

# 13TH ECST NETWORK MEETING

28th, 29th, 30th, 31st May 2024

## Sustainable Tourism and Nature Conservation: The Opportunity and Challenge for Parks *Finding Creative Solutions to Visitor Flow*

European Charter for Sustainable Tourism Meeting  
in Westport, County Mayo, Ireland



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# CÉAD MÍLE Fáilte WELCOME

Explore and discover the Wild West of Ireland! We invite you to save the date for the 13th network Meeting of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism, organised together with the National Parks and Wildlife Service of Ireland. Every two years, the EUROPARC network of Sustainable Destinations applying the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas methodology comes together to exchange experience and best practice. With visitor pressure increasing in many European Protected Areas, we need to look at tourism with a different mindset.

The meeting will focus on finding creative solutions to visitor flow – an essential topic for Protected Areas creating sustainable tourism offers!

Participants can expect an exciting programme, with loads of opportunities for knowledge exchange & networking. Furthermore, there will be visits to Connemara National Park and Wild Nephin National Park!

Registration for this event will open in March. Are you already planning to attend? Then we **highly recommend you book your accommodation as soon as possible**, as we anticipate high demand in the area during October.

Learn more about previous meetings from the [ECST Network here](#).



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# EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST) in Protected Areas is a practical management tool that enables Protected Areas to develop tourism sustainably.

The core element of the ECST is working in partnership with all relevant stakeholders to develop a common sustainable tourism strategy and an action plan on the basis of a thorough situation analysis. The aim of all ECST projects and activities is the protection of the natural and cultural heritage and the continuous improvement of tourism in the Protected Area in terms of the environment, local population and businesses as well as visitors.

Now, after over 20 years of experience, the ECST has proved to be a useful and important tool that delivers social, environmental and economic benefits and indeed can be described as a model of governance that delivers Protected Areas as sustainable tourism destinations. You can find the list of Sustainable Destinations here.

Sustainable tourism is Good for Parks, Good for People!

Tourism is a booming business. It produces almost 5% of the world's economic turnover, employs around 200 million people globally and is the fastest growing industry. Tourism is also one of the main economic drivers of Europe's rural economies; directly and indirectly, it accounts for around 10% of European GDP and 20 million jobs.



# EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM



ECST Network Meeting 2023, Slovenia

Between 2000 and 2010 European countries recorded over 440 million annual international visitor arrivals. On top of this, an even greater amount of tourism activity can be added in the form of own-country (domestic) tourists and people on day trips (*Practical, profitable, protected. A starter guide to developing sustainable*

*tourism in protected areas. ECEAT International, the European Centre for Eco and Agro Tourism in partnership with the EUROPARC Federation 2012).*

EUROPARC has long recognised the need to take care of both the land and the people who live and work there and often derive their livelihoods from those who come to appreciate these special places. We understand that not only are parks themselves facing challenges and pressure from visitation and misuse on the land they manage but have the opportunity and potential to act as catalysts for sustainability and lifestyle changes at a local and regional and indeed national level.

In 1993 EUROPARC published the groundbreaking report “Loving them to death”, which called for sustainable tourism in Europe’s Protected Areas. Further, in 1995, EUROPARC took the initiative to set up the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.

We believe that Sustainable Tourism is a state of mind, a conscious choice to work, live and be on holiday in a different way.

<https://www.europarc.org/sustainable-tourism/>

# SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CHALLENGES



County Mayo, Ireland

County Mayo is one of the largest counties in Ireland, with the longest Atlantic coast line and a dramatic topography of mountains, rivers and lakelands. At its heart is Wild Nephin National Park and a number of habitats under SAC / SPA EU Habitat protection.

Traditionally County Mayo has suffered from economic migration and low density population. In recent years and most notably since the opening of the Wild Atlantic Way coastal tour route, the county is now developing its tourism potential.

However, striking a balance between the sustainable development of tourism in the region and the protection and enhancement of the natural assets of the region is a fundamental challenge.

Transport and access routes are still dominated by cars, although Westport has a regular train service route running across the country to Dublin. Regional bus services are somewhat limited, although this has improved over recent years. Cycle routes are also in development and Mayo led the country in the last decade with the opening of the Great Western Greenway (a 42 km cycle route established on a disused rail line).

Tourism is a significant sector for employment in the region, however, this has largely been a seasonal offering. Steps are being taken to close the seasonal employment gap and Wild Nephin National Park contributes to this with the Mayo Dark Sky Park offering a winter schedule of tourism events, supporting local businesses with off-peak events.



Mayo Dark Sky Park



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# DESTINATION WESTPORT

Westport is a safe and friendly heritage town, offering a truly extraordinary meeting place in which you can enjoy nature, history, culture and outdoor recreation all from one destination.

The Mayo town competed against more than 500 other entrants in the Irish Times “Best Place to Live in Ireland” competition to be crowned the best in the country. Westport has boasted many awards including Best Kept town, European Sports Tourism Award, Water Quality and Green Flag destination.



Sited in the shadow of the Reek (Croagh Patrick Mountain), Westport is a picturesque town with tree-lined boulevards and stone bridges over the Carrowbeg River. With multi-coloured shopfronts, charismatic cafés, pubs and unique restaurants, it is little wonder that this Clew Bay town has become one of Ireland’s most popular towns.

With spectacular scenery, an unusually mild climate and rapid changes in light over Clew Bay, Westport is a bewitching place of intense beauty for landscape photography. For those that want an adventure experience, it has easy access to hiking, sailing, cycling and of course easy access to the Connemara National Park, Wild Nephin National Park/ Mayo Dark Sky Park.



## OUR VENUES: WESTPORT WOODS HOTEL

Westport Woods is a locally owned 4 Star Hotel, nestled in a 300-year-old wood, close to the heart of the town. The hotel offers a beautifully appointed range of bedrooms, spacious and flexible conference rooms and a team of friendly staff who can help you organise outings or advise on what to see and do locally.

The Beech Club Leisure Centre on site, includes an 18m swimming pool, jacuzzi, steam room, sauna and gym. Its Spa promotes health, well-being and complete rejuvenation through a range of organic therapies including seaweed based treatments.

The hotel has also commenced on an accessibility programme for accessibility to welcome all guests with equity and create an inclusive culture for staff and customer service

Westport Woods is committed to reducing its carbon footprint and operating in a sustainable way. In January 2022, it began a training programme with an Irish company Fifty Shades Greener. This action based programme has clear steps to control and reduce the use of energy, water and production of waste, as well as improve social sustainability and green procurement.



[westportwoodshotel.com](http://westportwoodshotel.com)



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# PÁIRC NÁISIÚNTA NÉIFINNE FIÁINE WILD NEPHIN NATIONAL PARK

Located on the Western seaboard in northwest Mayo, Wild Nephin National Park covers a vast 15,000 hectares of uninhabited and unspoilt wilderness, dominated by the Nephin Beg mountain range. To the west of the mountains is the Owenduff Bog, one of the last intact active blanket bog systems in Western Europe.

The National Park also protects other important habitats and species including alpine heath, upland grassland, heath, lakes and river catchments. Greenland white-fronted geese, golden plover, red grouse and otters are just some of the important fauna found within the National Park.

Wild Nephin National Park is a spectacular place to experience some of the most remote lands in Ireland, catering to both experienced and beginner hikers. It also showcases some of the darkest, most pristine night skies in the world and is officially certified as a Gold Tier standard International Dark Sky Park.

<https://www.nationalparks.ie/wild-nephin/>



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# PÁIRC SPÉIRE DORCHA MHAIGH EO MAYO DARK SKY PARK

Nestled between the remote Nephin Mountain Range and the unspoiled Atlantic coastline, Mayo Dark Sky Park extends across an area of 150km<sup>2</sup> and encompasses Wild Nephin National Park. Established in 2016 as Ireland's 1st International Dark Sky Park with Gold Tier, Mayo Dark Sky Park has continued its ethos of community engagement to promote and protect dark skies.

It now embarks on a new journey with plans to expand Mayo county into an International Dark Sky Reserve, tackling urban areas of light pollution within the county. An ambitious, but achievable project.

The Dark Sky Park is embedded in community engagement and provides training courses such as "Dark Sky Ambassador" providing accessible education on the value of dark skies to local society.

Our annual flagship event is Mayo Dark Sky Festival which promotes sustainable tourism in the region to raise the issue of light pollution at local and national levels.

[www.MayoDarkSkyFestival.ie](http://www.MayoDarkSkyFestival.ie)



  
Mayo Dark Sky Park



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# PÁIRC NÁISIÚNTA CHONAMARA CONNEMARA NATIONAL PARK

Connemara National Park covers some 2,000 hectares of scenic mountains, expanses of bogs, heaths, grasslands and woodlands in County Galway. Some of the National Park's mountains, namely Benbaun, Bencullagh, Benbrack and Muckanaght, are part of the famous Twelve Bens or Beanna Beola range.

Opened to the public in 1980, the National Park includes lands that once formed part of the Kylemore Abbey Estate, the Letterfrack Industrial School, and the private property of Richard 'Humanity Dick' Martin, who helped to form the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Connemara National Park holds an array of sites of archaeological and historical significance, some dating back thousands of years, highlighting the rich history of the National Park lands and their long human habitation.



<https://www.nationalparks.ie/connemara/>



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# ACCOMMODATION CAPACITY & RATES:

\*\*\*All Prices are approximate, and accommodation should be contacted directly for rates.

Venue: Westport Woods Hotel (**EUROPARC MEETING VENUE**)

Star Rating: 4 Star | No. of Bedrooms: 122

Sample Rate Bed & Breakfast Double Occupancy: €149 for single or double at EUROPARC Delegate Rate, First Come First Served, **CODE** provided upon meeting registration.

Venue: Castlecourt Hotel Spa & Leisure Centre

Star Rating: 4 Star | No. of Bedrooms: 157

Sample Rate Bed & Breakfast Double Occupancy: €200

Venue: Westport Coast Hotel, Leisure, Spa & Apartments

Star Rating: 4 Star | No. of Bedrooms: 85

Sample Rate Bed & Breakfast Double Occupancy: €180

Venue: Westport Plaza Hotel

Star Rating: 4 Star | No. of Bedrooms: 87

Sample Rate Bed & Breakfast Double Occupancy: €220

Venue: Hotel Westport

Star Rating: 4 Star | No. of Bedrooms: 129

Sample Rate Bed & Breakfast Double Occupancy: €250

Venue: Clew Bay Hotel

Star Rating: 3 Star | No. of Bedrooms: 54

Sample Rate Bed & Breakfast Double Occupancy: €165

Venue: Knockranny House Hotel & Spa

Star Rating: 4 Star | No. of Bedrooms: 97

Sample Rate Bed & Breakfast Double Occupancy: €230

Venue: The Mariner Westport

Star Rating: 4 Star | No. of Bedrooms: 34

Sample Rate Bed & Breakfast Double Occupancy: €180

Venue: Wyatt Hotel

Star Rating: 3 Star | No. of Bedrooms: 90

Sample Rate Bed & Breakfast Double Occupancy: €130

In addition to hotels, Westport has a number of B&Bs, a hostel and self catering options. See [www.destinationwestport.com](http://www.destinationwestport.com) for info.



# ACCESS TO WESTPORT

Getting to Westport is easy with its efficient transport links, better road infrastructure and all new services around the county.

Westport is serviced by both Irish Rail and Bus Eireann. Services run 7 days a week, with Irish Rail links and Bus Eireann routes running to many locations throughout Ireland throughout the day.

Driving times from the main airports are:

- 1** From Ireland West (Knock): 63km (39 miles) – 50 minutes
- 2** From Shannon: 164km (102 miles) – 2 hours
- 3** From Dublin: 252km (156 miles) – 3 hours and 30 minutes
- 4** From Belfast: 305km (190 miles) – 4 hours 15 minutes



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# AIRPORT LINKS

Ireland West Airport Knock is about 50 min drive from Westport, offering convenient – and often low-cost – access to the UK and many European destinations.

Tel: + 353 (0)94 9368100 / [www.irelandwestairport.com](http://www.irelandwestairport.com)

Dublin International Airport is 3 hours 30 min on the M4 motorway to Westport and manages an average of 60,000 passengers per day, rising to 80,000 during the peak season, with more than 600 aircraft movements every day.

Tel +353 (0)1 8141111 / [www.dublinairport.com](http://www.dublinairport.com)

Shannon airport is the second largest airport in Ireland and offers easy access to European cities and transatlantic destinations.

It is a 2 hour drive from Westport.

Tel +353 (0)61 712000 / [www.shannonairport.ie](http://www.shannonairport.ie)



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## TRAINS, BUS & CAR HIRE

Irish Rail /Iarnród Éireann (National Rail service)

Our conference hotel (and all town center hotels) are within walking distance, or a short cab ride from the Westport train station.

A 45 min- 1 hr bus ride with Bus Eireann (or via Taxi) will take you from Dublin Airport to Heuston Station. Links from Dublin City Centre (Heuston Station) to Westport Mayo. Journey time is 3.30mins. <http://www.irishrail.ie>

The City Link Bus route from Dublin Airport (Bus 721) to Castlebar (a town only 15 minutes NE of Westport) is now available. The Bus takes you directly from Dublin (Zone 11) to Castlebar (Stephen Garvey Way) within 3-4 hours. A cab can then be taken directly to Westport.

Bus Eireann, our national bus service, operates a bus from Knock Airport, every 4 hours.

The journey takes 1h 9m

Telephone: +353 1 8366111/

Email: [CustomerCare@buseireann.ie](mailto:CustomerCare@buseireann.ie)

<http://www.buseireann.ie>

Car Rental (available from all airports). Please note we drive on the LEFT-hand side of the road. Most rented cars are stick shift /manual gear boxes

For more information check

<https://www.destinationwestport.com/getting-to-westport>



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## EXPERIENCES IN WESTPORT...

### 1. Cycle the Greenway

Cycle (or walk) the Great Western Greenway, Ireland's longest off-road cycling and walking trail.

### 2. Climb Croagh Patrick

Ireland's best loved mountain, incredible views all the way from sea to summit!

### 3. Pamper Yourself

Westport has an impressive selection of luxury spa and leisure centres for a day of indulgence.

### 4. Go Trekking

Go horseriding in the unspoilt countryside, from beach treks to fast-paced woodland canter.

### 5. Westport Walking Tours

Explore the town with a guided experience of its history, stories & architecture.

### 6. Theatre Night

Westport Town Hall presents a year round programme of theatre, performing arts and events.

### 7. Traditional Music

Enjoy traditional Irish music in Matt Molloy's (Chieftains flautist) pub in the heart of town.

### 8. Arts and Crafts

Visit Westport's many arts and craft shops or beautiful galleries featuring local artists.



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# IRELAND: USEFUL INFO

## Geography

The island of Ireland is 385 kilometres/300 miles at its longest; 304 kilometres/190 miles at its widest. It is divided into four provinces – Ulster, Munster, Leinster and Connaught, which make up 32 counties.□

## Population

Approx 5 million in Ireland | Approx 1.8 million Northern Ireland

## Electricity

240 volts AC | Overseas visitors will need a flat 3 pin adapter (same type as UK).

## Currency

Euro in Ireland | Pound Sterling in Northern Ireland

## Shopping

Mon-Sat from 9am -6pm

Sunday (some shops) open from 12-6pm

Tax Refunds are available for non-EU residents (check in store)

## Smoking

Prohibited inside all public areas (including all bars, restaurants) and on public transport.

## Driving

Left hand side of the road.







# CONTACT INFORMATION:

## Europarc Federation

Carol Ritchie, Executive Director  
carol.ritchie@europarc.org  
www.europarc.org

## National Parks and Wildlife Service (Ireland)

www.npws.ie

## Wild Nephin National Park

<https://www.nationalparks.ie/wild-nephin/>

## Mayo Dark Park

<https://www.mayodarkskypark.ie>

## Connemara National Park

<https://www.nationalparks.ie/connemara/>

  
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