



Benbulbin, Sligo

2.12 Tourism, Arts and Culture

2.12.1 Analysis

The location of Sligo City, in an area of outstanding beauty, favours well for tourism. Benbulbin and Knocknarea, north and west of the city, respectively, provide a magnificent backdrop to the city that is bound by the sea to the west and the shores of Lough Gill to the east. Its position as a 'gateway' on the main touring route between the west and the north west plus the variety and the distribution of resources which the city, its environs and the county has to offer in terms of coastal, urban, cultural and upland interests means that it is ideally positioned in terms of tourism. Culturally, Sligo's association with traditional Irish music, archaeology and the Yeat's family connection to painting and literature, favours well for tourism development.

A total of 205,000 tourists visited Sligo County in 2000, which was a third of all tourists that visited the northwest. A total of 52.05 million Euro was generated in Sligo from overseas tourists in that year. Tourism numbers in the north west region have reduced by 6000 between 1999 and 2000, but tourism revenue has steadily risen since 1996 and increased by 26.4 million Euro between 1999 -2000. However, there are some indications that the city has not capitalised on its full tourism potential, despite the fact that it performs well when compared to other counties in the North-West Region³⁶.

Lough Gill offers significant tourism potential. There is an excursion cruise service operated daily during the peak tourist season between Doorly Park landing stage and Inishfree. The most important water based activities appear to be fishing (shore and boat) and pleasure boating, though there are no formal facilities for shore fishing (fishing stands) and also the extent and availability of boats for hire (fishing and pleasure boating) is limited. The incidence of shallows tends to favour the use of small shallow draft boats especially rowing boats, though the lake offers the potential as a sailing area. There is limited use of the lake for swimming.

The city and environs lack an image or theme in terms of tourism promotion despite its appeal. There is also a lack of opportunity for visitors to spend money in the city and environs, outside of the obvious domain of pubs, accommodation and restaurants. Although the city does have some good eating establishments and restaurants, in general there appears to be a need for a greater diversity and an improvement in quality. Some restaurant locations tend to be discreetly located on the upper floors of buildings and while this is good for the vitality of the city centre, their overall impact and visibility is not as obvious or prominent to the visitor or tourist as a ground floor use where their contribution to the ambience of the city centre in the evening time would be greater. Streets that could be considered for restaurants and café culture include Rockwood Parade and Market Street.



Lough Gill, Sligo

The development of a number of attractions in the area of arts and culture have reinforced Sligo's role in the area of tourism over recent years. These include the Model Arts and Niland Gallery Centre (housing the works of Jack B. Yeats and contemporary artists), the refurbishment of the Yeats Building, and the refurbishment of the 'Factory Performance Space' to complement the Hawk's Well Theatre (with workshop space provision). Future developments over the period of the plan include the provision of new buildings to house the County Library and the County Museum.

Festivals, whether of a comedy, music, arts, etc. theme, can add significantly to the image of a place, providing a significant draw for visitors and tourists. At present Sligo is host to the International Choral Festival and the local Feiseanna. As such festivals are an important ingredient in establishing the city's cultural reputation, both nationally and internationally, and they will be supported by the local authority where resources permit.

³⁶ North West Tourism region consists of the following counties: Sligo, Donegal, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan.

2.12.2 Policies

It is the policy of the local authorities to:

- Ensure that future development of tourism is carried out in a sensitive and sustainable manner.
- Promote the Abbey as a key tourist attraction in the city and examine opportunities to open up views, vistas and physical connections between it and the river.
- Promote the development of specialist tourist shops, including arts and crafts along Abbey Street and in particular as a ground floor use immediately opposite the Abbey.
- To improve the signposting of scenic routes, walks, riverside trails, historic and archaeological heritage features in an attractive and well designed manner.
- Promote the development of high quality camping and caravanning facilities to the east of the city in a suitable location in the vicinity of Lough Gill, where sheltered cooking/picnic areas could be provided, with the availability of water, electricity, showers and other services, so as to offer a diversified accommodation base for tourists in attractive locations close to Sligo centre.
- Promote the development of eco-tourism and other leisure activities in the environs of Sligo, outside the proposed urban edge (development limit boundary), such as equestrian centres, outdoor recreational centres, bird-watching, boat clubs and canoe rental.
- Support and promote, with the co-operation of private landowners, public access to heritage sites and features of archaeological interest.
- Control the use of jet-skis and other high speed crafts and powerboats on Lough Gill and the Garvogue River, in the interest of nesting wildfowl and so as to maintain the tranquillity associated with the area.
- Promote the development of interpretative signs and information boards at important sites of archaeological interest, heritage and nature conservation.
- Work with North West Tourism and The Arts Council and other relevant bodies to promote and develop the arts and tourism sector in Sligo.
- Explore the potential promotion of the city's churches and graveyards as historical elements of interest to tourists.
- Support the provision of workshop space for artists in suitable buildings.
- Examine the feasibility of providing a satellite tourist office on the major approach roads to Sligo City so as to assist with information on inner city parking, local maps and essential facilities.

2.12.3 Objectives

It is an objective of the local authorities to:

- TO1** Provide a slipway (approx. 4 metres wide) and associated car parking facilities (10-15 spaces) in the vicinity of the Garvogue River/Doorly Park/Cleveragh.
- TO2** Explore the provision of fishing stands on the shores of Lough Gill, so as to enhance the attraction of shore and bank fishing for anglers.
- TO3** Explore the possible provision of a heritage trail in the city and environs that might include such features as the St. John's Cathedral, the Courthouse, City Hall, Old Market Street³⁷, the Abbey, Forthill, the Famine Graveyard and the archaeological features of Carrowroe and its vicinity.
- TO4** Provide a pedestrian trail along the north and south banks of the Garvogue and Lough Gill as part of an overall linear park system.
- TO5** Promote the development of a venue building and/or concert hall that could be used for a variety of live entertainment, music concerts, recitals, drama,

³⁷ Old Market Street – ‘Origin of all Irish-American Emigration’. In 1846, an advert placed in this street advertised the departure of a ship from Sligo Port bound for America. This marked the start of the great exodus from Ireland's shores during the potato famine. By the following year, over 13,000 people sailed from the Port of Sligo. It may be appropriate to position some memorial along this street to mark this event or to move the existing famine memorial to this area (i.e., the traffic island at foot of High Street).

comedy and dance, including events such as the Sligo Choral Festival. The development of such a facility could be provided as part of a public-private partnership project.

- TO6** Develop a new tourist office on the site of the proposed new civic square for the intersection of Wine Street-Adelaide Street-Edward Street. This would provide information to visitors and tourists as they arrive to the city (from the proposed transport interchange) on tours, walks, hotels and accommodation, etc.
- TO7** Improve and enhance access to Carrowmore Passage Tomb Cemetery by means of road improvements and co-ordinated signage from city centre and main approaches.

