

OFFALY – IRELAND'S HIDDEN GEM

Offaly is gaining a reputation as a destination for Irish businesses, including the country's burgeoning film industry.

Take another look at Offaly. This county is quietly making strides and appearing on the national radar in areas such as enterprise and innovation, tourism, food and film. The new tourism brand for the county, Offaly – Ireland's Hidden Gem, taps into this and encourages visitors to discover for themselves the wealth of natural amenities, cultural attractions and local charms.

The Hidden Gem brand is also apt when describing the vibrant business culture in Offaly. The county has a strong heritage of energy production and manufacturing. Employment in both ESB and Bord na Móna has resulted in generations of skilled fabricators. Many of those employees then went on to create their own successful engineering and manufacturing businesses. Emerging enterprise sectors in industrial design, food, software and renewable energies are accompanied by a growing cluster of Enterprise Ireland and IDA-supported companies

COUNTY STRENGTHS

Businesses in Offaly are supported by Offaly County Council, through the Local Enterprise Office (LEO). The Local Enterprise Office is the 'one stop shop' for all Government supports for anyone looking to set up or expand their business and create jobs in Offaly. The LEO has a close working relationship with other development agencies, private sector and Chambers



FilmOffaly has launched a new campaign to boost film and television production in Offaly

FILMOFFALY, WHICH IS OFFALY'S FILM COMMISSION AND A PROJECT OF OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL SUPPORTS FILMMAKERS AND ACTIVELY PROMOTES LOCATIONS AND CREW.

of Commerce in delivering business initiatives.

Head of Enterprise, Orla Martin spoke to us about some of the county's strengths as a business location. These include a central location, good connectivity and quality of life making it a great place to live and work. From most parts of the county, cities like Limerick, Galway and Dublin are just an hour's drive away. This is a valuable asset for businesses looking to operate in national and international markets. Furthermore, its central location provides an opportunity for workers to 'reverse commute'. This emerging trend is where employees (or the self

employed) may live in the greater Dublin area (or other urban area) and commute against the traffic flow to work in Offaly. This trend is already popular in London and is now showing signs of popularity in this midlands county.

Orla Martin also spoke about "sector specific" locations. For green enterprises, there is Rhode Business Park (near Edenderry), which has been established on the site of a former ESB power station. It has 13 serviced sites, with an option to tap into the national grid. For Offaly's growing food sector, fledgling businesses can head to Ferbane Food Campus. It has an industrial kitchen, incubation units and a dynamic business manager, Donal Egan, on hand to assist with new product development. Meanwhile in Tullamore, The Junction Business Innovation Centre has hot desk facilities, office suites and business supports for people looking to set up a business in the areas of design, software and renewables. Set up in 2015, The Junction has a number of award winning clients, including

ticketing software developer Future Ticketing (www.futureticketing.ie). The facility itself has been nominated for the 2016 Excellence in Local Government Awards.

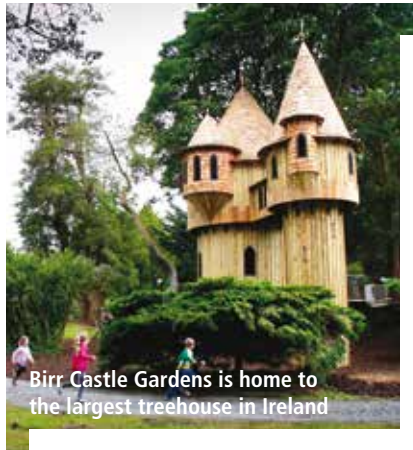
Tourism jewels include Clonmacnoise, Lough Boora Discovery Park, Birr Castle, Tullamore DEW Visitor Centre and the Slieve Bloom Mountains. Chief Executive Anna Marie Delaney explained to us about their plans to develop the blue way connecting 90km of the Grand Canal running through Offaly with the river Shannon bordering the west of the county, and the potential to link sites within Ireland's Ancient East. Offaly's high quality food and drink products are also garnering national and international recognition. The growing list includes Mossfield Organic Cheese, Wild Irish Foragers, Glenisk and, of course, Tullamore D.E.W. whiskey.

ON SET IN OFFALY

Another hidden gem is Offaly's growing reputation as Ireland's ultimate film location, with credits such as *Becoming Jane*, *Garage*, *Pure Mule*, *Eden* and *A Nightingale Falling* to name but a few.

Situated in the heart of Ireland, Offaly boasts a unique landscape, good road and rail infrastructure, and plenty of experience and enthusiasm in hosting film productions. The northeastern part of the county is located within the commuter belt, with the southern and western parts bordering the Slieve Bloom Mountains and the River Shannon – delivering ease of access alongside stunning scenery.

FilmOffaly, which is Offaly's Film Commission and a project of Offaly County Council, supports filmmakers and actively promotes locations and local crew. In partnership with FilmBase, FilmOffaly offer an annual bursary to writers; the winning script is then produced as a short film made in Offaly. One such film was *Noreen* directed by Domhnall Gleeson and starring Brendan Gleeson. Speaking on filming in the county Brendan Gleeson explained: "Everything that we needed was there – it was there by hook or by crook."



Birr Castle Gardens is home to the largest treehouse in Ireland



Syrup produced by Wild Irish Foragers, a small, family-run business in Offaly

Gleeson added: "The landscape itself is distinctive...I would have no problem at all coming down here and shooting again, or rather that I would look forward to it. We had a great experience down here."

As part of FilmOffaly's recent relaunch, the aim is to show that as well as having surreal landscapes including boglands and waterways, there is also scope for more urban films. FilmOffaly has a location database that includes institutional style buildings and warehouses, all of which can be found on their newly designed website, www.filmoffaly.ie.

Great strides are also being made in celebrating and promoting filmmaking in the county. Taking place across Birr town in October, OFFline is a film festival dedicated to making and screening quality films in the Irish midlands. Last year's winner went on to win an Oscar for his film, *Stutterer*.



Mossfield Cheese is one of a number of produced at Mossfield Organic Farm

AWARD WINNERS IN OFFALY

2016 NATIONAL ENTERPRISE AWARD:
Applied Concepts Ltd – www.appliedpi.com

2016 BANK OF IRELAND START UP AWARD
Craft Category:
Truzees – www.truzees.com

2016 STUDENT ENTERPRISE AWARDS:
Senior Category, Innovation Award:
Daniel Carroll, Caballis Equine Ltd.

2016 STUDENT ENTERPRISE AWARDS:
Intermediate Category, Innovation Award:
Adam Henry, Josh Dunican,
Oisín McGuire, Farm Friendly Feeder.

**2015 BEST ENVIRONMENTAL TOURISM
INNOVATION AWARD:**
Lough Boora's Discovery Park – www.loughboora.com

2016 IRISH FOOD WRITERS GUILD AWARD:
Wild Irish Foragers – www.wildirishforagers.ie

**2016 INTERNATIONAL
CHEESE GOLD AWARD:**
Mossfield Organic Cheese – www.mossfield.ie

**2016 PLUMBING & HEATING,
INDUSTRY ACHIEVEMENT AWARD:**
Stephen Grant, Grant Engineering – www.grantengineering.ie

For more information on what Offaly has to offer, visit www.offaly.ie