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## Mary Daly *Interview*

'It's like speed dating!' That's how Mary Daly, Group Sales Manager with Trinity Hospitality's Groups Dept describes her constant globetrotting workshops and sales calls to bring more and more coach groups to Ireland and the hotels she represents. From January to April and September to October each year she travels to the UK, the US and Europe and of course around Ireland itself convincing tour operators to bring their business to the hotels and Ireland, a business that is now worth in excess of €9m.

In terms of bed nights, bringing coach tours to independent hotels for at least 8 months of the year makes a huge difference to their operation. It means they can have customers not only during the peak months but also outside the main tourist season. We can extend the season so the big advantage to them is a full hotel. The main bulk of the coaches arrive from March to October and Mary is constantly working to extend the season at both ends.

For over twenty years now Mary has specialised in working with groups incoming to Ireland and assisting clients with their hotel requirements. She looks after hotels that range from big properties in key cities & towns to golf resorts and the smaller properties that aren't on the touring map and which wouldn't have a dedicated person to go chase the business.

Coach tours are a unique and specialised business. So how does Mary do it? She stresses the importance of her relationship with the operators, a relationship of trust and loyalty built up over more than two decades. A graduate of the College of Marketing and Design, Mary says her passion was always for sales. Now she has put that passion to work for the more than forty hotels across Ireland, the majority of which are independently owned and operated.

Mary says the hands-on approach is vital. Her clients have become her friends. Her contacts are amazing and go right across the globe from Europe to Russia to China and Japan to Australia and the UK. Most of these visitors arrive by air and then travel around Ireland by coach, some travel across Europe or the UK en route to their Irish leg of the holiday. She is already working on 2019 and 2020 season and says she needs more hotels to accommodate the hotel requirements for the constant requests received from her clients. The reaction from Ireland's independent hotels varies, she says, some of them are happy to come on board immediately, others debate it for a bit before deciding. 'We're an asset to them', she says, we push the individual hotels and generate the business for them. I'm out doing the rounds of the international workshops and trade shows and we have a team of 3 reservations agents in our office constantly sending enquiries to hotels.

In 2017, Mary places over €9m worth of groups and tours business into the hotels she represents and believes that can be increased





substantially. 'We generate three times that amount in enquiries but we need more hotels to accommodate all the requests we receive. We have the business but we need more locations and we'd love to add some new independent hotels to our list.'

But is Ireland considered good value for tourists? 'The constant feedback is that prices are high, particularly in Dublin. So in addition to booking Dublin for some of their stay, I encourage them to look outside Dublin, within 30 km of Dublin, within an hour's drive. I offer that as an alternative and it will be less expensive than city centre.'

Looking to the future and the advent of Brexit, will tourism in Ireland be affected? 'Yes, Brexit is a concern but luckily the British market is only one of the many markets we work with', Mary tells me, 'It's the unknown really. We've already seen the downturn in the UK market, Brexit has had an impact as well as the sterling issue. We will be guided by Tourism Ireland and their focus is to drive the American business and other markets in Europe way up. So, even though the UK is an important market, we can expand into other areas.'

Another worry facing tourism is a possible change in the VAT rate. 'It is vital that it is maintained at 9% because the rates have increased substantially, so to push it further on top of a rate increase would be damaging to the business.'

The future of group tourism looks very healthy, it is growing and growing and, according to Mary, it's a culture in some countries. 'It's the way they do their holidays.'

Apart from the price differential, what do Mary's groups think of Ireland? 'They love Ireland, my clients are passionate about it. They feel they're coming home when they come to Ireland. The welcome is still there and Ireland has a charm you couldn't bottle! It's the experience; if they get the experience and the welcome then everything falls into place.' And Mary gives the new hoteliers loads of tips to make sure the guests experience that welcome, including getting onto the coach before the guests disembark to welcome them in person to the hotel.



And part of Mary's lifestyle is the fact that she thoroughly enjoys her work. 'You have to enjoy it! I love it because of the interaction with people. I can go anywhere in the world and I'm never on my own! The hospitality industry is still relationship based and I love that. We all work closely together, I have great colleagues in Trinity Hospitality.'

It's always a bit scary to ask a travel expert about their own holidays but Mary loves travel and takes a few trips each year. 'I love the States and I go to a European city a couple of times a year and it's great being a tourist instead of selling to secure group business for the hotels! I love holidays in Ireland. I love Kerry. I had a great weekend there a while ago, the weather was great and I felt like "I'm on holiday!"'

Trinity Hospitality is owned by PREM Group and provides a range of services for independent hotels from procurement to web design, HR and IT, 'everything hotels need to develop their business'. If you are an independent hotel seeking assistance to grow your group business please contact Mary Daly at email: [mdaly@trinityhospitality.com](mailto:mdaly@trinityhospitality.com) & tel. 01.639 1115

