

Case Study



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The Economic and Cultural Impact of the Aer Lingus College Football Classic

The Aer Lingus College Football Classic has become a standout event, blending the passion of American college football with the rich cultural backdrop of Ireland. Held annually in Dublin, this series has not only brought thrilling sports action across the Atlantic but has also fostered substantial economic, cultural, and social benefits for Ireland. The World Trade Center Dublin (WTC Dublin) was delighted to host a delegation from the World Trade Center Savannah who travelled to see the game and explore business opportunities in Ireland.



2024 Overview

The 2024 Aer Lingus College Football Classic took place on August 24th at Aviva Stadium in Dublin, featuring Georgia Tech versus Florida State University. This marked the latest instalment in a series that began in 2016, which has quickly grown in popularity among both American and Irish fans.

The 2024 game saw over 47,000 fans pack the Aviva Stadium, a substantial increase from previous years. Notably, around 25,000 of these attendees were Americans who travelled to Dublin specifically for the game, highlighting the

event's international appeal. The match cultivated a lively atmosphere, combining American football traditions like tailgating and marching bands with Irish hospitality and culture.

While the game was a spectacle, it also delivered in terms of sports action. Florida State secured a victory over Georgia Tech with a score of 34-20. The Seminoles' defense was particularly strong, forcing three turnovers and recording five sacks, which proved crucial in stifling Georgia Tech's offense. On the offensive side, Florida State's quarterback threw for over 250 yards and two touchdowns, demonstrating the high level of play brought to the international stage.

The 2024 game was broadcast live on ESPN in the United States, capturing an audience of nearly 5 million viewers. This figure set a new record for the most-watched college football game held outside the United States, underscoring the growing interest in this international event. Additionally, the game was broadcast on TG4 in Ireland and Sky Sports in the UK. In a first, the game was available on free-to-air television in Ireland, significantly expanding its reach and allowing more local viewers to engage with American college football.

Attendees	Over 47,000
Viewers	5 Million

Economic Impact:

The Aer Lingus College Football Classic has had a profound economic impact on Dublin and the wider Irish economy. Each game in the series has drawn thousands of international visitors, leading to increased spending in various sectors:

Tourism and Hospitality:

The influx of over 25,000 American fans in 2024 resulted in substantial revenue for Dublin's hotels, restaurants, pubs, and tourist attractions. The average length of stay for American visitors was around five days, with many fans choosing to explore other parts of Ireland before or after the game.

Direct Economic Contributions:

The 2024 game alone was estimated to contribute more than €115 million to the Irish economy. This figure includes spending on accommodations, food and beverages, transportation, and other services. In comparison, the 2023 game between Notre Dame and Navy generated an impressive €180 million, reflecting the growing economic importance of these games.

Wider Economic Benefits:

Beyond direct spending, the games have also bolstered Ireland's profile as a destination for international sports events, leading to increased tourism beyond just game day. According to a report by Grant Thornton, the series has injected over €400 million into the Irish economy since its inception. The broader economic impact includes job creation in sectors such as hospitality, retail, and transport, as well as increased demand for local goods and services.

Hotel Occupancy	30% increase
Local Business Revenue Boost	50-70% increase on game day
U.S. tourist numbers to Dublin	15% Increase
Economic Activity Multiplier	Each euro spent by visitors generates an additional 25%
Visitor Stay Duration	Average of 5 days

U.S.-Ireland Business Connections

Over the years, there have been several trade missions organized around the game to promote economic cooperation. For instance, in 2023, a business delegation led by the U.S.-Ireland Business Council travelled to Dublin alongside the sporting event. The delegation focused on sectors such as technology, pharmaceuticals, and financial services, which are key areas of trade between the two nations.

Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland often align their initiatives with the game, utilizing the event to host networking receptions and pitch sessions, creating opportunities for Irish businesses to connect with American companies. This was particularly evident in 2022 when several Irish startups participated in a showcase event aimed at attracting investment from visiting U.S. business leaders.

The game also attracts political interest, with delegations from both countries attending to support economic and cultural ties. This year, The Mayor of Savannah, Georgia participated in a delegation along with members of the World Trade Center Savannah on a mission focusing on economic development hosted by the World Trade Center Dublin, which centred around the game. Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland frequently partner with the event to promote Ireland as a tourist destination to the large contingent of American visitors.

Beyond traditional business and trade, universities participating in the Aer Lingus College Football Classic often use the opportunity to explore educational partnerships. These initiatives include exchange programs, study abroad opportunities, and collaborative research efforts between American and Irish institutions. In 2024, a delegation from Northwestern University met with representatives from several Irish universities to discuss expanding their exchange programs and joint research initiatives.

The Aer Lingus College Football Classic has gone beyond just economic benefits, creating a rich cultural exchange between Ireland and the United States. The games have introduced many Irish locals to the traditions of American college football, from marching bands and cheerleaders to the excitement of tailgating. Conversely, American visitors have the opportunity to experience Irish culture, enhancing mutual understanding and appreciation between the two nations.

Promoting Ireland as a Sports Destination:

By successfully hosting these large-scale events, Ireland has solidified its reputation as a capable and attractive destination for major international sports. This is expected to lead to further opportunities in hosting diverse global

events, from rugby and soccer to other niche sports. The games have also fostered community engagement and local pride, with numerous ancillary events such as pep rallies, parades, and fan festivals taking place across Dublin. These events have provided entertainment for local residents and visitors alike, creating a festive atmosphere that extends beyond the stadium.

Conclusion

The Aer Lingus College Football Classic has evolved into much more than a football game; it is a celebration of sport, culture, and international friendship. The 2024 game between Georgia Tech and Florida State University showcased the best of American college football while delivering substantial economic and cultural benefits to Ireland. With no signs of slowing down, plans are already in place for future games, including the 2025 matchup between Kansas State University and Iowa State University. Each year, the event organizers aim to make the games bigger and better, continually enhancing the experience for fans while continuing to build bridges between Ireland and the United States, driving economic growth, and enriching the cultural landscape of both nations.

World Trade Center Dublin

A key objective of the World Trade Center Dublin (WTC Dublin) is to raise the profile of Ireland internationally and promote it as a country of innovation, opportunity and talent through international trade opportunities, education, and events. We believe that trade is the bridgebuilding force that creates bonds, accelerates business and prosperity, and strengthens the global community. Through our network of over 300 trade centers in over 100 countries, the WTC Dublin provides a gateway for businesses expanding into Europe as well as providing valuable trade services to Irish businesses embarking on an international trade journey. Explore our Resource Hub and learn more at www.wtcdublin.ie.



**CONNECTING BUSINESSES,
GLOBALLY.**

*A central place for international businesses
to thrive and prosper.*