

**Laois LEADER & Laois County Council
with
Laois Tourism Limited**



Tourism Strategy for County Laois 2006-2010

26th January 2006



1. Introduction

1.1. The Brief

Tourism in Laois is relatively undeveloped by comparison with other Midland counties. This is due to a number of factors i.e. a limited range of built attractions, a limited hotel supply and other registered accommodations, the absence of a tourism tradition and the lack of an extensive base of professional tourism providers. Added to this, the county lacks a medium term comprehensive strategy to direct the future growth of tourism. In this latter regard Laois Tourism Ltd. appointed May Day Management Consultants, Limerick in August 2005 to assist it in the preparation of a tourism strategy for Laois 2006-2010.

1.2. Issues around the brief

From the consultancy's extensive experience in area tourism development, May Day Management identified the following issues at the commissioning of the project:

- The need to actively involve the private tourism sector of Laois (who must be the primary deliverers of tourism product to visitors) in the strategy development process
- The need to get all sectors of business in Laois involved in the process - not just the accommodation and activity businesses but sectors such as retailing, food & beverage and the general public.
- The need for agreement on a co-ordinated approach to the development of Laois as a distinctly appealing tourism destination within the Midlands-East Tourism Region
- The need to come up with new ideas for Laois. Ideas that have not been tried before elsewhere in Ireland and ideally elsewhere in competing product areas!
- The need to identify how joint development and marketing initiatives are to be funded and how to sustain this funding over the initial 3-5 years of emerging marketing strategies.
- The need to devise an implementation process so that the emerging plans don't languish on shelves but start without delay.

1.3. Methodology

This strategy presented herein has been devised by the directors of Laois Tourism and other volunteer members in facilitated workshops with May Day Management from September 8th 2005 to January 12th 2006. Six workshops have been held, together with a members' information and networking event on November 15th and Members Forum on 12th January 2006 when the strategy was endorsed by the membership.

1.4. Planning process participants

Nollaig Baker	Patricia Kavanagh
Tom Cox	Mark Martley
Honor Deevy	Marie McCormack
Oliver Dempsey	Mary Murphy
Ingrid Deverell	Martin Phelan
Mary Donnelly	Julian Smith
Caroline Farrell	Peter Stokes
Anne Goodwin	Tom Treacy
Cllr. Tom Jacob	Kevin Fingelton

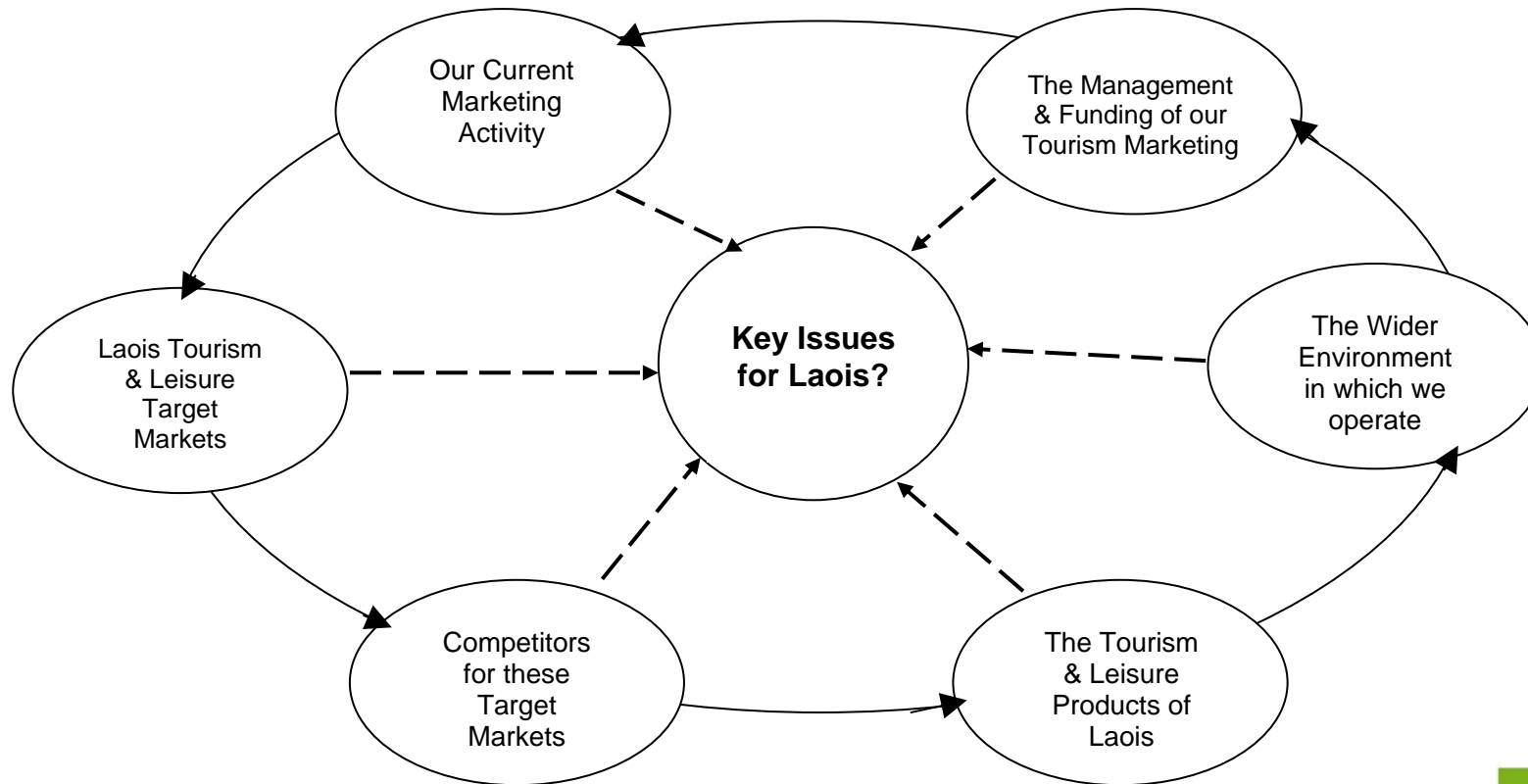
2. The Strategic Planning Process

The strategy planning process was framed around a critical examination of and debate on three strategic questions;

- Q1. Where is Tourism in Laois now?
- Q2. Where should tourism in Laois seek to be in 5 years time?
- Q3. How will Laois get there?

2.1. Q1. Where is Tourism in Laois now?

This involved looking at the following six areas and teasing out key issues as appropriate



From this extensive analysis the following were agreed to be the 4 Key Issues for Laois tourism going forward:

1. Target Market Selection Issue:
 - 1.1. Need to concentrate the limited marketing resources of the county (both financial and human) on an agreed number of target markets for 2006-2008 initially
2. Competitor Strategy Issue:
 - 2.1. Need to determine Laois' Sustainable Competitive Advantages in these target markets
3. Market Positioning Issues (2):
 - 3.1. Need to position Laois as a fashionable tourism and leisure centre in the domestic market and
 - 3.2. As a viable tourism centre for overseas visitors to Ireland
4. Membership & Supporter Issues:
 - 4.1. Need to fund an initial 3 year marketing strategy (with sufficient € / human resources to do the job)
 - 4.2. Need to widen the membership base of Laois Tourism Ltd.
 - 4.3. Need to involve the membership in the planning and implementation process
 - 4.4. Need to up-skill SME/Micro tourism sector in Laois

Following further discussion the strategy planning group has prioritised these issues as follows:

1. Laois Tourism Ltd. Membership & Supporter Issues
2. Target Market Selection Issue
3. Market Positioning Issues

2.2. Q2. Where should tourism in Laois seek to be in 5 years time?

The strategy planning group has proposed the following “Visions of the future” for tourism in Laois i.e. in 5-10 years time that

- Laois will be seen to be “The Place to Go”: “Fashionable and away from it all”
- Laois will be an upmarket tourist destination
- Laois will be a major centre for conferences – just off the motorway
- European visitor numbers to Laois will have tripled
- Laois is innovative in its tourism offers & activities
- Laois Tourism Ltd. will have 400 members

Measurable Objectives 2006-2010 for Tourism in Laois

The following objectives have been set by the planning team as giving firm targets to be met in achieving the visions of tourism in Laois

Objectives	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
1. Membership of Laois Tourism Ltd. grows substantially from the current base of 100	200	250	300	310	330
2. Enquiries to Laois Tourism Ltd. website grow substantially from 250,000 currently per annum	375k	500k	650k	900k	1m+
3. Overseas visitor nos. & spend in Laois grows from 2004 - 38,000/€9m Domestic Leisure Tourism grows year on year	50k	75k	100k	180k	250k
4. The no. of Laois Tourism Ltd. businesses engaged in training & development grows year on year from 2006	25	50	75	100	100

2.3. Q3. How will Laois get there?

1. By Target Market Selection

The strategy planning group recommends to the members of the tourism sector in Laois that available resources be concentrated on developing the following markets over the next five years;

- Market 1. Dublin - a large urbanised consumer base needing regular rural escapes
- Market 2. UK – Ryanair & Aer Lingus gateway catchment populations within 1hrs drive of these hub gateways
- Market 3. Europe – Ryanair Euro Hubs 1 hour catchment populations e.g. Bruxelles, Frankfurt, Paris, Girona, Rome

Ryanair Euro Hubs



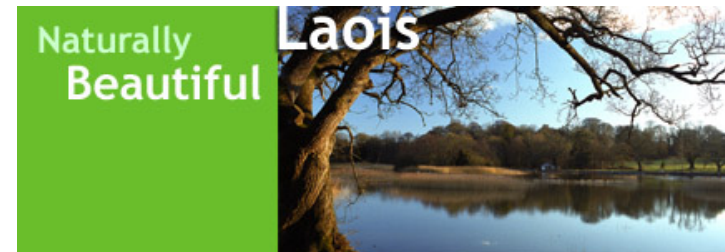
2.3. Q3. How will Laois get there?

“Market Positioning” is the stratagem whereby marketers seek to position their products in the “mind space” of target customers i.e. how and where these customers see and view the marketer’s product offering. In the case of established tourism centres such as Galway City or Kilkenny, target customers have clear, positive images of what these places offer them as holiday & leisure destinations. However for the lesser known or less frequently considered places, such as Laois, target customers have limited perception of what is on offer to them as a holidaymaker. In this situation, Laois must seek to position itself through branding, paid advertising and favourable publicity etc. into the minds of the target customers, the media and other opinion formers.

The current positioning of Laois can be seen by reference to the two websites – Laois Tourism Ltd. and Midlands East Tourism

“County Laois – Ireland’s Inland Port” from www.laoistourism.ie

“Naturally Beautiful Laois” From www.eastcoastmidlands.ie



There is also a third positioning statement in use in promoting Laois i.e. “Laois- the heart of Ireland”.

In his 1993 book “Marketing Places” renowned marketing teacher and writer Dr.Philip Kotler suggests the following guidelines for designing a place’s image, which can be applied to the Laois positioning challenge, namely

“For an image (of a place) to be effective it must meet the following criteria:

1. *It must be valid*
2. *It must be believable*
3. *It must be simple*
4. *It must have appeal*
5. *It must be distinctive”*

It is proposed in this strategy to reposition Laois by adapting the new Laois logo to incorporate the tag line “so different, so near”. This proposition plays on the perceived competitive advantages of Laois as having a unique character, heritage and appeal while being very accessible to the target markets.

Examples

Laois leisure breaksdaringly different

Body copy of promotion



For enquiries and bookings click

www.laoistourism.ie

Laois a taste of Ireland

Body copy of promotion



For enquiries and bookings click

www.laoistourism.ie

