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## Meet the woman who arranges €30,000 luxury holidays to Ireland for celebrities

As part of our How My Business Works series, we profile travel firm Adams & Butler.

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KANYE WEST AND Kim Kardashian are good customers for any small Irish business to have, but no one beats the King of Pop.

In 2006 Michael Jackson was weary of publicity. The entertainer, who had recently been acquitted in a child abuse trial, sought some relief from the media frenzy by travelling to Ireland.

Dubliner Siobhan Byrne was tasked with finding Jackson a suitable venue where he could get some rest and relaxation.

“We had to slap ourselves every so often and say: ‘Michael Jackson is our client, he’s here’,” she tells *Fora*.

Her company, Adams & Butler, organises tours and holidays for the rich and famous. The firm decided to put him up in Luggala in Wicklow, where the notoriously media-shy star stayed for three months, grateful for some relief from the US paparazzi.



“He was as happy as a pig in shite. Irish people didn’t hassle him, and the Irish press paid him respect,” Byrne says.

“It was 24/7 at times, one day we were doing site inspections and then looking at properties for him from 5am until 2, but as he settled in there was nothing more that had to be done, we didn’t do anything for the last six months.”

Byrne, 51, says that Jackson so enjoyed his time in Ireland that he was seriously considering buying a property in Westmeath. Jackson, of course, tragically died in 2009 before he got a chance to make good on his plans.



Michael Jackson visited Ireland in 2006

Source: Altered image MJPictures.com via ReflectionsOnTheDance

Nevertheless, while Jackson's stay in Ireland was relatively brief, it gave Byrne's company a big boost.

### Hiring castles

Adams & Butler was set up by Byrne in 2003, well over a decade after she first finished school and studied Spanish and Arabic in UCD.

After completing a postgraduate degree she, like many others, found it difficult to find work during the 80s recession, eventually landing a placement in a sales and marketing role in a hotel.

Byrne spent the next 11 years there before returning to UCD for an MBA and taking up a new role as the head of Active Ireland, a firm that specialised in marketing luxury properties.

“When I was working in property we hired out castles and I saw that no-one was providing high-end services (for wealthy people), so I set up a company to provide that,” she says.

With four other people from Active Ireland, Byrne broke away to set up her own company, Adams & Butler, to focus on tailoring trips to Ireland for the rich.

While she initially found it hard to attract the ultra-wealthy celebrities she sought, in 2005 she managed to get the company accepted to the Virtuoso consortium, an international network of high-end travel agents.

The network gives its members access to good deals and clients, and a year after joining the group Adams & Butler was working with Jackson.

“There were lots of articles about it in America and people saw how happy he was in Ireland. It put us on the map,” says Byrne.

Afterwards, the company started getting bookings from more of the ultra-wealthy, particularly from the US, including the likes of Taylor Swift.

As well as finding more success after the Jackson's visit, Byrne also found a partner, Kasao Learat, on a trip to Kenya in 2007. The pair married in 2010 and he now helps Byrne run the business.

Famously, the company was tasked with arranging Kim Kardashian and Kanye West's Irish honeymoon in 2014, when the pair stayed in Limerick's Castle Oliver.



Kanye West and Kim Kardashian in Portlaoise

Source: Aisling Dunne

“It was very last-minute notice, only a few days. They were meant to go to Scotland, but all the properties in Scotland were full because it was a bank holiday, so we thought that Ireland would be a better option,” she says.

The company’s expansion and her husband’s involvement helped Adams & Butler broaden its horizons, operating tours to the UK as well as to Africa, where Kasao can act as a guide.

The company now has about a dozen staff and made a €200,000 profit in the year to the end of October 2015.

### **Designing trips**

At its simplest level, the company arranges travel, accommodation and anything else that its wealthy clients need on their trips.

“Staff design an itinerary based on what the client needs, for example to suit their fitness or age. Then we have drivers and travel guides that work for us; they would be sub-contractors but they would only work for us,” Byrne says.

Once the client has decided what they want, Adams & Butler goes about arranging the logistics. As well as the basics, they also look to offer ‘experiences’, such as meeting Irish political or cultural figures.

“There was an author that people wanted to meet with. When I first rang him he said he wasn’t for hire, then he agreed to sign books and talk with them,” Byrne says.

“People are often flattered when people are coming from abroad and are interested in meeting them.

“We do things as well like letting you live with an Earl in a castle and having the Downton Abbey experience or stay with my husband’s tribe in Africa.”



Byrne and Learat

Source: Adams & Butler

Rather than charging a set fee, the firm gets a commission for all the client's bookings. For example, when someone reserves a castle on the recommendation of Adams & Butler, the company gets a slice of the fee.

Byrne admits that the nature of the work means that predicting how much money the firm is going to make can be difficult. Commissions vary widely depending on the client and type of booking.

"We have to make sure that our conversion rates are high," she says.

### **High-fliers**

While the company caters to a handful of global superstar-level celebrities every year, its bread and butter is working for people slightly below that level.

"We would have about 20 or 30 high-profile business people every year, such as a well-known CEO, and the rest would be wealthy people like doctors, lawyers and diplomats. We have a large Jewish clientele," she says.

The company handles between 400 and 500 customers a year, most of whom come from the US.

🗨️ "Most people coming to Ireland would spend seven to 10 nights here and would spend between €20,000 and €30,000," she says.

"The most we ever did was for €270,000 for eight people for a nine-day trip."

### **New company**

While the company is mostly focused on arranging trips into Ireland and the UK, Byrne has plans to start catering for wealthy Irish people going overseas.

Byrne is setting up a new business called Private Luxury Travel that will formally launch in October. Irish people will pick where they want to go internationally, and the company will arrange the trip.

She says that there are no companies in Ireland that provide the same service as Adams & Butler.

🗨️ "Lots of potential clients would go to high-end tour operators, but our selling point is that we're based in Ireland and offer 24/7 hand-holding," she says.

“We design an itinerary based on the client. Once you book with a travel agent that’s it, but we can change things during the trip.”



Source: [Adams & Butler](#)

Byrne claims that using the company is no more expensive than booking a comparable trip through a travel agent, and she says that customers get added benefits because of the company’s international links.

As well as joining up with Virtuoso, Adams & Butler has linked up with several other international consortia that provide perks for customers.

“Any clients that are travelling with it get benefits that are only there for members of that consortium, for example, dinners, bottles of wine or free transfers from airports. Sometimes the benefits can be worth hundreds of dollars.”

#### **For sale**

Nevertheless, Byrne says that she now plans to sell the company and focus on her new venture.

“The value would be on all the contracts that we have around the world with other consortia. It means that we’re the Ireland and UK reps for those consortia and are the first port of call for bookings,” she says.

“Adams & Butler has huge growth potential, it would be a much bigger company that would buy it.

“An English company were looking at us, but they only knew about part of our business, they didn’t realise we were almost bigger than they were. It has to be someone who can leverage the company.”

Byrne says focusing on Private Luxury Travel, which will have a narrower focus, will allow her to spend more time with her four children and four step-children.

“The company will be more of a company to suit my lifestyle. I’ll divide my time between Kenya and here.”

A better work-life balance is the ultimate goal then? “Exactly.”

***This article is part of our weekly series examining the nuts and bolts of businesses. If you would like to see your company featured please email [news@fora.ie](mailto:news@fora.ie).***

Written by [Paul O’Donoghue](#) and posted on [Fora.ie](#)

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**Yap McGregor**

1y

Jun 25th 2017, 7:24 PM

Slightly off script – bit he landed on his feet there!



137



**Fiona Roche**

5y

Jun 25th 2017, 7:30 PM

@Yap McGregor: Clown! Do you know them? Reign your neck in and don't be such a fool!



61



**Alan Wiley**

4y

Jun 25th 2017, 7:31 PM

@Yap McGregor: €200k not exactly a massive profit is it ? I was

expecting to see millions.

  66

S E E 3 M O R E R E P L I E S



**John Cusack**

2y



Jun 25th 2017, 8:31 PM

Didn't Kim and Kanye not stiff the castle on the bill? Great clients eh!

  55



**Finn Bowe**

2y



Jun 25th 2017, 9:08 PM

20k to 30k spent on average, must of been in temple bar for a few drinks

  47



**pat seery**

1y



Jun 25th 2017, 8:35 PM

Did Michael Jackson not stay in Rosemont Co Westmeath while in Ireland  
Hope to see the clarify this or are they just a  
Spoofing

  30



**Alois Irlmaier**

1y



Jun 26th 2017, 12:16 AM

Just don't ask kids for directions...

  6

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Adam Tyrell

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The 9 at 9: Sunday

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