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Irish whiskey groups launch a €3 million push into India and Japan

The EU will cover 80% of the three-year program, the first co-funded promotion campaign to feature Irish spirits

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Bord Bia and the Irish Whiskey Association announced on Thursday, November 12, a €3 million campaign to promote Irish whiskey and other European geographical indication spirits in India and Japan, part of a three-year program due to begin in 2027.

The campaign, called Spirits of Europe – GI, is being financed with €2.4 million from the European Union and €600,000 from industry, according to a statement published by Ibec, the Irish business group that houses Drinks Ireland. That means 80% of the budget is coming from the EU and 20% from the sector.

The program is not limited only to Irish whiskey. It covers European spirits protected by geographical indication rules, although the organizers said Irish whiskey will be a main focus. The money announced is a budget for promotion, not a measure of sales, exports or guaranteed future income.

Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board, and the Irish Whiskey Association said the campaign will target buyers, distributors, wholesalers, bartenders and other on-trade decision makers in both countries. The funding will pay for dedicated market specialists in India and Japan, participation in trade fairs and trade media activity aimed at professional buyers.

The organizers described it as the first EU co-funded promotion campaign to feature Irish spirits. The money was secured through the EU’s Enjoy, it’s from Europe policy, which backs projects meant to open markets, diversify trade relationships and promote EU standards on quality, safety and sustainability.

According to the statement, the application was submitted under the Third Country - All Markets category and won funding in a competitive process. The group said 97 applications were made in that category and 25 were approved.

The announcement reflects a broader push by Irish whiskey producers to reduce dependence on their largest traditional export destinations. The United States, the European Union and the United Kingdom remain the sector’s biggest markets by value, but Irish producers have increasingly been looking to Asia for growth.

Irish whiskey exports were worth €930 million in 2025, accounting for 43% of Ireland’s total drinks exports, the statement said. The Irish Whiskey Association also said 95% of the whiskey distilled in Ireland is exported.

India is already an important destination for the category. Citing data from IWSR, the organizers said India is Irish whiskey’s second-largest market by volume and that sales there have grown more than twelvefold over the past five years. They said that expansion has happened despite a 150% tariff on exports to India.

The statement also linked the campaign to expected trade changes between India and the EU. It said a recently concluded India-EU free trade agreement is expected to enter into force in 2027, cutting the tariff in half immediately and then reducing it to 40% over the following seven years. If that timetable is carried out, lower duties could improve the competitive position of imported Irish whiskey in what the industry describes as the world’s largest whiskey market.

Japan is a smaller market than India by volume, but producers also see it as an important growth opportunity. The statement, again citing IWSR, said Irish whiskey sales volumes in Japan have risen 305% since 2020. Japan has a long-established domestic whiskey industry, but importers and consumers have also increased their interest in products from other producing countries in recent years.

The use of geographical indication status is central to the campaign’s message. Geographical indication protection sets rules on origin and production standards and limits the use of protected names. For Irish whiskey, that status is meant to safeguard how the product is made and marketed in export markets.

The groups behind the project presented the campaign as both a trade initiative and a market education effort. In practice, much of the spending appears aimed at trade channels rather than general consumer advertising. Dedicated staff in each market are expected to work directly with distributors and other commercial partners, while trade fairs and specialist media are intended to build visibility among industry buyers.

The €3 million budget is spread over three years, but the organizers did not publish a breakdown by year or by country. They also did not provide a comparable earlier budget for similar work in India or Japan. As a result, the announcement gives a clear total figure and financing structure but leaves unanswered how much will be spent in each market and which activities will receive the largest share.

The campaign also offers a measure of how strongly public support is being used to help the sector expand in Asia. With the EU providing four euros for every one euro contributed by industry, the project shows the degree of official backing available for export promotion when producers can secure co-funding through Brussels.

The announcement came from organizations closely tied to the industry and to Irish food and drink promotion. Bord Bia is the Irish state agency for promoting food and beverages at home and abroad. The Irish Whiskey Association represents distillers, bottlers and brand owners across the island of Ireland. Ibec, which published the statement, is Ireland’s main employers and business organization.

What the announcement does not establish is how much additional business the campaign will generate. Promotional programs can raise awareness and help distributors enter or expand in a market, but they do not guarantee higher sales. That is especially relevant here because the program includes a wider group of European geographical indication spirits, even if Irish whiskey is expected to be the most visible beneficiary.

Even so, the scale of the funding and the choice of India and Japan underline where the industry sees its next opportunities. After years of growth in established Western markets, Irish whiskey producers are now putting fresh resources behind two Asian destinations where sales have already been rising and where trade conditions may become more favorable from 2027.