



Visitor Experiences and Attractions Sector Anticipating Recovery in 2022 After Two Years of Losses

- **The Visitor Attractions and Experience sector down 70% since 2019, with Dublin suffering a drop of 80%**
- **AVEA welcomes additional Government supports in Budget 2022 to assist businesses through winter as they look towards recovery of inbound tourism in summer 2022**
- **Sustainable recovery will underpin the long-term future of the sector**

18th October: Delegates at the Association of Visitor Experiences and Attractions (AVEA) annual conference, broadcast virtually from the Guinness Storehouse this afternoon, heard that the Visitor Attractions sector looks forward to recovery next year following the Covid-19 pandemic, but that Government supports will be still needed into 2022 to assist the sector.

The theme of the conference for 2021, *'Rethinking the Future – Towards Sustainable Recovery'*, was officially opened by Minister Catherine Martin TD, Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, the Gaeltacht, Sports & Media. The Conference of over 500 online delegates, representing the VEA and Tourism sector, also heard from keynote speaker David Harland, CEO of the Eden Project in Cornwall, as well as a host of other leaders in the sector and from the tourism industry in Ireland and abroad.

In 2019, the estimated economic contribution of AVEA members to the Irish economy was €501 million, with a total of 25.3 million visitors. AVEA members, who employ 4,500 people across Ireland, suffered a 70% reduction in visitor numbers across 2020 and 2021 compared to 2019 levels, with a drop of 80% for Dublin based Attractions. The Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC) has forecasted that it may be 2024 or 2025 before the tourism sector returns to 2019 pre-pandemic business levels.

Despite the obstacles faced by the VEA sector due to restrictions around capacity and a significant downturn in international travel, the operators of visitor experiences and attractions remain optimistic about the viability of their businesses and opportunities in 2022. A recent survey of AVEA members, found that the majority of operators anticipate returning to between 40% and 60% of 2019 business levels for the 2022 summer season.

Minister Catherine Martin TD, Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, the Gaeltacht, Sports & Media said, "The visitor experience and attractions sector is an indispensable part of our national tourism offering, stimulating demand, creating and sustaining jobs, and delivering an economic return both locally and nationally. It is also a motivating factor for international tourists to visit Ireland. I am pleased to be at the AVEA conference to hear some thoughts on how we can begin to rebuild such a critical sector in a sustainable, innovative and more resilient way.

"In Budget 2022, I secured a record level of funding for tourism, some 31% extra next year. This will help to address survival concerns in the sector. I have also provided for continued high levels of investment in Fáilte Ireland's Tourism Capital Programme so that we can continue to build our national tourism offering, international competitiveness and appeal as a tourism destination.

“The new National Development Plan provides for exciting new and enhanced attractions through investment in tourism product development, including through Platforms for Growth – Fáilte Ireland’s investment strategy – to target projects that have the greatest potential to grow and foster sustainable tourism.

“Our tourism sector has been devastated by the pandemic but we now have the opportunity to rebuild a truly sustainable tourism offering that is positive and beneficial for local communities and tourists. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic we will seek to reshape our tourism sector to ensure that it is sustainable from an economic, social and environmental perspective.”

In his address to delegates, **Sean Connick, Chairman of AVEA and CEO of the Dunbrody Famine Ship**, said, “Covid-19 has provided a challenge like no other and, while the VEA sector is not out of the woods yet, we do see a clear path to recovery ahead. We are thankful of the support we have received from the Government and Minister Martin over the past 18 months, and the supports delivered in the Budget will continue to be needed into 2022. Visitor Attractions are key tourism demand drivers to the island of Ireland and to regional destinations. Our members provide the essential components of ‘things to see and do’ that create the magical memories of a holiday experience and make them want to return. This is evidenced in Failte Ireland’s TEPS¹ 2019 survey where 89% of visitors rated having a variety of ‘things to see and do’ as a primary reason in choosing Ireland for their holiday.”

Speaking at the Conference, **David Harland, Chief Executive of the Eden Project**, told attendees how delivering on sustainability can provide the sector with a competitive advantage and play a key role in helping to energise the recovery of the industry in the years ahead. “Our sustainable tourism journey at the Eden Project in Cornwall, worldwide and in 2023, Foyle in Derry, has been many years in the making. But there are lessons which visitor attractions in Ireland can easily learn from and implement as part of the journey towards full recovery. Through exhibits, events, cultural programmes, education, and community initiatives, Eden has become more than a destination and welcomes almost a million visitors annually.

He continued, “In particular, with an eye on world leaders gathering at COP26, we will focus on how visitor attractions and experiences can be part of the change that we need, ultimately as part of their business revival and by creating places and projects to excite and engage communities, as well as reminding everyone that we are a part of the living world not apart from it.”

ENDS

For Further Information

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Notes to Editor:

Sean Connick, Chairman of AVEA and CEO of the Dunbrody Famine Ship and David Harland, Chief Executive of the Eden Project Cornwall are available for interview

Images from AVEA Conference to be issued to photodesks

About AVEA

¹ Failte Ireland Tourism Experience Ports Survey (TEPS) 2019

AVEA – Association of Visitor Experience and Attractions - is the national body representing the Visitor Attractions Sector of the Tourism Industry. AVEA represents and provides advocacy for members to Government, tourism agencies, media and the tourism industry. Networking amongst the members is central to the association's objectives to enable the organisation to provide supports in training, benchmarking and advocacy initiatives to assist our members continually improve the visitor experience.

www.avea.ie