



Case Study

EPIC – The Irish Emigration Museum



Ireland's Experience Economy

More than meets the eye

What is the Experience Economy?

The Experience Economy consists of businesses and a workforce that operate across multiple sectors in Ireland as well as encompassing organisations in the arts, cultural, sporting and heritage sectors, it includes hospitality, retail, travel, food and drink, tourism, attractions and venues, entertainment, events and activity providers.

Ireland's Experience Economy contributes €4 billion annually to the Irish economy and employs over 300,000 people. Ibec is leading a campaign to educate all stakeholders about the reach and value of the Experience Economy.

Our campaign *More than meets the eye* seeks to highlight not only the “front of house” sector itself but also the vast array of services and industries that support hospitality, leisure, tourism and entertainment sectors in Ireland, and thereby make the case for better focus on the status of the Experience Economy and its wider ecosystem.

The Experience Economy and its supply chain, touches not only on more developed economic environments but also the “hard to reach” yet critical parts of the economy and society in Ireland, including regional/rural areas with limited economic opportunities, small businesses, and economically disadvantaged groups (e.g. young people).

This case study illustrates the ecosystem of the Experience Economy.



EPIC – The Irish Emigration Museum

Visitor attractions are a key component of the Experience Economy in Ireland, which provide experiences for millions of people every year, including visitors to Ireland and Irish residents.

Background

In 2022, there were nearly 20 mn visits made to Ireland’s visitor attractions (as reported to Fáilte Ireland, the State tourism development authority), and close to 14 mn of these visits were to fee-paying attractions. And on an individual site basis, visitor numbers can range from just a few thousand visits up to more than 1 mn visits (e.g. for Dublin Zoo, the Cliffs of Moher, or the Guinness Storehouse).

In total, there are close to 500 visitor attractions registered with Fáilte Ireland, with historic sites comprising the largest sub-category of attractions, followed by museums and galleries. Museums and galleries are a key element of the visitor attraction stock in Dublin, where they account for 38% of all visitor attractions, and a relatively recent addition to the stock in Dublin is EPIC – The Irish Emigration Museum, situated in the Dublin Docklands area. EPIC is a privately-owned attraction, founded by Neville Isdell, a former Coca-Cola CEO. An Irish emigrant, he purchased the Custom House Quay [CHQ] Building in the Dublin Docklands in 2013, and opened EPIC there in 2016, with the intention of providing a dedicated museum experience that tells the story of Irish emigration, and the impact of the Irish diaspora, around the world.

Current Activities and Scale

The core of the EPIC museum experience seeks to illustrate the story of approximately 10 mn Irish emigrants (and an estimated global Irish diaspora of 80 mn people), and how they influenced the world, in a way that is alive and attractively presented. The museum experience is therefore spread across 20

galleries, beginning with the experience of different Irish emigrants as they leave Ireland and enter new countries, before going on to portray the impact and influence of Irish emigrants and their descendants throughout history. While the early galleries cover the historical context for Irish emigration, why they left and the journeys undertaken, the story then progresses to describe how the Irish settled abroad, maintained their cultural identity, and began to make their mark in new surroundings. Galleries incorporate themes of Irish success and influence across different spheres (e.g. music and dance, sport, science, or the arts), while there are also galleries covering communication, the global Irish network and The Famine. Other galleries explore returning to Ireland and the global influence of the Irish diaspora today, while the experience concludes

by encouraging reflection on the museum journey that the visitor has undertaken.

Crucially, however, the EPIC museum experience is very much a digital experience. Digital presentation and interaction lie at the core of the museum presentation, and it uses a panoply of technological displays that are intended to provide an immersive and interactive journey through the history of Irish emigration for visitors. Indeed, EPIC can be considered “ahead of the curve” in this regard and is now promoted as one of the world’s first fully digital museums. Unlike more traditional museums, EPIC also largely avoids the high cost of conservation and the costs associated with off-site storage of artefacts, as it stores data rather than objects, and as a non-profit museum that channels surpluses into re-investment, this enhances the museum’s ability to further invest in innovation, updating and re-development in its experience presentation.

By 2019, visitor numbers at EPIC were at more than 240,000, with about 70% of visitors typically coming from overseas and 30% coming from the island of Ireland each year. While it was adversely affected by the restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, however, visitors rebounded to 264,000 in 2022, a near 13% increase on 2019, which cemented EPIC’s place among the top 20 of Ireland’s fee-paying visitor attractions. The digital nature of the experience, and the capacity to re-imagine and re-invest in the experience, is considered critical to this visitor growth, while investment in marketing has also been cited as a key element in driving increased visits. In addition, temporary exhibitions (which are often developed alongside key external partners) are considered important,



and recent examples of such exhibitions include:

- > “Her Story”, the museum’s first themed temporary exhibition in 2018, which was launched in conjunction with “Herstory: Ireland’s Epic Women”, a six-part RTÉ documentary;
- > “Entangled Islands”, part of an ongoing partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs as part of its Global Ireland Initiative, which explores Ireland’s influence on the Caribbean (and which will be exhibited several overseas embassies in 2024); and
- > “They Gave the Walls a Talking”, a collaboration with Hot Press Magazine, which pays tribute to the music of The Pogues and the late Shane McGowan.

Importance to the Local or Regional Economy

In addition to its core attraction as a digital museum, EPIC offers four versatile event spaces – the Galleria, the Liffey Corner, the Mall and the Annie Moore Room, where upwards of 900 people can be hosted for stand-up events or 650 people for seated events. EPIC also hosts product launches, brand activation events and award ceremonies, and is conveniently located close to Convention Centre Dublin (CCD) for spin off-meetings.

Where possible, EPIC works with small, independent, locally sourced farmers and suppliers for their events and retail offerings (shop and café). This is also one of many initiatives aimed at improving sustainability within the business, a core value at EPIC, which is regarded as “ensuring the flourishing of our people,



places and things, now and in the future”. To this end, a Sustainability Working Group meets monthly to drive implementation of EPIC’s action plan in the area.

Five key action areas guide their strategy for sustainability, and these are to:

- > reduce, reuse and recycle;
- > work with tenants to reduce food waste within CHQ;
- > reduce single use plastics across the organisation, with the goal of eliminating them completely;
- > reduce carbon footprint per visitor; and
- > follow-up and communicate key activities both internally and externally.

Additional sustainability initiatives outside of these areas include: support for employees to upskill in the area of sustainability; championing local small businesses to reduce adverse supply chain impacts; quarterly energy audits; and digitalisation of all human resources processes. EPIC is also a member of Sustainable Travel Ireland, and the Sustainability Working Group uses monthly key performance indicators to constantly monitor the museum’s carbon footprint, and benchmark against other visitor attractions via Fáilte Ireland channels.

Lastly, EPIC works closely with the wider Dublin Docklands tourism sector, particularly The Irish Family History Centre and the Jeanie Johnston famine ship, and EPIC is also the end point of a Famine Trail, which commences at the National Famine Museum in Strokestown, Co. Roscommon.

Business Outlook

Closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic was a potentially devastating blow for EPIC, but Government supports during that period were crucial, and the museum has recovered well from its impact.



The post-Covid recovery of the Irish visitor attractions sector has been mixed across the different sub-sectors, for example, with outdoor attractions (e.g. gardens and natural attractions) recovering towards or even exceeding 2019 attendances, but with museums and galleries recovery being more variable. Nationally, overall numbers at visitor attractions in 2022 were at 85% of 2019 numbers, while Ireland’s top attraction in 2019 (Guinness Storehouse) saw visits fall from 1.7 mn in that year to 1.1 mn in 2022.

As noted earlier, however, visitors to EPIC in 2022 were some 264,000, or about 13% higher than in 2019, bucking the post-Covid decline experienced by museums and indoor attractions in general. Furthermore, EPIC has an ambitious target to reach 500,000 visitors by 2026, and the prospects of reaching this target appear positive, with early estimates for 2023 suggesting overall visits of about 357,000 (a 35% growth on 2022), plus a projected target of 412,000 visits for 2024.

In recent years, Government support from Fáilte Ireland (e.g. through the “Digital That Delivers” Scheme, to improve online booking software) and from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (e.g. through the Night Time Economy Support Scheme, which facilitated late opening in winter months) has been very helpful to EPIC. More widely, however, EPIC’s operators would welcome a more focused tourism brief at Government level as well as further support to help address skills shortages through access to non-EEA markets (e.g. through visas).

About Ibec

Ibec is Ireland's largest lobby group and business representative. We campaign for real changes to the policies that matter most to business. Policy is shaped by our diverse membership, who are home grown, multinational, big and small and employ 70% of the private sector workforce in Ireland.

With 39 trade associations covering a range of industry sectors, 6 offices around Ireland as well as an office in Brussels. With over 300 employees, Ibec communicates the Irish business voice to key stakeholders at home and abroad. Ibec also provides a wide range of professional services and management training to members on all aspects of human resource management, occupational health and safety, employee relations and employment law.



Ibec Trade Associations

Representing your industry

Representing your industry Ibec understands that every business is different. There are the general issues which face all businesses operating in Ireland and then there are the issues specific to individual sectors or categories of the economy. To reflect the distinct interests of all our members, there are 39 business associations within the Ibec group. Ibec's trade associations identify and champion issues of importance to their respective members and provide great knowledge sharing, networking, and training for all these industries.

Ibec's trade associations are strong brands in their own right and those that represent the Experience Economy include:

- Ibec Networks
- Retail Ireland
- Food Drink Ireland
- Drinks Ireland
- Irish Whiskey Association
- Dairy Industry Ireland
- Meat Industry Ireland
- Technology Ireland
- Telecommunications Industry Ireland
- Audiovisual Ireland
- Travel, Leisure & Hospitality Network
- Supply Chain Network
- Small Firms Association

#YourExperienceEconomy

#MoreThanMeetsTheEye

**[www.ibec.ie/influencing-for-business/
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Ibec Offices

Ibec Head Office

84/86 Lower Baggot Street,
Dublin 2.
T: +353 1 605 1500
E: membership@ibec.ie

Galway Offices

Ross House,
Victoria Place,
Galway.
T: +353 91 561109
E: galway@ibec.ie
www.ibec.ie/west

Cork Offices

Second Floor,
Penrose One,
Penrose Dock,
Cork.
T: + 353 21 4295511
E: cork@ibec.ie
www.ibec.ie/cork

Limerick Offices

Gardner House,
Bank Place,
Charlotte Quay,
Limerick.
T: + 353 61 410411
E: midwest@ibec.ie
www.ibec.ie/midwest

Donegal Offices

3rd Floor,
Pier One,
Quay Street,
Donegal Town,
Donegal.
T: + 353 74 9722474
E: northwest@ibec.ie
www.ibec.ie/northwest

Waterford Offices

Waterford Business Park,
Cork Road,
Waterford.
T: + 353 51 331260
E: southeast@ibec.ie
www.ibec.ie/southeast

Brussels Offices

Avenue de Cortenburgh 100,
1000 Brussels,
Belgium.
T: +32 (0)2 740 14 30
E: europe@ibec.ie
www.ibec.ie/europe

Web
www.ibec.ie

Twitter
[@ibec](https://twitter.com/ibec)