



ESA, ESO, NASA, IYA

An Open Door to Science & Space

Inspired activities for visitors of all ages are freely available during First Fridays at the Castle open nights at CIT Blackrock Castle Observatory.



“Oh my goodness, I could have listened to her talk for three hours – She really knows her stuff! It was amazing.”

Mag Horgan on Frances McCarthy's First Friday talk on 'Juno to Jupiter'

The Need

Raising awareness of the vast creative resources and expertise in astronomy and science at Blackrock Castle Observatory (BCO), along with its strong foothold in the international space events calendar.

The Solution

First Fridays at the Castle are firmly embedded in the BCO experience, attracting a fun-loving, star-gazing audience of all age groups. Monthly, every first Friday, the astro-action kicks off at 6pm with family-friendly workshops (hosted by BCO's resident astronomers) that engage children and their families in hands-on, space-related craft activities, themed round the evening's events. Throughout the evening, the *Cosmos at the Castle* exhibition, is open and free to all. At 6.45pm, the Cork Science Café invites speakers to brew ideas and encourage debate about science amongst the public in the informal surrounds of the Castle Café. At 8pm, BCO hosts invited speakers, many of whom are scientists of international repute. The evening's highlight is stargazing with support from the Cork Astronomy Club. Visitors can enjoy exploring the night sky using telescopes in the castle courtyard.

Challenges

To capture the interest of the public as a whole and not simply those with special

interest in matters scientific and astronomical. The themes of the evening and invited speakers need to be able to appeal and engage the huge age range and interests of individuals. BCO continually meets this challenge by inviting top speakers of interest and offering a varied menu of activities.

Critical Success Factors

The calibre of speakers is crucial to its success. Working in partnership with internationally known researchers through links with BCO labs, the Cork Astronomy Club and the Cork Science Café ensures that lively and interesting presentations are delivered to the public. BCO's band of Astronomy Volunteers in association with the Cork Astronomy Club are central to the night's success as they guide the public, enabling them to see a host of astronomical objects with their own eyes.

Benefits of the Engagement

First Fridays enables BCO to engage the public in a taster session of what the facility offers. The activities are always well received as the atmosphere is light-hearted and no previous knowledge is required. BCO amasses an ever growing portfolio of engagement with scientists and local and international partners and is recognised as a centre of excellence in scientific research, education and outreach.

“The Star making was very good – The kids really enjoyed it and were very well entertained!.”

Mary McCarthy

