

Last year over eight million overseas visitors travelled to Ireland while tourism employed some 250,000 people and contributed over €6.5 billion in revenue earnings. With visitors increasingly searching for an authentic Irish experience, the Irish pub is seen by Fáilte Ireland as the essential component in the overall success of the Irish tourism product. The Fáilte Ireland Tourist Bar Award recognises the important role bars the length and breadth of the country play in promoting the Irish tourism product and only the very best were included in this year's entry.

FINALISTS

The Bulman Bar,
Summercove
Kinsale
Co Cork

The Arlington Hotel
Batchelors Walk
Dublin 1

Johnnie Fox's Pub
Glencullen
Co Dublin

The Fáilte Ireland Tourist Bar Award goes to...

FITZPATRICK'S BAR AND RESTAURANT,
JENKINSTOWN, CO LOUTH

When owner Danny Fitzpatrick heard that Johnnie Fox's was also a finalist in the tourist bar category, he conceded defeat saying he was simply grateful for inclusion in the final four.

'It was a complete shock as we were up against what is a tourist institution. We have been working away here for the last 15 years but when you look at the competition and how well they are known, we didn't expect to win,' says an elated Danny.

The Cooley Peninsula, where Jenkinstown is situated, was recently awarded the title of European Destination of Excellence – Tourism & Intangible Heritage 2008, indeed, the Cooley Peninsula is now one of the fastest growing tourism spots in the country, thanks to its natural beauty, with tourism figures growing from 16,500 in 2004 to 37,000 last year.

Establishments such as Fitzpatrick's Bar and Restaurant play an integral role in the success of the Peninsula and after 15 years Danny and his wife Dympna have firmly put Fitzpatrick's on the map as a tourist destination.

'We have worked very hard to get everything right, from the food to the staff to creating the right atmosphere in the bar. Dundalk is not really known as a tourist spot and so we had to work harder in getting tourists to come up here-getting this award means a lot to the business.'

Fitzpatrick's is a vast business, with new hotel accommodation and facilities, restaurant, two bars and a beer garden – employing 42 staff, the bar is an important asset to the local community.

'Everyone from around the local area was calling in congratulating us. It means so much to them as well. A lot of the staff have been with us a long time, and they have worked very hard in getting

Fitzpatrick's to where it is today,' says Danny.

A chef by trade, Danny knows the importance of good food, and it is no surprise that Fitzpatrick's reputation is as much about their delicious dishes as anything else.

'If you don't have the right food, people are simply not going to return, no matter how nice your premises or how friendly your staff is, all of our meat and fish are locally sourced and everything is homemade. We strive to have the very best in food, and thankfully it has paid off.'

Last year, Danny and Dympna welcomed tourists from 27 different countries, and just two days after winning the award, a Japanese group descended upon the establishment after hearing about it in Scotland.

'A bus pulled up with Japanese tourists who were told in Glasgow by another group to come here. It is that kind of word of mouth that has helped us grow. The Irish market has also improved especially with Carlingford so nearby.'

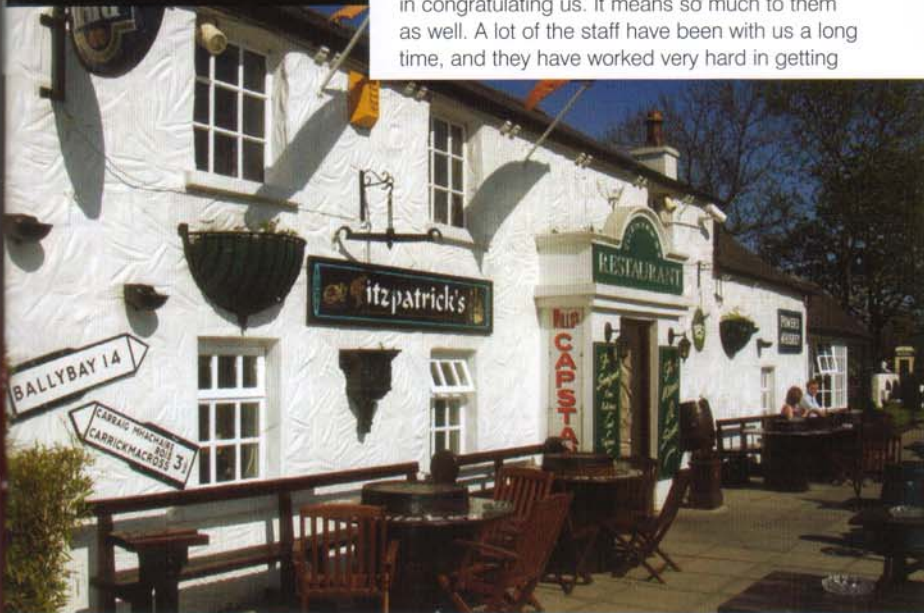


▲ Dympna and Danny Fitzpatrick from Fitzpatrick's Bar and Restaurant accept the Fáilte Ireland Tourist Bar Award from Aidan Pender, director of policy and industry development at Fáilte Ireland.

Fitzpatrick's bar is the epicentre of the vast establishment, while its hotel is a popular spot for weddings and other large events.

In a bid to keep ahead of the competition, they have also organised a series of novel events, including gourmet nights, as well as providing courtesy transport to customers, all of which are important to enticing customers.

'You have to pull out all the stops to make people want to stop here, or want to travel here. If you drop the bar at any point you will lose customers and standards, and we want to be at the top of our game for some time.'



The Tourist Award is sponsored by



Fáilte Ireland