



Irish  
Responsible  
Tourism Awards

**Best Cultural Heritage  
Attraction for  
Responsible Tourism**

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**Congratulations on being longlisted for the 2015 Irish Responsible Tourism Awards!**

You have been longlisted for '**Best Cultural Heritage Attraction for Responsible Tourism**' - a category awarded to a tourism attraction or experience that is designed to protect and promote the heritage of a community, integrating principles of responsible tourism into every aspect of their operation. The winner will be an inspirational example of a memorable and enjoyable attraction where the traditions and culture of a community are at the heart of an experience.

Now we would like to hear your story - your work, your achievements, and your vision for responsible tourism. Please complete this form to the best of your ability, and email the completed document to [james@rethinktourism.ie](mailto:james@rethinktourism.ie), along with any supporting documentation, by **6<sup>th</sup> February 2015**.

Our questions are designed to find out about you and your work, so be as honest and clear as possible. We understand that you may not always be in a position to provide evidence when we ask for it, but hope that you will try your best to give us a clear and transparent picture of what you do.

Please note all word counts are the maximum for that section, not a target. The evidence you provide to support your answers can be provided in the form of additional documentation, which you can upload alongside your application. Please label all supporting documentation clearly.

If you have any questions or queries at all, please contact James Chilton at [james@rethinktourism.ie](mailto:james@rethinktourism.ie).

Good luck!

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**Name of your business:**

**Mizen Tourism Co-operative Society Ltd. R4724R**

Mizen Head Signal Station, Cloghane Island GPS Co-ordinates:  
5127 0416 - 0949 0000

**Section 1 - You and your vision**

## **1. Why do you think your cultural heritage attraction deserves to win this award?**

For preserving iconic landmarks, Mizen Head Signal Station and the Arched Bridge

for retaining the environmental simplicity and essence of the site in a SAC

for developing an authentic experience for visitors

for developing Mizen Head Signal Station into internationally renowned visitor attraction,

for achieving the status of Signature Point on the Wild Atlantic Way. One of 15 key discovery points on the WAW.

for registering a community co-operative, Mizen Tourism Co-operative Society Ltd., in 1993 to develop a visitor centre and keep it in local ownership when few people in the area knew what a visitor centre was. There are over 800 shareholders now.

for building a locally owned and operated successful business over the last 22 years,

for creating local jobs to replace those lost when the Commissioners of Irish Lights automated the Signal Station in 1993,

for training and developing our own staff and managers,

for giving holiday jobs to countless students and school children,

for giving jobs to people who had difficulty in obtaining the work experience necessary to start their careers elsewhere,

for bringing more than 60,000 visitors a year to the area,

for developing interpretive displays to encourage visitors and locals to appreciate and enjoy all that the Mizen Peninsula environment has to offer whether birds, flowers, geology, history, tides, the ocean, Marconi, the Irish Lights history and artefacts, etc.,

for using our financial advantages towards community amenities (through Goleen & District Community Council (GDCC) e.g. West Cork Tourism Ferry Shares, Goleen Play park, Goleen Rural Transport Bus, rock cutting and making a footpath in Goleen, road widening etc.),

for developing Mizen Information and e-Centre in Goleen to bring business back into the village,

for lobbying, cajoling and coercing funds (with grateful thanks) over 22 years from West Cork LEADER, ERDF/Bord Fáilte, Fáilte Ireland, National Millennium Fund, the Commissioners of Irish Lights, Cork County Council,

for guaranteeing the future of Mizen Head Signal Station with a successful campaign to get the iconic Arched Bridge demolished and rebuilt in 2010.

#### **4. What does responsible tourism mean to you? Why is it important? (200 words)**

Responsible Tourism is developing a local resource in a sustainable and environmentally sympathetic way for visitors and locals alike. It is important not to change or impose facilities or developments that alter the natural state to the point that the original attraction has been lost. Development is not just physical, but also includes topics like community, employment, training and education. The local resource, whatever it is, whether it is a signal station, a beach or a walk, has to be developed for the visitor, but not at the expense of local people. The local people are what make an area live, without them it is desolate. In rural disadvantaged areas, every plan or project should start with the premises: how is this good for the local environment and how is it going to help local jobs and amenities?

#### **5. Do you have a responsible tourism policy or equivalent?**

No. We have never felt the need for a document, because our whole ethos is to create a sustainable, environmentally sympathetic tourism product.

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## **Section 2 - Your attraction**

### **1. Please give us a brief overview of the attraction and how it engages visitors(600 words)** *You may prefer to pick one or two issues to focus on - you don't need to tell us about everything you do*

At the end of the Mizen Peninsula, the cliffs of Mizen Head rise high above the Atlantic Ocean, where the currents meet from the west and south coasts and waves from the mid-Atlantic crash into the land. In all weathers, the Mizen is spellbinding. Expect an exhilarating and satisfying visit.

Mizen Head Signal Station Visitor Attraction has many experiences in one exciting package

- **Above** -the dynamic visitor centre by the large car park. Ticket Office. Navigational Aids Simulator, Fastnet Hall, the Geology of the Mizen, the Fastnet Rescue Tide Clock, Tidal Mural, Historical Tour of the Mizen Peninsula, SS Irada Propeller and much more.
- **Washrooms** are there for your comfort.
- **Mizen Cafe** with good home-cooked food, snacks, drinks and ice cream for lunch and tea. Open all day.

- **Gift Shop@the Mizen.** A quaint shop filled with a great selection of maritime gifts, model boats, books, and toys for all ages, books, postcards, cards and maps. A good place to browse.
  
- **On the Way** - a ten minute walk to the **Signal Station** down the famous 99 steps, and over the iconic **Mizen Bridge** amid stunning scenery with the possibility of seeing seals, kittiwakes, gannets and choughs. One of the best places in the world to see Minke, Fin and Humpback Whales and Dolphins. The Mizen is an ever-changing experience.
- **The Paths** – there are four new paths
  - **Sea Arch** – a steep path down towards the ocean ends in an observation platform with views of the Sea Arch and back to the Bridge and Signal Station.
  - **Bridge View** – a level path to an observation platform where you can look down at the Bridge and up north to the Beara Peninsula. This path is good for those unable to take steep climbs
  - **Dunlough View** – over the Bridge and up by the Explosives Hut where the cordite for the explosive Fog Signal used to be kept there is a path that takes you to a breath taking observation platform. The views are sublime in every direction.
  - **Derrick Path** – a short path leading down to the Derrick stand that was once used to supply the Station from boats before the Bridge was built in 1909. The views under the Bridge are fascinating.
  
- **Below** –The Keepers' Quarters in the former Irish Lights Signal Station; the Engine Room with Marconi Radio Room and The Workman's Quarters with the Mizen Map Collection, Birds, Whales and Dolphins, Wrecks and CIL Boats displays and much more.

**2. Please provide a brief overview of the attraction itself – ownership, the management model, who is involved, number of staff (200 words)**  
 Mizen Tourism Co-operative Society Ltd. is registered with ICOS. There is a Committee of Management with 9 voluntary elected members. The current members are: Dr. Brian O'Connell, Goleen; William Buckley, Goleen Post Office and Manager, River Island Hotel, Castleisland; Stephen O'Sullivan, Goleen, Manager, Mizen Head Signal Station (former Irish Lights Keeper), Maureen O'Sullivan, Galleycove House, Crookhaven, Michael McCarthy,

Letter and Schull; Sue Hill, Development Officer, Mizen Head Signal Station and also The Heron's Cove Restaurant and B&B, Goleen, Diarmuid Kenneally, Barleycove Holiday Park and Cork City Gaol; Michael Barnett, Barnett's Drapery, Schull; Dermot Sheehan, former MCC and Sheehan's Mini Market, Goleen

There are over 800 shareholders, who have one vote each however many shares they own. A share is €35. When the co-op was registered in 1993, it was agreed that a share would be £25 so that the cost would not be prohibitive for anyone in the community. It was decided that it was more important to get local support and involvement than the funds.

All the staff are local and have been with the Mizen for many years. Stephen O'Sullivan was made redundant from Mizen Head Signal Station in 1993. He has been the manager of the visitor attraction since 1994 and has assisted the Development Officer over the years with all stages of project development. Patti Clarke (Manager), Bernie Sheehan, Margaret O'Reilly and Mary Downey, all from local farms, operate Mizen Café. Jean Collins, who operates the ticket office and shop, is formerly of eircom in Cork, but returned home to care for her mother, many years ago. During busy times, up to ten local students and young people are taken on.

**3. What have been the biggest challenges to making your attraction responsible, and how have you worked to overcome them? Please be as transparent as possible. (400 words) Please provide evidence to support this statement**

I can't think of any challenge that we have had to overcome to make our attraction responsible. We have developed the attraction slowly over 22 years. We have never taken on more than the Co-operative could bear at any time (although there have been some close shaves bringing in funding, matching funding and completion dates on time) One of the main challenges has been to raise funds and get grants as the site of the attraction is on a 250 year lease from the Commissioners of Irish Lights (soon to be transferred to Cork County Council). We bought the former AIB sub-office in Goleen (now demolished and reconstructed as Mizen Information and e-Centre) in 1997 for £20,000 and this has been our collateral. An area that could have been problematic was the demolition and reconstruction of the Bridge. However, the site is so restricted that in fact the whole job was done without the use of any heavy machinery. The old Bridge was demolished and reconstructed section by section, virtually by hand. They also fenced the many paths on the site. The engineers and construction company have to be congratulated on the minimal amount of environmental impact they had.

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**Section 3 - Your impacts and relationships**

**1. In what ways do local communities benefit from your attraction? 250 words)** *Please provide evidence to support this statement.*

For many years the focus of Mizen Tourism Co-operative was to develop Mizen Head Signal Station as a visitor attraction. The effort and time in voluntary work to get each of the phases designed, built, completed and funded was at times overwhelming. However, each phase brought more visitors and this gave local jobs directly with employment at the Mizen and indirectly in the form of bed nights with local B&Bs and customers for the shops and pubs etc. However, it was very difficult to get people to stop in Goleen on the way through to the Mizen. After the purchase of the former AIB sub office in Goleen we opened one of the first 'telecottages' in Ireland at a time when computer literacy was in its infancy. We ran computer courses, helped children complete their projects, etc. In time it was not needed and awaited redevelopment. When the Bridge was condemned in 2005, its replacement became the all-encompassing concern. However, when the new Bridge was opened in 2011, our attention was concentrated on developing a vehicle to put some of the income from the Mizen back into the heart of the community. Mizen Information and e-Centre offers information, coffee, snacks, gifts, public toilets, hot desks, mentoring and courses through our LEO, office services and chat in a purpose built environmentally engineered building on Main Street, Goleen. (Geo-thermal heating, rainwater harvesting for the public toilets, LED lighting) It is a beacon to all going to the Mizen. It opened in July and was very busy. This winter it is open on Tuesday when the butcher is open; Friday when the post office is busy with pensions and the weekend when the Mizen is open. We have been able to part fund several projects in conjunction with Goleen & District Community Council such as Goleen Play Park, Rural Transport Bus, taking bends out of roads, all sorts of projects. We are planning to set up a Foundation, which can give assistance to local people.

**2. How do your responsible tourism initiatives have a positive impact the environment? (250 words)** *Please provide evidence to support this statement.*

The main environmental advantage of the development of a successful attraction is that by channelling visitors to the Mizen sensitive areas are protected from over use. The site is in an SAC. This is especially true at the Mizen where the Keepers had told us that there were thousands of people on the cliffs every summer who were prevented from crossing the Bridge. The land round the Mizen is a very special type of coastal heath.

<http://www.npws.ie/media/npwsie/content/images/protectedsites/conservationstatement/CS000109.pdf>

By fencing the area this heath has been protected and flourishes. Kittiwakes, seals, sky larks, choughs, hares, migrant birds, whales, dolphins are all to be seen at the Mizen.

Before the site was fenced and opened, it was not possible for visitors to spend time at the Mizen and enjoy a very special environment. We are planning to organise more courses in environmental subjects in the future. We did some pilot courses (Geology with Richard Unitt, UCC and Whale watching with Padraig



Whooley, IDWG) before the Bridge was condemned, Our ultimate goal is for Mizen Head Signal Station to be a Field Study Centre.

**3. In what ways do you educate, inform and inspire people about the attraction they are visiting? How do you ensure a memorable experience? (250 words) Please provide evidence to support this statement.**

We have developed Mizen Head Signal Station in a didactic way. The main attraction is the walk down the path across the Bridge, up the cliffs to the view of Dunlough Bay, Sheep's Head and Beara, down the cliffs to the Sea Arch and down under the Bridge to the derrick platform. The views are magnificent and the sea ever changing. The visitor might see a whale, powerboats racing round the point from Crookhaven to Castletownbere, yachts cruising, gannets diving, and seals under the Bridge. All is different each visit; this is the memorable and, for many, inspiring experience. So inside the displays concentrate on explaining all that they see around them in the environment of the Mizen peninsula. To that end we have commissioned a stunning mural with 100 birds in their habitats, details about them and a picture of their eggs. We are working with a botanist in New Zealand whose daughter lives in Ireland and our most prolific artist, Jules Thomas, to create a similar lexicon of Mizen plants. We have displays about the history of the area, tides, the Irish Lights Keepers and their lives, a sculpture by Sheena Woods, The Ewe, depicting the Keeper's Hobbies, John Eagle's wonderful Lighthouses of the Southwest photos, a Navigational Aids Simulator with three screens which takes the visitor on a boat trip from Crookhaven Harbour, round the Mizen and out to the Fastnet Rock Lighthouse. We have lists of the shipwrecks round the Mizen, the Irish Lights vessels, the fascinating story of the Building of the Fastnet Rock Lighthouse. The list is endless; it is all set out to inform and educate those visitors, who want more than a walk and would like to understand the Mizen environment.

**4. In what ways do you have a positive impact on the local economy? (250 words) This might include: local employment, sourcing local goods and services, encouraging guests to visit local attractions. Please provide evidence to support this statement.**

We were delighted when Goleen & District Community Council (GDCC) was elected twelve years ago under a Muintir na Tire initiative. As the sole body locally interested in tourism we had attended all tourism meetings and fought to get Goleen and the Mizen on the map, but now there was a body which could take on other projects for the community democratically. We have a member elected as a Community Councillor. We work in conjunction on projects as mentioned. We give local employment as discussed and we do whatever we can to promote the area and assist the local community. This topic has been dealt with in other questions.

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## Section 4 - Other information



**Year business opened** 1993

**Country** Ireland

**Number of clients per year 2014**

68000 paying visitors. Many visitors come to use the shop and café without paying an entrance fee.

**Website** [www.mizenhead.ie](http://www.mizenhead.ie)

**Social media links**

[www.facebook.com/MizenBridge](http://www.facebook.com/MizenBridge)

**Your name**

Sue Hill

**Job title**

Development  
Officer, Mizen  
Tourism Co-  
operative Society  
Ltd.

**Phone number**

028-35225

Mobile

0868073072

**Email address**

[info@mizenhead.ie](mailto:info@mizenhead.ie)

**Skype name**

## Section 5 - Final comments and references

**Is there anything else about your business you would like us to know? (200 words)** *This might include web links to articles about your organisation, Awards you have won, or anything else not covered by the earlier questions.*

At the end of the Mizen Peninsula, the cliffs of Mizen Head rise high above the Atlantic Ocean, where the currents meet from the west and south coasts and waves from the mid-Atlantic crash into the land.

- Signature Key Discovery Point on the Wild Atlantic Way.
- Dare to cross the iconic Bridge high above the gorge; watch for seals and their pups in the swell below.
- Experience the solitude of the keepers' lives and the elemental power of the restless Atlantic where the ocean currents swirl.
- Laugh with exhilaration into the fresh salt-laden sea air. Be inspired by the majesty (pull) of the endless seascape and the breath-taking views.
- Scan the ocean for whales and dolphins. In wind, rain and gale as well as hot summer sun, the Mizen is exciting. In fog and mist, it is mysterious – a journey of discovery for the senses.
- Interpretation and displays demonstrate many different topics, completing your experience. Come and find your Mizen!

In all weathers, the Mizen is spellbinding. Expect an exhilarating and satisfying visit.



The Bridge was closed for demolition and reconstruction for 18 months and reopened in March 2011. In November 2011 Mizen Head Bridge won the 2011 Engineering Project of the Year in the Engineers Ireland Excellence Awards and a Commendation in the category for Heritage Award for Building or Infrastructure Projects for the Institution of Structural Engineers. Since then the popularity of Mizen Head Signal Station has soared; it is a must - experience destination. Trip Advisor Ireland Traveller's Choice Top 10 Attractions and Certificate of Excellence 2014.

Mizen Head on a Perfect Day

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpKcmDdiVpw>

The Building of Mizen Bridge

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMDNznlh1Qk>

Opening and Blessing of New Bridge by Minister Leo Varadkar

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gDsxJdGgGs>

TV Gurus Australia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1u56MIsE6s>

MIZEN CAFÉ Homemade lunch, snacks, teas & coffees, GIFT SHOP Souvenirs, books, cards, toys & Fuchsia Brands crafts. WC & Baby changing facilities.

MIZEN INFORMATION & e-CENTRE, Goleen Information, Takeaway Coffee, Snacks, Gift Shop with Made in West Cork crafts, Free Wifi, public toilets.

OPENING HOURS DAILY June—Aug 10am—6pm Mid-Mar, Apr, May, Sept, Oct  
10.30am-5pm Nov-Mid-Mar Weekends 11am-4pm

**2. What is your most significant achievement in terms of responsible tourism? (250 words)** *Please provide evidence to support this statement.*

In April 1993 the Commissioners of Irish Lights (CIL) automated Mizen Head Signal Station. There were redundancies for the Lights personnel, but also for the local providers of services to the Station. To counteract this a lease was sought for the path and buildings across the Bridge from CIL and LEADER funding was applied for. In December 1992 both the funding and the lease were agreed. A public meeting was called to create a local co-operative to develop Mizen Head Signal Station as a visitor attraction. Mizen Tourism Co-operative was registered and today there are over 800 shareholders.

The mission of Mizen Tourism Co-operative Society Ltd. is to preserve the cultural heritage of the Irish Lights buildings, artefacts and history, to operate a commercially viable business with sustainable jobs in a rural area, to involve the community, to enhance the National Tourism Product and to create the best possible experience for visitors to the area.

Mizen Head Signal Station would have been derelict if the local co-operative had not been registered. Besides the job losses, the history of the Station is too distinguished for that to happen. It has been at the forefront of the development of radio in navigational aids in Ireland; the location at Ireland's most south-westerly point and in view of the Fastnet Rock Lighthouse has given it the sought after cachet as the end of the land, next stop America. The iconic arched Bridge, cliffs, vast seascape, wildlife and historic associations have melded to create an authentic experience that has captured the imagination of hundreds of thousand visitors over the last 22 years.

In 2005 the Bridge was closed by the engineers and condemned. After 6 weeks of lobbying, CIL and Cork County Council agreed to fund a temporary solution with scaffolding so that the Signal Station could remain open to visitors. The scaffolding had a life of 3-5 years. The years 2005-8 were very stressful as we again lobbied for funding to replace the Bridge. It was not in the remit of the CIL to take on tourism projects, Fáilte Ireland were not convinced of the feasibility of a new Bridge and Cork County Council was interested, but felt it was beyond them. Our greatest moment came in June 2008, just before Lehman Brothers crash, when the County Manager called to say that he had relented and he would help us with a contribution for the Bridge in conjunction European funding from Fáilte Ireland and a contribution from CIL. Cork County Council agreed to be the client and the Commissioners of Irish Lights leased the whole site to them. The three years of travelling to beg for help and the almost daily calls to the three agencies had paid off. Without their participation Mizen Tourism Co-operative would not have been able to continue as the visitor attraction as being able to cross the famous Bridge is the main attraction.

### **3. What is your vision for the way your attraction will operate in the next 2 years? How will you measure it? (200 words)**

After 22 years Mizen Head Signal Station is beginning to realise its potential. Our next goals are to move towards being a Field Study Centre. A substantial sum was put towards the local GDCC Rural Bus and this can be used to transport students on Mizen Courses on field days. The idea is that initially the courses would run over 2 days. The first day would be theory in the Mizen classroom and the second day would be in the field. This would encourage people to stay locally. On a longer term it would be ideal to build accommodation and classrooms, probably in Goleen, to accommodate school and college groups.

We will set up Mizen Foundation to use income for community advantage. Up till now income has gone into new development and employment, but we are nearing a time when some income can be set aside to help the community.

We have a few more environmental subjects that we would like to explore and develop.

We will have a greater social media presence and are presently training a local person to fulfil this role. To do it properly requires flair, time and consistency.

We have to identify and train successors for Sue Hill and Stephen O’Sullivan, who have been the prime movers in the development and day to day management of the attraction.

**Please supply 2-3 independent references from contacts who can testify to your tour operations responsible tourism achievements.**

Please ask them to email their references directly to [james@rethinktourism.ie](mailto:james@rethinktourism.ie) with your organisation’s name in the SUBJECT line by 9<sup>th</sup> February 2015. Please also provide the names and contact details of your chosen referees in the boxes below.

Referee 1	Referee 2	Referee 3
Name: Jean O’Sullivan Position: Development Officer Organisation: West Cork Development Partnership Email: <a href="mailto:jean@wcdp.ie">jean@wcdp.ie</a>	Name: Michael Collins MCC Position: Cork County Councillor and Chairman, Goleen & District Community Council Organisation: Cork Co Co and GDCC Email: <a href="mailto:collinsmike68@eircom.net">collinsmike68@eircom.net</a>	Name: Position: Organisation: Email:

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**Please ensure your completed questionnaire is emailed to [james@rethinktourism.i](mailto:james@rethinktourism.i) by 6<sup>th</sup> February 2015**