



Blueways Ireland

Blueway – Do it Your Way!



Blueways Ireland is a tourism and recreation initiative which provides easy access to multiple outdoor activities on and along the waterways. Blueways can be enjoyed by paddlers, cyclists and walkers, are open to all, can be experienced with or without a guide and can be as active or as laid back as you wish. By presenting experience-based Blueway packages, the initiative supports visitors in uncovering and enjoying an idyllic natural environment, woven within a tapestry of rich natural and built heritage.

Blueways are a network of paddling, cycling and walking trails on and alongside the waterways, connecting villages and communities in predominantly rural settings. The Blueways initiative promotes experiences where visitors are truly engaged with the landscape, flora and fauna of the environment. The restorative and relaxing benefits of being close to water are well documented.

The concept is a holistic one, offering effortless access to activities through packaging and presenting consumer *experiences*. It aims to break down barriers to participation in water/outdoor recreation and provide options for visitors of all ages & abilities to enjoy, with the strapline “**Blueway, do it your way!**”

Careful consideration of environmental sensitivities and stakeholder consultation are both key elements throughout the planning, development and construction phases to create the Blueway infrastructure. By repurposing existing facilities on the navigations (moorings, slipways, service blocks) and promoting them to a new activity-tourism market, the ethos has been to create a product which encourages low-impact but meaningful engagement with the waterways and an appreciation of the wonderful natural and built heritage associated with them.

The website www.bluewaysireland.org helps visitors in planning a Blueways visit, detailing individual trails together with a wide range of Places to **Stay, Eat and Go**. It provides the packaging element that the busy consumer expects, showcasing trip ideas, inspiration and bite-sized visitor experiences.

The essential aim of the initiative is to increase the recreational use of the inland waterways and thereby to generate economic, health, social and community benefits. This sustainable activity tourism proposition has been developed through partnership working with Local Authorities, State Agencies and NGBs, however, of vital importance has been the partnerships created with the Private Sector as well as engagement with the local communities around the Blueways. Through ongoing collaborative working & capacity-building workshops, activity providers have been encouraged to come together with visitor-servicing businesses, to present consumer-focused and activity-based experiences, thus animating the



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Blueways. The development and marketing of a coherent Blueway brand has created a proposition of scale which gives small, local businesses a platform for selling their services to a wide audience.

This Multi-Agency and Public-Private sector partnership strategy has also successfully leveraged significant funding support for both product development and marketing.

With high levels of demand from organisations to develop Blueways across Ireland and Northern Ireland, a national strategic group (comprising Sport Ireland, Sport NI, Fáilte Ireland, Tourism NI and Waterways Ireland) has created a development system and standards for Blueways, which will ensure a high quality and consistent, consumer-centric Blueways product offering at a national level. See developer resources at www.sportireland.ie/outdoors/blueway-development

Since its inception in 2014 an extensive network of Blueway trails has been developed by Waterways Ireland in the North Shannon, Shannon-Erne and Lough Derg regions, with development ongoing across the inland navigations, in both Ireland and Northern Ireland. The current status of the trails network developed to date by Waterways Ireland on its inland waterways are:-

- **Shannon Blueway** –100km Paddling trails with 10km Walking and Cycling trails
- **Shannon-Erne Blueway** – 70km Paddling trails with 30km Walking and 13km Cycling; further sections currently in development
- **Lough Derg** – 160km of shoreline Paddling trails
- **Barrow Blueway** – Currently in Product Development stage
- **Lower Bann Blueway** – Currently in Product Development stage

The Barrow Blueway represents one of the most exciting new Blueway opportunities, with a Steering Group composed of the Local Authorities, Waterways Ireland, LEADER and LEO organisations, working together to deliver 46km of stand-out, multi-activity trails on and alongside the idyllic canal banks of the Barrow between Lowtown and Athy.