coast.

Hero Product:

- Visiting the many holy wells along **the Kerry Way** on a **pilgrims trail**.
- Travel along **the Blueways** on your own pilgrimage (proposed).
- Walk to Bolus Head and join the **Monk's Trail** in Baile an Sceilig/Ballinskelligs or Cnoc na dTobar (proposed).

Supporting Experiences

- Pause in the **Gardens at Derrynane House** or along the **Derrynane Seashore and Nature Trails** and reflect on the journey of St Fionán (Derrynane named for the Saint) or Daniel O'Connell's journey from Dublin to Doire Fhionáin / Derrynane for inspiration.
- Take a **night tour from the Skellig Experience Centre** (proposed) to view the ancient remains of an Abbey and beehive huts older than Skellig Michael on the little island of Illaunloughan (proposed).
- Take a **tour of the Ring Forts** (Leacanabuaille, Cahergal, Loher and Staigue) with a local guide to hear the stories of Viking raiders.
- Take an **artist's retreat at the Cill Rialaig Famine Village** on your own journey of discovery and inspiration from nature.
- Visit the **Church Islands** of Lough Currane and Valentia Harbour (proposed).
- Visit the Holy Well and **Healing Point at Glanleam Gardens**.
- See **the lunar stones** near Baile an Sceilig/Ballinskelligs and the **solar stones** near Waterville.

The Skellig Coast Story Scéal Cósta an Sceilig

STORY 2 – The Cradle of Ireland’s Nationhood

Cliabhán Náisiúntacht na hÉireann

Despite its seeming isolation, the Skellig Coast has played a **significant role in the building of Ireland as a nation** – a role that has evolved and been shaped throughout history by the forces of the Atlantic. With its shores regarded as the **cradle of Gaelic civilisation** following the landing of the Milesians in 700 BC, this rugged, coastal destination has since given rise to a **rich cultural and historical tapestry blending the aspirations and achievements of expedition, conquest and liberation.**

Signature Experiences

The *Cradle of Ireland’s Nationhood* story can be found through the following Signature Experiences:



Be Inspired by the Spirit of Human Endeavour

Bí Spreagtha ag Spiorad Iarracht Dhaonna

Come away feeling that the world is a better place after hearing the powerful stories of bravery and triumph from past leaders and liberators in their efforts to care for their community and humanity.

Hero Product:

- Follow the *story of Daniel O’Connell* from his birthplace in Cahersiveen, to the **Old Barracks** via **Valentia Island** to hear his stories and on to his home in **Doire Fhíonáin/Derrynane** at **Derrynane House & National Historic Park.**



Discover How Our Story was Shaped

Aimsigh Conas a Chuireadh Cruth ar ár Scéal

Being at the edge of the known world, the Skellig Coast has attracted intrepid adventurers for generations, each wave leaving a trace of their history in our stories, language, sports and traditions. Join the celebration of life at the Edge of the World as you immerse yourself in the rich music, Irish language and sporting traditions shaped by the land and its people over generations.

Hero Product:

- Arrive in **the Gaeltacht** following bi-lingual Wild Atlantic Way signage and learn your first words of Irish.
- Join in the *music and stories* on **Irish nights in the pub.**
- Take an *Irish language, art, music, or photography workshop* at **Baile an Sceilig/Ballinskelligs, Cill Rialaig or Tech Amergin** (existing and proposed) or attend a workshop at the famous Éigse na Brideóige.

Supporting Experiences

- Take a moment to reflect on the amazing story of The Pimpernel of the Vatican, a true ‘Humanitarian Hero’ who saved thousands of lives during WWII – **Monsignor Hugh O’Flaherty** at his grave at the **Daniel O’Connell Memorial Church** in Cahersiveen.
- Reading the **stories of national hero Daniel O’Connell**, the Liberator, an Irish political leader from the 19th century who campaigned for Catholic emancipation including the right for Catholics to sit in Westminster Parliament.
- Collecting the stories from folklore and history at the **Waterville Craft Market’s Heritage Gallery.**
- Stand at the point on the shore **where the Milesians first came ashore** in Ireland near Waterville (proposed) or hear the stories of the Bull Rock and Scariff and Deenish Islands from a local tour guide.
- Learn the Irish Language** and see how it is shaped by the landscape and history of the nation and the words that are linked directly to the Skellig Coast.
- Take a **Turf cutting tour** (proposed).
- Hear the stories of **emigration and escape from the famine**, of those that stayed behind and the businesses that supported the families and farmers at the Golden Mile or Cill Rialaig.
- Go to a game of **Gaelic football.**
- See a **regatta** or join a team for training (proposed).



The Skellig Coast Story Scéal Cósta an Sceilig

STORY 3 – A History of Global Connections

Stair Ceangail Domhanda

The **people's story is one of perseverance and tenacity** – leveraging the Skellig's coastal location to allow for connection across the Atlantic and beyond. The **lives and legends of the past** remain alive in the villages today, and have helped to develop the Skellig Coast's present day way of life, including its economy, culture, language, tradition and sport.

Signature Experiences

The *Global Connections* story can be found through the following Signature Experiences:



Make the Global Connection

Déan an Nasc Domhanda

See how today's economy is shaped by a blend of past and present ways of life connecting across the Atlantic and beyond, and learn about the important role the Skellig Coast has played throughout history.

Hero Product:

- Create an interactive experience that brings the **Transatlantic Cable Story** to life (proposed).
- Follow the story of the *Knights of Kerry* and how they influenced the fortunes of **Valentia Island** at Glanleam House & Gardens, the lighthouse at Cromwell Point, the Slate Quarry, and Knightstown.



Innovation and Trade at the Edge of the World

Nuálaíocht agus Trádáil ar Imeall an Domhain

Living at the Edge of the World is not always easy, but it has inspired many great things. Influenced by the power of the Gulf Stream, learn about the unique challenges of this environment and marvel at the stories of resilience and adaptation in industry and village life.

Hero Product:

- Get *Siopa Feirme* and *Taste Kerry* produce at top restaurants, pubs and local cafés serving local food by following the **food touring route** (proposed) and learn about our history of exports of quality produce fed by the Gulf Stream (ocean currents).

Supporting Experiences

- Create a visitor experience celebrating the birth of telecommunications at the **Transatlantic Cable Station** (proposed) linked to Hearts Content (Canada), Cornwall and other locations associated with the Transatlantic Cable Story.
- Read the **Transatlantic Cable Story** at Valentia Island Heritage Centre and meet the locals who know where you can see elements of the story on the ground.
- Hear the story and imagine seeing the fires lit at the **Signal Towers** connecting London (Bray Head, Bolus Head, Hog's Head & Lamb's Head).
- Visit one of the **network of Irish lighthouses** protecting the coast for global voyagers past and present (starting with the Lighthouse at Cromwell Point).
- Go on a **seaweed foraging tour** and learn about Irish Seaweed – where it is being exported and how it is being used.
- Visit **innovative Kerry enterprises** such as Skellig Chocolates, the Valentia Candle Maker and more.
- Walk the **Derrynane Seashore Nature Trail** (connect with the story of the Wild Plant Medicine Walk).
- Follow the **Old Butter Road** and see how pilgrims in the 18th century used to transport their goods to market.
- Share the story of the **Viking influence** on the Iveragh Peninsula at a **marine and heritage facility on or near Beginish Island**.
- Admire the view over the water and imagine pirates, traders, Vikings and monks travelling from across the globe as you enjoy the luxury of **boutique accommodation with ocean views**.

The Skellig Coast Story Scéal Cósta an Sceilig

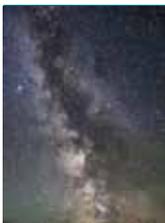
STORY 4 – Ocean Meets Sky at the Edge of the World

Buaileann Aigéan le Spéir ar Imeall an Domhain

Take some time to **connect with the land, the stars and everything in between** as you look out over the Skellig Coast, humbled by the power of the Atlantic Ocean. Its landscape, **chiselled by the force of the ocean's waves** yet gently embraced by the warmth of the Gulf Stream air, offers a **new view around every bend** and lends itself to a **bounty of plants and animals** that link back to the origins of Ireland's geological past.

Signature Experiences

The *Ocean Meets Sky at the Edge of the World* story can be found through the following Signature Experiences:



Find Nature's Window to the Past (Dark Skies) / Aimsigh Fuinneog Nádúr Chuig an Am Atá Caite (Spéartha Dorcha)

Offering some of the best celestial views with the naked eye, come and see why the Skellig Coast has been recognised as one of only three Gold Tier Dark Sky Reserves on the planet and hear about ancient legends and mythology as they come to life in the night sky.

Hero Product:

- Find a **local guide** who can help you connect the acclaimed **dark skies and local stories** of the Vikings and Milesians (proposed), visit the **Cahersiveen Planetarium** (proposed), **Fogher Cliffs observatory** (proposed) or a **mobile observatory** (proposed) or join a tour at the **Skellig Experience Centre night experience** and star show (proposed).



Feel the Power of the Edge *Mothaigh Cumhacht an Imeall*

Feel the wind in your hair and the roar of the ocean as you explore one of the many coastal trails or enjoy one of its memorable coastal activities.

Hero Product:

- **Coastal walks and lookouts** (e.g. Discovery Points).
- **Storm Season (Winter) itineraries** for the adventure seeker.



Have an Up-close Marine Encounter

Bíodh Dlúth-theagmháil Mara Agat

Whether it's admiring one of the largest fish in the world or even eating a piece of seaweed, the Skellig Coast's diverse abundance of marine life has a little something for everyone.

Hero Product:

- **Marine eco-tours** (proposed) on the Atlantic or along the **Blueways** (proposed).
- Join a tour with the **marine education centre (WEAVE)** (proposed) with international links to universities to be involved in citizen science (where everyone gets to contribute to science).

Supporting Experiences

- Water sports, snorkelling, diving, tours and beach/coastal guided walks where visitors can **learn more about the extraordinary marine environment** and the influence of the Gulf Stream.
- Visit one of the **Great Lighthouses of Ireland on Valentia Island** and learn how life on the Iveragh Peninsula has been shaped by the power of the Atlantic from the time of the Vikings.
- Enjoy the **warm waters, fishing, horse riding and links golf** on the Southern Peninsula with a much milder climate from the Gulf Stream.
- **Education centres** like the Valentia Island Heritage Centre (which has the famous marine biologist Maude Delap's collection) or the Sea Synergy Centre in Waterville provide marine education indoors.
- The **Skellig Ring Drive** with views and photo opportunities from the Discovery Points.
- See the **first footprints on land at the Tetrapod Tracks** and get your photo with a 400 million year old Tetrapod (proposed) and see its footprints not discovered until 1993!
- Visit the **Caherdaniel Observatory** and take a **solar walk** (proposed).

4

Experience Delivery Eispéireas a Chur ar Fáil



*When you customise an experience to make it just right for
an individual...you cannot help changing that individual.*

- The Experience Economy, Updated Edition, 2011

Locality Experience Summary Achoimre ar Eispéireas Dúiche

As a destination, having the ability to offer a diversity of experiences throughout the region helps to increase length of stay, visitor spend, and the dispersal of visitors within the region.

The Skellig Coast region offers a wealth of signature experiences in its various localities, as summarised in Table 2 below. The orange ticks (✓) represent a greater prevalence in the area than the black ticks (✓).

Table 2: Locality Experience Summary

Please refer to Technical Appendix 3 for more detail on each locality.

Skellig Coast Localities	SIGNATURE EXPERIENCES								
	Journeys Inspired by the Skellig Monks		The Cradle of Ireland's Nationhood		A History of Global Connections		Ocean Meets Sky at the Edge of the World		
	<i>Follow the Story of the Monks</i>	<i>Take a Pilgrimage</i>	<i>Be Inspired by the Spirit of Human Endeavour</i>	<i>Discover How Our Story was Shaped</i>	<i>Make the Global Connection</i>	<i>Innovation and Trade at the Edge of the World</i>	<i>Feel the Power of the Edge</i>	<i>Have an Up-close Marine Encounters</i>	<i>Find Nature's Window to the Past (Dark Skies)</i>
Kells & Cahersiveen		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Valentia Island	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Portmagee	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Baile 'n Sceilg & An Gleann	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓
Waterville & An Dromod	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Cathair Dónall, Doire Fhionáin & Castlecove	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓



Challenges and Opportunities Dúshláin agus Deiseanna

For the Skellig Coast to create memorable moments and to meet the needs of the target markets (i.e. those who are seeking life enriching experiences that help them to develop as a person) collaboration between agencies and aligning the trade in one tourism group (Skellig Coast Tourism Network) is required.

The way forward for the Skellig Coast is through partnerships, connectivity of the products to experiences and a focus on getting the story to the customer – inspiring them to travel off season, stay longer and enjoy the essence of the Skellig Coast. To help achieve this, **ten Catalyst Projects** have been identified, along with a range of supporting recommendations and **seven Enablers of Success (see p29)**.

The Plan recognises that visitation to the Skellig Coast is growing. While quantitative data is difficult to access for this area, feedback from businesses suggest 2016 has been the best season ever with more interest in Skellig Michael from its international exposure through Star Wars and an overall growth in visitor numbers to Ireland and County Kerry. Whilst the businesses are coping with the demand, this growing volume is creating a range of challenges, and from those, opportunities (see table below).

Note: The following ten Recommended Catalyst Projects where proposals are progressed to feasibility stage consultation with relevant interested parties will take place.

Recommended Catalyst Projects:

1. Examine the potential of improving the delivery of **the Monks Trail Walk** in Baile an Sceilg/Ballinskelligs with signage, a brochure and points of interest.
2. Renew and reopen the **Skellig Experience Centre** as both a day and night attraction.
3. Identify a **Daniel O’Connell Touring Route** linking the Old Barracks, Memorial Park, the church, his original home, Valentia Island, Portmagee and Cathair Dónall.
4. Develop **workshops for visitors to learn about the Irish language, arts, crafts and photography** which can happen off-season.
5. Create an interactive experience of the **Transatlantic Cable Story**, supporting its UNESCO World Heritage listing.
6. Examine the potential of **delivering the Greenway** from Glenbeigh to Renard.
7. Create a **food touring route map** to showcase regional produce and the history of exporting quality goods from County Kerry.
8. Deliver **Dark Skies programmes** for visitors and tour operators with the local communities.
9. Examine the potential of delivering a **Sea/Wild Atlantic Centre** that is dedicated to the sea based in Waterville and a **Marine Education and Citizen Science Facility (WEAVE)** in Cahersiveen.
10. Support the continued operation of a **marine eco-tour from Portmagee, Cahersiveen or Valentia Island** as an alternative or addition to the Skellig Boat journey.

Challenges

- Limitations on **the number of people** that can visit Skellig Michael.
- The **seasonality of** visitation, particularly the short season for visiting Skellig Michael.
- **The ‘Star Wars’ effect** attracting visitors with little connection to the rest of the Skellig Coast.
- An **overwhelming number of stories** and ideas that are not easily explained on returning home.
- **Passive engagement** in the destination, or simply skimming the surface without getting the full story.

Opportunities

- **Broaden the focus** from a visit to Skellig Michael to the story of the Monks with real alternatives to landing on the rock including on-water experiences without making a landing.
- Encouraging **activities and events that are best experienced out of peak season**.
- **Engage Star Wars’ fans in the story of the Monks** and its link to why Star Wars was filmed at the ‘edge of the world’.
- **Better organise the stories** around a few central themes to create ‘bucket list’ experiences for others.
- **Create a series of iconic journeys** that deliver deeper personal experiences.



The Way Forward An Slí ar Aghaidh

The recommendations listed on the following pages are those with the greatest potential to deliver the vision of the Visitor Experience Development Plan (VEDP). A further set of supporting recommendations are included in the Detailed Action Plan (Appendix 4). This plan does not guarantee future funding, and is designed to encourage businesses to be proactive in creating unique experiences.

Guiding Principles

To ensure the successful implementation of the Skellig Coast signature experiences, the following Guiding Principles have been established to guide certain recommendations and projects listed in this section.

- **All projects are self-sustainable**, meaning they do not solely rely on funding to be achieved or maintained.
- **All projects connect to the broader region** as they deliver benefits to more than one village in the Skellig Coast region.
- **All projects are on-message** with the Skellig Coast signature experiences and are aligned to the broader mission of the Wild Atlantic Way.
- **All projects are innovative** and set the region apart from its competitors.
- **All projects add value to the region** and provide a direct and demonstrable link to either extending visitor length of stay, extending the length of the tourist season or developing a new market.

Implementing the Plan

Implementation of the Visitor Experience Development Plan and delivery of the signature experiences requires each organisation to make a shift on how they tell their story and in selecting what projects and initiatives gain support moving forward.

The VEDP clearly identifies that each signature experience needs to do more than just ‘tell a story’. It needs to create a sense of the journey or quest involved in that story, it must provide for moments of reflection, and must inspire the customer to reflect and help them to recharge to be a true Skellig Coast signature experience.

It is then the job of each agency, product provider and business operator to embrace the signature experience and put that at the top of the list of the things we share with our customers. What that means for each organisation is:

Fáilte Ireland – will focus on working with the trade that deliver the signature experiences, and help those businesses not currently doing so to start delivering and sharing their unique story.

Tourism Ireland – should focus on telling the stories connected to the signature experiences as a priority in their marketing, social media, and publicity.

Kerry County Council, South Kerry Development Partnership, Údarás na Gaeltachta and Kerry LEO – as providers of industry development and supporters of sustainable development including new infrastructure, they need to encourage businesses, either through mentoring or group support, to embrace a signature experience and deliver it. They should also give preference to those who best deliver on the signature experiences.

Office of Public Works – as their primary responsibility includes the maintenance, ownership and upkeep of Government of Ireland buildings, they should fulfil the role of management and development of the sites.

Educators – As educators in tourism, the IT Tralee and Kerry Education & Training Board should assist tourism operators in creating and delivering signature experiences.

Local tourism groups – need to work together to share their signature experience stories with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland, and work with businesses to help them find and share their signature experience under the common themes established in the VEDP.

Individual businesses (trade) – need to find which signature experience they best deliver, deliver it to their customers and encourage their customers and the marketing agencies to share that story with the world.



Recommendations Moltaí

For the following recommendations where proposals are progressed to feasibility stage consultation with relevant interested parties will take place.

A. Journeys Inspired by the Skellig Monks

Aistir Spreagtha ag Manaigh na Sceilge

A1. Follow the Story of the Monks to the Edge of the World / Lean Scéal na Manaigh go hImeall an Domnain: Most visitors fail to realise they are driving and sailing right past the story of the Monks as they travel to and from the iconic Skellig Michael. The Island is but one chapter in the story – now the other chapters...

Recommendations

- A1.1 **CATALYST 1:** Examine the potential of **improving the delivery of the Monks Trail Walk** in Baile an Sceilg/Ballinskelligs with signage, a brochure and points of interest (e.g. viewing Ballinskelligs Abbey by walking along the shore line).
- A1.2 **CATALYST 2: Renew and reopen the Skellig Experience Centre** as both a day and night experience with the successful leasee. This could include night time activities, stone sculptures, a walking tour, a night time walking tour including the coastline alongside Illaunloughan Island, an interactive Star Wars experience and night show of the Dark Skies, a Skellig Michael stone masons project where stone masons can learn their skills and visitors can see them in action, and a Skellig Monk inspired children’s activity area.
- A1.3 Work with the OPW guides to **introduce new Skellig interpretation elements**, including (but not limited to):
- The UNESCO story (why it's listed);
 - The forgotten hermitage;
 - Building of the terrace (needs further development) – how did they exist before the beehives, how did they build everything?
 - More recent life on the Skellig: lighthouse keepers families (two families per house), teacher, Star Wars; and
 - Link to Baile an Sceilg/Ballinskelligs Abbey (currently a work site) and Monks Trail.

A2. Take a Pilgrimage (like Saint Fionán) / Tóg Oilithreacht (Cosúil le Naomh Fionán): The Kerry Way is an iconic walk and pilgrimage and is central to delivering this experience. For those unable to commit to the epic journey, shorter trips need to be offered from each of the villages and town.

The delivery of this signature experience also needs to be supported by new products such as the Greenway.

Recommendations

- A2.1 Create **Saint Fionán’s Driving Itinerary** (on map or in App) with the potential of delivering interpretation examined at key points in Kells, Valentia Island, An Gleann, An Dromod, Waterville and Doire Fhionáin/Derrynane (using existing attractions where possible).
- A2.2 Create an **interactive element on Skellig Boat cruises** with the development of commentary (translated into different languages) for those unable to land on Skellig Michael.



Recommendations Moltaí

B. The Cradle of Ireland's Nationhood

Cliabhán Náisiúntacht na hÉireann

B1. Be Inspired by the Spirit of Human Endeavour / *Bí Spreagtha ag Spiorad Iarracht Dhaonna*: While the stories of Daniel O'Connell, Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty and other local personalities have strong cultural linkages, their connection to landscape and the Irish language is missing. Each story needs to become a journey through the landscape (either a walk, a drive or an event) with moments of reflection to complement the moments of inspiration.

Recommendations

B1.1 CATALYST 3: Identify a **Daniel O'Connell Touring Route** linking the Old Barracks, Memorial Park, the church, his original home, Valentia Island, Portmagee and Cathair Dónall/Caherdaniel and use it as a template for similar routes for St Fionán and the Knights of Kerry in building itineraries. The Daniel O'Connell story also has links to Dublin and international links which could be identified in the itinerary.

B2. Discover How Our Story was Shaped / *Aimsigh Conas a Chuireadh Cruth ar Ár Scéal*: While visitors receive some fleeting glimpses of this experience, it eludes many (if not most). A methodical approach to embedding the stories in the landscape will be critical to effectively deliver this signature experience.

Recommendations

- B2.1 CATALYST 4:** Develop **workshops for visitors to learn about the Irish language, arts, crafts and photography** which can happen off-season.
- B2.2** Examine the potential of improving the delivery of **the fishing product in the Skellig Coast region** through the training of Ghillies and developing the fishing product in the area, including salt and fresh water angling.

C. A History of Global Connections *Stair Ceangail Domhanda*

C1. Make the Global Connection / *Déan an Nasc Domhanda*: Tales of epic journeys and inspiration meet moments of reflection in the minds of visitors as they relive the stories of the pioneering people of Kerry's past. The experience, however, exists mainly in the mind, with few authentic connections to the landscape and the Irish language of the Skellig Coast.

Recommendations

- C1.1 CATALYST 5:** Create a series of interactive experiences, telling the **story of the Transatlantic Cable**, supporting the UNESCO World Heritage status application and future development of the Cable Station and as the centerpiece for year-round activities to engage the visitor in the cable story (proposed). Create a visitor experience celebrating the birth of telecommunications at the Transatlantic Cable Station (proposed) linked to Hearts Content (Canada), Cornwall and other locations associated with the Transatlantic Cable Story.
- C1.2** Create a **Knights of Kerry pass** that provides access to the Valentia Island Heritage Museum, Glanleam House & Gardens, Geokaun Mountain and lighthouse experiences.

C2. Innovation and Trade at the Edge of the World / *Nuálaíocht agus Trádáil ar Imeall an Domhain*: Like an underground river, these experiences (particularly those of village life) are spoken of with great reverence and excitement, but access to this stream of cultural authenticity seems harder to achieve than it should be. Visitors need to be given all the necessary information required to engage in these activities, including how they might go about gaining a personal invitation to get involved should they wish.

Recommendations

- C2.1 CATALYST 6:** Examine the potential of **delivering the Greenway** from Glenbeigh to Renard.
- C2.2 CATALYST 7:** Creating a **food touring route map** to guide foodie's around the region linking growers, producers and restaurants that serve predominantly local produce including Farmers Markets and Siopa Feirme in Waterville and the history of exporting quality goods from County Kerry.
- C2.3** Include pub music and dance nights on the Fáilte Ireland Events listing to be promoted through the **Discover Ireland website** and in next phase of the **Wild Atlantic Way App** and on the **Skellig Coast App**.



Recommendations Moltaí

D. Ocean Meets Sky at the Edge of the World

Buaileann Aigéan le Spéir ar Imeall an Domhain

D1. Find Nature's Window to the Past (Dark Skies) / Aimsigh Fuinneog Nádúr Chuig an Am Atá Caite (Spéartha Dorcha): For many, the idea of Dark Skies is inspiring, but the opportunity to experience the feeling is missed. Small steps are needed to help guests see beyond the clouds and their current way of viewing the planets and stars, to allow them to appreciate an ancient storybook in the sky.

Recommendations

- D1.1 **CATALYST 8: Deliver Dark Skies programmes for visitors and tour operators** with the local communities, and promote them in Ireland and internationally with the support of Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland.
- D1.2 Examine the potential of **developing a of a mobile observatory in the short term and a permanent planetarium** in the longer term, and encourage the establishment of other observatories (including commercial sites), to enable night sky viewing across the region.

D2. Feel the Power of the Edge / Mothaigh Cumhacht an Imeall: This could possibly be viewed as the most successfully delivered signature experience on the Skellig Coast at present, as there are numerous products and business operators already delivering this. In order to lift this experience, the next step will be to link the landscape to the story of the people to create journeys and moments of reflection.

Recommendations

- D2.1 **Package new walks** in line with international best practice **to extend the Kerry Way concept** and to promote trails of high cultural significance such as the Kimego Forest Walk and Cnoc na dTobar.
- D2.2 Examine the potential of the sustainable development of a **network of Blueways**, both coastal and inland, including Cahersiveen to Knightstown and Portmagee.
- D2.3 In consultation with stakeholders examine the potential of the **lighthouses on Skellig Michael and at Cromwell Point** and connect the **Lighthouse families with the Knights of Kerry story** and the fishing industry of the region.

D3. Have an Up-close Marine Encounter / Biodh Dlúth-theagmháil Mara Agat: With marine encounters rapidly evolving into experiences of 'surprise and delight', new products and places are needed to further develop this experience.

Recommendations

- D3.1 **CATALYST 9:** Examine the potential of delivering a **Sea/Wild Atlantic Centre** that is dedicated to the sea based in Waterville and a **Marine Education and Citizen Science Facility (WEAVE)** in Cahersiveen.
- D3.2 **CATALYST 10:** Support the continued operation of a **marine eco-tour from Portmagee, Cahersiveen or Valentia Island** as an alternative or addition to the Skellig Boat journey (including Puffin Island and the Kerry Cliffs), and to Beginish Island and Knightstown.



Enablers of Success Cumasóirí ó Thaobh Rath

The successful development and delivery of the Skellig Coast Visitor Experience Development Plan requires the support of several ‘game changing’ initiatives and recommendations to improve the region’s tourism capacity.

This includes the development of a workbook on the principles of experience development and the Skellig Coast experience offering for tourism stakeholders.

The key Enablers of Success identified for the Skellig Coast include:

Better Connection Between Groups

At present, the Skellig Coast offering is quite fragmented, with different groups working in isolation of one another instead of as one collective team. From a visitor perspective, this causes a lack of cohesion in the overall destination experience which can result in confusion and frustration, and may make the difference between whether or not they choose to visit the region.

To ensure a clear, cohesive message is being delivered to visitors, tourism groups must come together to provide a co-ordinated approach to tourism, one that is driven by clear communication.

Enablers

- | | |
|------|---|
| E1.1 | Establish a Skellig Coast Tourism Network , made up of representatives of each of the local tourism groups working together. This group needs a set of clearly defined roles and responsibilities and terms of reference to assist in implementation of the VEDP. |
| E1.2 | Formation of an Implementation Group with representatives from the agencies and up to four representatives of SCTN to identify the ideal model to resource and implement the actions in the Skellig Coast VEDP. |
| E1.3 | Create a tourism mobile-ready website for the Skellig Coast region that aligns with the Wild Atlantic Way website style and messages and incorporates the themes and actions in the Visitor Experience Development Plan. |

Inspire and Create Confidence in Sharing Stories

To ensure the region takes a unified approach in sharing the Skellig Coast story, the development and implementation of an integrated marketing programme that is supported by capacity building and experience development programmes and tools are required. This will not only help to boost industry confidence, but will also generate destination Ambassadors that resonate with the global tourist market.

Enablers

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| E2.1 | Rollout of the Workbook and suite of hard copy training and support materials for operators to use in their everyday business operations that make it easier to get involved in sharing their piece of the Skellig Coast story. |
| E2.2 | Undertake Skellig Coast Business Support delivered by agencies to help deliver the Visitor Experience Development Plan. |
| E2.3 | Take five Skellig Coast operators to promote at overseas trade and consumer shows - ITB, Berlin in March, Star Wars Celebration 2017, USA, and to Meitheal 2017, telling the Skellig Coast Stories . |

Create a Museum in the Landscape

While linking locations for indoor interpretation, the overall focus for interpretation needs to shift to identify places in the landscape where events in history have occurred to inspire visitors. This will help to bring the Skellig Coast stories and landscape to life.

Enablers

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| E3.1 | Develop a series of themed itineraries (by market segment) including storm season itineraries and tours linking the region’s localities. |
| E3.2 | Review the Skellig Coast Map and App to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A wellness guide / section of the App with the locations of Holy Wells, Healing Points, and people that sell health food;• Gulf Stream Gardens of the Wild Atlantic;• Winter openings – who is open, where and when; and• Distances between towns, points of interest/experiences. This could be included as part of a welcome pack for the Skellig Coast region . |



Enablers of Success Cumasóirí ó Thaobh Rath

Measures of Success

As a part of implementing the framework for developing memorable visitor experiences, Fáilte Ireland has committed to pursuing the principles of Responsible Tourism as set out in the Cape Town Declaration (2002). As such, the following measures of success have been established around the four key components of Responsible Tourism, that is, a balance between visitors, industry, community and the environment. These measures are to serve as key performance indicator areas which should be reported on annually to help ensure responsible and sustainable tourism growth is achieved in the Skellig Coast region.

Performance Indicator	Measure	Source
Visitors		
Increase average length of stay	Visitor Nights, Numbers	FI Statistics
Improve brand /proposition awareness	Website Traffic	Google Analytics
Improve visitor satisfaction	Visitor Satisfaction Survey	Holiday Maker Survey
Extend the length of the season	Off-peak Visitation	FI Statistics
Increase visitor take-up of key messages	Use of Hashtags	Social Media
Industry		
Increase visitor expenditure	Visitor Spend	FI Statistics
Increase tourism related jobs	Number Employed in Tourism Related Sectors	Central Statistics Office
Increase industry take-up of key messages	Use of Hashtags	Social Media
Community		
Improve community perceptions of tourism	Community Survey	To be Designed
Community Association involvement in Tourism Committees	Local Tourism Committees with Community Representation	Tourism Committee Reports
Increase community involvement	Event Participation	Event Organisers
Environment		
Effective management of the environment, including natural, cultural and heritage assets	Environmental Impacts of Key Sites	CAAS Environmental Monitoring
Trade adoption of the principles of <i>Leave No Trace</i>	Number of Trade Adopted	Trade Websites





Photograph by @storytravelers

“People will forget what you said, they will forget what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel”

“Déanfaidh daoine dearmad ar cad a dúirt tú, déanfaidh siad dearmad ar cad a rinne tú, ach ní dhéanfaidh siad dearmad riamh ar chonas a mhothaigh siad de bharr tusa.”

- Maya Angelou



Fáilte Ireland
National Tourism Development Authority

