

Demand for 'off-grid' holidays is growing

Off-grid holidays in natural settings are becoming very popular with stressed out, 'always on' professionals. Zoobox sees the opportunity in this space.

Irish startup [Zoobox](#) sees an opportunity in the world of 'off-grid' holidays. The business builds bespoke lodges and then places them in hidden natural landscapes away from the hustle and stress of the 'always on' digital world.

The company burst onto the tourism scene some years ago in Canada, a country with deep forests, incredible vistas and bulging mountains. Zoobox says its experience gives customers 'an open window to the natural world'. The concept is that humans are in 'boxes' looking out at nature. These homes are off-grid and self-sufficient.

The lodgings are eco-friendly, and 'respect their environment'. Each site is specifically chosen and designs are created to merge with the natural landscape.

We spoke with Zoobox's head of business development, Laure Hantz-Burnet, who gave us more insight into the idea.

How was Zoobox born?

We started as a real estate development company based in Canada beside a national park. We were the first to design platinum certified passive homes in Canada.

We realised there was a strong demand to reconnect with nature in a comfortable setting. It makes sense – we spend more and more of time indoors (90% if you are American according to the national human activity pattern survey), we also spend most of the time sitting in front of a screen. We believe people are feeling an urge to unplug and recharge in a natural environment. High-end eco lofts can rent at a similar price of luxury hotel rooms but cost from 20% to 50% less to build and run. Seeing this demand, our company designed a prototype in 2007 that would be the ultimate outdoor lodging experience.

We called it the Zoobox and it immediately got a lot of attention from the media and potential customers. Since we already had contacts in North America and had global ambitions, we decided to launch the Zoobox project in Ireland to help us connect to the European market. We design and produce the units here in Ireland and are preparing to ship them worldwide.

Where will they be placed in Ireland?

The goal is to create a network of five Zoobox sites in Ireland. Today we have sites in progress on the west coast (Galway, Clare and Kerry) and also Wicklow. We also have many interested parties in Donegal and west Cork.

How much they will cost?

For the moment, we don't plan to sell the units individually. Our business model is based on joint ventures; we design ecotourism sites with local partners. Our sites size will vary between five and 15 units, depending on the local market study.

How successful has it been?

It has been very successful so far. We have confirmed our first order for Canada for 15 homes. We had plans to secure five partnerships in Ireland before 2020, and so far we already have three active partnerships. We are getting loads of demand from abroad from countries such as Iceland, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Madagascar and Jamaica.

What are the future plans?

In the next five years, we plan to have five operational sites in Ireland and ten sites abroad. As we push forward with our research and development, and our design, we are finding out that some of our cost-effective solutions to install the Zoobox in remote areas could drastically decrease the construction price of off the grid houses or any houses for that matter.