



# Growing craft-based tourism in Northern Ireland

## Creative and cultural tourism – the opportunity

Craft and tourism are building a relationship and it's a growing one. Both industries are developing rapidly in Northern Ireland and increasing synergies between them are providing new and attractive opportunities for visitors, designer-makers and service providers. Research shows that more people are looking for authentic experiences and want to engage with local communities as well as, or instead of, being passive consumers of cultural experiences provided in the destination.

The craft industry provides a base for creative and cultural tourism development which has been recognised by tourism agencies, local authorities and cultural sector lead bodies. Expectations are high and significant prospects lie ahead.



**northernireland**  
tourist board

*'Creative Tourism' is considered to be a new generation of tourism... the first generation was 'beach tourism', in which people travelled to a place for relaxation and leisure; the second was 'cultural tourism', oriented towards museums and cultural tours. 'Creative Tourism' involves more interaction, in which the visitor has an educational, emotional, social and participative interaction with the place, its living culture, and the people who live there.*

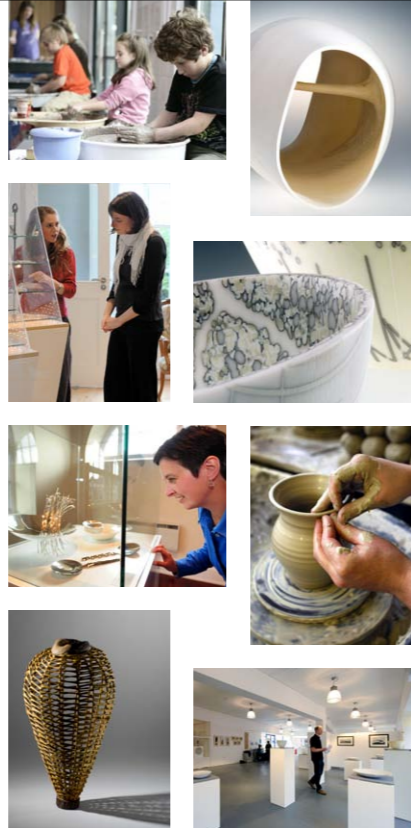
*Towards Sustainable Strategies for Creative Tourism; 2008 International Conference on Creative Tourism, Santa Fe.*

*'The foundations of success depend on the people of Northern Ireland. They need to be proud of where they live, be enthusiastic about sharing it with visitors and passionate about making it a better place. Marrying this energy with government commitment will give Northern Ireland a truly sustainable tourism industry'*

*Draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020*

*'The development work on recent projects is now coming to fruition and the Signature Projects will open and start attracting new visitors to Northern Ireland in the next few years. The collective effect of these investments will reach a 'tipping point' in 2012 when a critical mass of attractions will represent a genuinely new experience that must be capitalised on.'*

*Draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020*



## Strategic context

Converging government directives for tourism and the creative industries have produced a favourable context for future collaboration and growth. With particular reference to cultural tourism, DCAL, DETI and DEL; NITB, Invest NI and Arts Council NI, separately and collectively are working towards the enhancement of the visitor experience and the strengthening of the infrastructure which will make this a reality. The long term development of Northern Ireland's tourism strategy is set to usher in a wave of new possibilities. The craft sector is well positioned to tap into the potential of this growth.



## A growing craft infrastructure

Around 400 Northern Ireland-based craft businesses already generate significant export sales and cater to international and domestic tourists. The network of craft and arts centres, high quality sales outlets and regionally-spread small businesses offer increasing visibility for craft designer-makers with the potential for both direct and online sales.

UK market research shows that the craft industry has the potential to grow by 60% with a projected customer base of 4.4 million in addition to the 6.9 million who already buy craft. In Northern Ireland, the sector contributed £39.2M GVA in 2008-09 to the local economy with key impacts in the cultural economy, tourism and sustainable rural communities.

## Partnership with tourism

The Draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 highlights the need to attract more visitors and encourage repeat visits. As selling on price alone becomes increasingly challenging, the need to create products and services which deliver value for money through their distinctiveness and quality is a priority.

As the focus of tourism shifts towards emphasising the everyday, intangible culture of Northern Ireland - its sense of people and place - as part of its unique identity, the potential to link craft and tourism strengthens further. Tourists can provide new markets for craft producers, and in turn a vibrant craft scene can add attraction, activity and animation to tourist destinations. The craft sector can assist in the delivery of NITB's 'Signature Projects' by creating craft experiences and products at sales points, within short break formats, activity holidays and cultural and heritage tourism.

## Craft can help to 'sell' Northern Ireland

NITB is supporting the development of quality products, services and experiences within a competitive marketplace. The 400 craft producers in Northern Ireland represent a dynamic, highly skilled sector of the economy with the potential to contribute to this development and to the wider economy as well as boosting the export earnings of their businesses. Craft producers can expand their markets while adding value to the tourism product.

## Sightseers and culture seekers

Tourism Ireland research identifies 'Sightseers and Culture Seekers' as the best prospect for growing overseas business to Northern Ireland and estimates a pool of 44 million such people in the top four markets for travel to Northern Ireland. This important group:

- tends to spend more than the average visitor
- is more likely to stay in paid accommodation
- enjoys visiting multiple areas across the island
- is more likely to bring their own car or hire one
- has the strongest interest in visiting the island of Ireland

## Creative tourism

The creative tourist is keen to get to know a culture from the inside, meet 'real' people and experience their everyday lives; learning a craft or skill directly from local producers is an effective way of achieving this. Creative tourism can encourage cross-cultural understanding and provide business opportunities for craft designer-makers and artists with wider benefit for local restaurants, hotels and other service providers.

Active involvement in creativity makes a deep impression on tourists, encourages them to stay longer in the destination and offers the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with the local community, enhancing the likelihood they will return.

Creativity as part of the tourism offering:

- creates 'atmosphere'
- feeds on people's need for self-development
- creates a direct link between the culture of the tourist and the host population
- can refresh existing tourism products

The craft sector can be a key driver and contributor to the development of creative tourism in Northern Ireland.

## Meeting the needs of the creative tourist

Different types of experiences contribute to the visitor experience:

- Learn to** Workshops
- Tasting** Experiences such as open ateliers / studios
- Seeing** Itineraries and craft trails
- Buying** Linking to specialist outlets, shops, galleries

## Developing the product

In collaboration with NITB, local authorities, the cultural sector and other providers, the craft industry has been developing its interface with tourists.

### August Craft Month

For August Craft Month, Craft NI has joined forces with the tourism industry, cultural partners and more than 50 venues to maximise tourist opportunities for designer-makers throughout the region. This highly successful collaborative partnership between the arts, culture and tourism builds on the important role that craft businesses, galleries, studios and shops play in making Northern Ireland an attractive place to holiday.

### Creative Peninsula

Ards Creative Peninsula, incorporating Arts Crafts, was established in 1995 by Arts Borough Council as a showcase for local craft. The 'Quest for Creativity' initiative encourages visitors to enjoy a self-guided journey to craft studios and public artwork in the Ards Borough area.

## Developing the commercial opportunity

### Making craft more accessible

The predominantly rural location of craft businesses provides an opportunity for developing new tourist products across Northern Ireland as a whole. The main challenge lies in making craft producers and activities visible and accessible to visitors. In addressing the needs of the visitor, Craft NI will encourage and support makers to:

- reduce the distance to markets by further development of workshop visits, studio trails and retail opportunities
- make craft more available through improved marketing, display and purchase opportunities at tourist attractions, craft shops and other outlets
- get closer to the tourist 'market place' with craft demonstrations and displays at tourist attractions, inclusion of workshop and studio visits on tour itineraries
- maintain and increase quality and desirability of craft product based on better understanding of customer needs, to produce authentic gifts and objects - contemporary souvenirs - that are original to the locale and the region
- reinforce Northern Ireland branding by strengthening the indigenous / local authenticity of the product - continuously reminding the buyer of where it was purchased
- encourage creative and cultural engagement through workshops and masterclasses to meet tourist demand for hands-on experiences and encourage higher tourism expenditure.



## See – Make – Buy

A wide range of outlets – galleries, shops, studios and arts centres, provide opportunities to see, make and buy craft throughout Northern Ireland. Tourists can visit sales outlets, makers' studios, attend workshops and generally experience craft in a local environment.

A full range of opportunities and a Craft Map of Northern Ireland is available online at [www.craftni.org](http://www.craftni.org).

## Future partnerships

In delivering benefits to the Northern Ireland economy through tourism and craft businesses, Craft NI and the craft sector will continue to develop effective working partnerships with:

Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland linking into strategies and funding support

Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Invest NI accessing support for creative industry development

Local authorities supporting local product development, marketing and visitor servicing

Culture and Heritage sectors integrating products and services to enhance the visitor experience

Private sector working with hospitality, food and other service providers in growing the tourist economy.



Craft NI  
Cotton Court  
Waring Street  
Belfast  
BT1 2ED

[www.craftni.org](http://www.craftni.org)