

# County Clare's Sustainable Tourism Policy 2026

## The Destination of County Clare

County Clare is located on the western seaboard of the Island of the Republic of Ireland, in the province of Munster, and covers an area of 3,450 km<sup>2</sup>. The county had a population of 127,938 at the 2022 census. County Clare has an exceptionally rich and diverse natural and cultural heritage. The county is almost surrounded by coastal, estuarine, and freshwater systems giving the region a distinctive 'island-like' geography that has in turn influenced its cultural heritage over the centuries. The combination and interplay of land and water are enhanced through iconic natural landmarks associated with the world-renowned Cliffs of Moher, the equally dramatic coastline of Loop Head, and the water-carved Burren plateau, regarded as one of the finest and most extensive karstic terrains in Europe and has international recognition as a UNESCO Global Geopark. Ireland's longest river, the River Shannon, traverses along the east side of Clare, passing through the country's second-largest lake, Lough Derg, before entering the Shannon Estuary – Ireland's largest estuarine waterway. The associated ecosystems and the biodiversity of the county are equally striking with a wide range of waterways, coastlines, woodlands, and caves. Ireland's earliest evidence of human occupation can be found in Clare dating back to the Palaeolithic period around 10,500 BC, and the imprint of life through the ages is scattered across the entire county. The Office of Public Works (OPW) has mapped over 7,500 recorded monuments, one of the highest densities in the country; and include sites such as the famous prehistoric dolmen at Poul nabrone to the wide range of monasteries, castles and forts. The medieval townscape of Ennis, the ecclesiastical settlements of Killaloe and Quin, the Victorian resorts of Kilkee and Lisdoonvara, and the patchwork of today's farmed landscape and rural villages provide a range of contemporary cultural experiences that contribute to Clare's global recognition for traditional music, dance, storytelling, and the arts.

## Tourism in County Clare

In 2018 it was estimated that 769,000 (8%) of overseas tourists who came to Ireland visited Clare and that the county hosted 510,000 (5%) domestic trips. The Cliffs of Moher ranks as the country's second top fee-charging visitor attraction, with approximately 1,495,069 million visitors in 2024.

## The Destination Authority; Clare County Council

Clare County Council is the destination management authority. County Councils (Local Authorities) provide hundreds of services ranging from roads; planning; housing; economic and community development; environment, heritage, recreation, and amenity services; libraries, and fire services. Clare County Council is leading the way at a local authority level by setting up the first focused Tourism Directorate within a local authority with a tourism strategy that is committed to sustainable development. This is highly significant considering the tourism assets it now manages directly;

- The Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience, the second largest tourism attraction in Ireland
- Loop Head Lighthouse,
- Holy Island Visitor Experience,
- Vandeleur Gardens,
- Bunratty Castle & Folk Park,
- Craggaunowen Bronze Age Park,
- Knappogue Castle & Gardens.

Private operators within the County provide a range of accommodation, food, transport, retail, and leisure businesses. A comprehensive list of private businesses can be found on [www.visitclare.ie](http://www.visitclare.ie). The development of the Clare Tourism Strategy 2030 was a watershed in Clare County Council's role in tourism in Clare. It's commitment to the sustainable development of tourism in the county is called out throughout the document. A strategic priority of the Action Plan is to **'work towards positioning Clare as a destination to be recognised nationally and internationally for its commitment to responsible tourism and sustainability'**.

To this end, after considerable research and consultation, Clare County Council has engaged the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) accredited destination certification company EarthCheck to conduct an external audit of the Council's work in sustainable destination management. The overarching aim of the

sustainable destination certification was to establish the County of Clare as a leading example in Ireland of a collaboratively planned and managed environmental, economic, and socially sustainable destination, and this was achieved on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April 2025. Within this achievement, County Clare commits to implementing the [Global Code of Ethics for Tourism \(GCET\)](#), a comprehensive set of principles whose purpose is to guide stakeholders in tourism development. The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism aims to help minimize the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and cultural heritage while maximizing the benefits for residents of tourism destinations. The Clare GSTC Destination Green Team was established in 2023 by the Clare Tourism Forum and the Clare County Council Tourism Department. The Green Team represents a cross-section of local authority employees, tourism agencies and businesses, conservation agencies, community leaders and organisations, and the sustainable tourism expertise of Atlantic Technical University, Sligo. The Green Team is informed by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council's Destination Criteria, the European Tourism Indicator System, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Clare Tourism Strategy 2030, the County Development Plan, Destination Experience Development Plans, and crucially by community, business and visitor needs and desires.

## Sustainability Commitments

Clare County Council commits to the following:

- To comply with all relevant national and international environmental and sustainability agreements and policies and support the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- To recognise, understand and control the environmental, social, and economic risks associated with tourism activities.
- To liaise with all local authority departments and relevant tourism, cultural and environmental agencies to encourage awareness of and collaboration with the sustainable tourism programme, its goals and action plans.
- To work with the Green Team, tourism officers, key government stakeholders and communities on the process of sustainable tourism indicator data collection in communities and enterprises providing third-party verification through the ATU Sligo and using this data to develop action plans.
- To use sustainable tourism indicators recommended by UNWTO, GSTC, and ETIS, in combination with destination-specific indicators and Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) indicators. To set annual targets to continually improve sustainability performance, undertake and report on annual benchmarking of performance through EarthCheck.
- To undertake data analysis and reporting, identify resident, business and consumer trends for future tourism strategies, using GDPR in all data collection and use.
- To communicate Co. Clare's destination's sustainability targets, including EarthCheck Benchmarking Indicators, and how residents' input has shaped corresponding action plans.
- To drive evidence-informed sustainable tourism policy for planning instruments such as Local Area Plans, County Development Plans, Climate Action Plans, rural development, heritage, biodiversity, and tourism strategies.
- To adequately resource the management of the destination certification process.
- To communicate clearly and regularly with the public and stakeholders on the progress and development of the destination certification program.

Clare County Council will review the Policy annually and publicly promote the Policy to all employees, stakeholders, and members of the public.

Signed,



Acting Senior Executive Officer  
Tourism, Festivals & Events  
Clare County Council  
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