

## Irish Tourism Industry Awards - PRESS RELEASE

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**Friday 1 February 23:59**

## **Airline CEO Willie Walsh honoured by Irish tourism industry with Special Recognition Award at 2019 Irish Tourism Industry Awards**

*Aer Lingus, Cliffs of Moher and St. Patrick's Festival among winners at the Irish Tourism Awards*

**February 2019:** Airline CEO, Willie Walsh was honoured at the Irish Tourism Industry Awards receiving the 2019 Special Recognition Award for his contribution to Irish tourism. The Awards, organised by the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC), Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland, gathered the 'crème de la crème' of the Irish tourism industry, announcing 15 winning companies as best in their category from 75 shortlisted finalists.

The event encourages, recognises and celebrates excellence in the tourism sector which reflected in a record number of entries across Ireland. Presenter, Kathryn Thomas hosted the gala evening, which took place in Dublin at the Clayton Hotel Burlington Road and was attended by Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Shane Ross TD, who presented the awards.

Speaking at the event, Minister Shane Ross said: "I am delighted to acknowledge the hard work and success of all companies at this evening's event. Our successful tourism figures go hand-in-hand with the quality of the Irish tourism and hospitality industry. I would particularly like to thank Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland for their fantastic contribution to these achievements. My congratulations to Willie Walsh on his special recognition and I wish him, and all the award winners, continued success"

Receiving the Special Recognition award, Willie Walsh, said: "I am honoured by this special recognition and thank ITIC and the Irish Tourism Industry Awards without whom the success of the industry would not be continuously encouraged and celebrated, as it is this evening. Tourism is a key sector for the Irish economy and it is only right that there is a national event to acknowledge and celebrate the best companies, operators and initiatives in this vibrant industry. My congratulations to everyone this evening on their awards and continued success, and thank you for this recognition."

Chairman of the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC), Maurice Pratt, presenting to Willie Walsh, commented: "As Chair of ITIC and on behalf of the industry, I congratulate Willie Walsh on his significant contribution to Irish tourism. His work as CEO of Aer Lingus, and latterly as CEO of IAG, has been instrumental in delivering positive change to Irish tourism and we are thrilled to recognise that this evening and congratulate him on his achievements."

CEO of ITIC, Eoghan O'Mara Walsh, commented about the event, saying: "The Irish tourism industry is worth an estimated €9.2 billion annually and employs 270,000 people right around the country. It is Ireland's largest indigenous industry and is a massive asset to our economy. With the uncertainty of Brexit and the impact that may be felt, it is imperative that our Government continues to support the sector, so that we can ensure success for many years to come."

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**Award Categories and Winners:**

- **Special Recognition Award** – Willie Walsh
- 1. **Best International Marketing Initiative** – Pharos Reizen
- 2. **Best Innovative Place to Stay** – The Gleneagle Group
- 3. **Best Ireland’s Ancient East Tourism Experience, less than 50,000 visitors** – Vagabond Tours of Ireland
- 4. **Best Ireland’s Ancient East Tourism Experience, greater than 50,000 visitors** – House of Waterford Crystal
- 5. **Best Entrepreneurial Tourism Innovation** – EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum
- 6. **Best Dublin Tourism Experience, greater than 100,000 visitors** – Pearse Lyons Distillery
- 7. **Best Dublin Tourism Experience, less than 100,000 visitors** – The Little Museum of Dublin
- 8. **Best Meet in Ireland Business Tourism Innovation** – Odyssey International DMC
- 9. **Best Food / Beverage Experience** – Galway Food Tours
- 10. **Best Environmental Tourism Innovative** – Vagabond Tours of Ireland
- 11. **Best Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands Tourism Experience** – Lough Key Forest & Activity Park
- 12. **Best Festival / Event Experience** – St. Patrick’s Festival
- 13. **Best Wild Atlantic Way Tourism, less than 50,000 visitors** – A Taste of West Cork Food Festival
- 14. **Best Wild Atlantic Way Tourism, greater than 50,000 visitors** – Cliffs of Moher
- 15. **Best International Access Initiative** – Aer Lingus

For more information on the Irish Tourism Industry Awards and a full list of the finalists in each category please visit [www.irishtourismindustryawards.ie](http://www.irishtourismindustryawards.ie)

\*\*\*\*\* ENDS \*\*\*\*\*

**For more information:**

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**Notes to Editors:**

**About the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation:** The Irish Tourism Industry Confederation was founded in 1984 and is the umbrella group representing the leading tourism interests in Ireland. Its members come from key tourism stakeholders across the public and private sector and include Aer Lingus, Irish Ferries, daa, Shannon Group, Irish Hotels Federation, Incoming Tour Operators Association, Restaurants Association of Ireland, Vintners Federation of Ireland and Association of Visitor Experiences & Attractions amongst others. Tourism state agencies, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland, are also members and the full list can be seen on [www.itic.ie](http://www.itic.ie).

**About the Irish Tourism Industry Awards:** The Irish Tourism Industry Awards give recognition to and promote people, companies and organisations – overseas and at home – that have made significant

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contributions to developing, marketing, selling and delivering improved visitor experiences in Ireland and to increasing the number of visitors from overseas. The Irish Tourism Industry Awards take place every two years.

The Irish Tourism Industry Awards aim to:

- Publicly recognise and reward excellence
- Provide a benchmark for best practice
- Encourage the continuous raising of standards
- Provide better visitor experiences
- Emphasise the value of the tourism sector
- Promote a biennial platform of celebration
- Provide networking opportunities for operators and supporters

For full list of 2019 finalists please visit [www.irishtourismindustryawards.ie](http://www.irishtourismindustryawards.ie) to find out more.

### **About the 2019 Awards Judging Panel:**

#### **Rhona Blake, Managing Director, FleishmanHillard Ireland**

Rhona Blake is Managing Director of FleishmanHillard Ireland, the Irish office of international communications firm FleishmanHillard, part of the Omnicom Group. She works with clients from a wide range of industries providing strategic counsel on brand marketing, reputation management, public affairs and media relations and she has master-minded many award-winning campaigns. Rhona has served on the board of Tote Ireland, the AA Ireland Motoring Policy Committee, the Irish Heart Foundation and the Steering Committee of 30% Club Ireland.

She is currently Chairman of the Public Relations Consultants Association of Ireland and is on the Board of the International Communication Consultancies Organisation (ICCO).

#### **Dearbhail McDonald, Group Business Editor, INM**

Dearbhail McDonald is Group Business Editor of Independent Newspapers. A global Eisenhower Fellow, the award-winning journalist, author and broadcaster is a recipient of the Mary Cummins Award for Women of Outstanding Achievement in Media. Dearbhail has received an inaugural Dublin City University Special Alumni Achievement award for her contribution to public affairs journalism and is an Irish Tatler Media Woman of the Year. A native of Newry, she is a member of the board of Fighting Words, Ireland's national creative writing centre for children and serves on the strategic committee of the Fondation Irlandais in Paris. A director and trustee of the St Stephen's Green Trust, Dearbhail also serves on the External Advisory Board of Maynooth University Department of Law. Dearbhail holds an LL. B (Law) from Trinity College Dublin as well as a Masters Degree in Journalism from Dublin City University.

#### **Fergal Naughton, CEO Glen Dimplex Group**

Fergal Naughton is Chief Executive Officer of the Glen Dimplex Group. He holds a degree in Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering (Trinity College Dublin, 1998), a Master's of Science (Stanford University, 2000) and a Masters of Business Administration (Harvard University, 2005).

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Fergal is Chairman of the Provost's Council at Trinity College Dublin. He was the Founding President of the British Irish Chamber of Commerce and is a trustee of the Naughton Foundation, a charitable organisation which supports worthwhile causes in education.

He is a Trustee of the University of Notre Dame where he is also Chairman of the Ireland Council

### **Eamonn McKeon**

Eamonn McKeon had a long and distinguished career in tourism, up to his retirement in 2016.

He served as Executive Vice President of CIE Tours in North America, Chief Executive of the Great Southern Hotels Group, and Chief Executive of the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC).

He also served on several tourism related boards, including Chairman of CERT, President of the Irish Hotels Federation, and served a term as Chairman of ITIC.

### **Conor Hennigan, Hospitality Consultant, Hennigan Hospitality Services**

Conor Hennigan is a Hospitality Consultant based in Killarney County Kerry. He has 36 years of Industry experience in a variety of managerial positions which included Newpark Hotel Kilkenny, Great Southern Hotels in Galway, Rosslare & Killarney, and The Malton Hotel, Killarney. Throughout his career, he has held many industry representational roles including Vice President of the Irish Hotels Federation, President of the Killarney Chamber of Tourism & Commerce, and President of the SKAL club of Kerry. Conor was previously a board member of National Tourism Authority (Fáilte Ireland).

In 2016, Conor set up his own company, Hennigan Hospitality Services, which provides advice and management services to companies and individuals on business planning, project management, business mentoring, food development and service evaluations.

He is a non-Executive Board member Fota Island Collection.

### **About the Special Recognition Award:**

#### **Willie Walsh, Airline Executive**

Willie Walsh became chief executive of International Airlines Group (IAG) when the company was created in January 2011, joining from British Airways where he was chief executive from October 2005. IAG is the parent company of Aer Lingus, British Airways, Iberia and Vueling. It is one of the world's largest airline groups with 565 aircraft flying to 279 destinations and carrying around 113 million passengers each year. Prior to joining British Airways, he was chief executive at Aer Lingus, a position he was appointed to in the aftermath of 9/11.

Born in Dublin in 1961, Willie joined Aer Lingus in 1979 as a cadet pilot. He held several management positions in Aer Lingus before being appointed chief executive of Futura, a Spanish charter airline owned by Aer Lingus in 1998. He returned to Dublin with Aer Lingus in 2000 where he took up the role of chief operating officer and was subsequently appointed as chief executive in October 2001. He completed a Master of Science in Management and Business Administration at Dublin's Trinity College in 1992.

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