Rural Tourism In Ireland

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Irish Economy: Excellent Performance since mid 1990s-Unemployment now 4.1% and very sound public finances.

Situation was not always so good. In 1991 Unemployment rate of 15.6% and very poor public finance position. Ireland’s GDP per capita was 75.7% of EU Average in 1991-110% by 1999
The Tourism Context

- Overseas Visitors of 1.95 million in 1985 but now 6.8 million. Annual growth rate of arrivals 6.4%.
- Real Revenue has grown by an annualised rate in real terms of 6.2% from 1985-2005.
- Overseas Revenue of 4.8 billion Euro today.
What Has Helped the Tourism Performance?

1. Good Governance of the Macroeconomy.
3. EU funds for Product Development
Rural Tourism: Background

1. Long Term Decline of Agriculture was a catalyst for a focus on rural tourism as a means of stimulating employment in 1980s.
2. Community Groups came together out of desperation.
3. Tourism seen to have low entry barriers at some levels (B+Bs), family labour, female employment, small capital investments required.
No Clear Strategy

1. Availability of Funding drove many early programmes-little evidence of clear targets.
2. EU Leader 1 was project driven-provided funding for indigenous micro projects which created much needed local employment.
3. Leader 2 more about capacity building in communities.
A Myriad of Bodies and Agencies Involved.

1. Leader Groups
2. County Enterprise Boards
3. National and Local Tourist Boards’
4. International Fund for Ireland
5. Training Authorities
How Were Projects Funded?

1. Grants through the Operational Programmes for Tourism.
3. Capital Allowances-allowed write offs against tax-usually for investment in accommodation over a seven year period.
Impacts

1. Some good accommodation and agri-tourism niche products established.
2. Some good co-operative marketing ventures established.
3. Employment growth not important in national terms but very important in local areas.
Lessons

1. Too much investment in hardware and not enough on training of people about tourism. A build it and they will come mentality.

2. Too little investment in product outside of accommodation.

3. Need to have “honest brokers” who can harness community skills and develop a business approach to tourism. You need professional outside help.

4. Too often only the big players got access to grants or could avail of tax schemes.
5. New uses of technology need to be embraced. Often the small groups lack basic expertise of using a computer-training is needed.

6. Domestic tourism potential was often neglected.

7. Need to streamline agencies involved to avoid duplication of effort and waste of resources.
8. Targets must be set for evaluation and they must be realistic.
Some Good Examples

1. Fuschia Brand - Local network of food producers linked to accommodation providers in West Cork.

2. Ballyhoura Failte - Long history of community and tourism development in County Limerick.

3. Rent an Irish Cottage begun in late 1960s and still exists today close to Shannon Airport.