

# The Best of Southwest Ireland

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## WEST CORK: A WORLD APART



**Schull, Mizen Head and Cape Clear have a local feeling and “big country” scenery**

*By Maeve Tynan*

The environs of Schull, near Ireland’s southwest corner, are a great refuge for the weary brain. Poets, writers, composers and artists have flocked to this area for years to re-charge and wash away the grime of modern life. With rugged, mountainous scenery more reminiscent of the Wild West than the green slopes of Eire, this corner of West Cork still offers a warm, community feeling, in spite of getting a fair number of tourists in the summer months. A recent trip to Schull, nearby Mizen Head and Cape Clear Island revealed a quieter side of Ireland.

Schull town is a pleasant tourist stop that’s kept an element of charm, even though it has been slightly “sanitized” a bit over the years. Once a place that would shut down for the winter months, its off-season population has been boosted by the arrival of people from overseas, who now make their homes there year-round.

We arrived at Schull around midnight, after a 5-hour drive from Dublin (it’s about an hour and a half from Cork City, on the N71). The

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“You’ve got to do your own growing, no matter how tall your grandfather was.”

*- Irish Proverb*

## Wild West Cork

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main thoroughfare of the old town was quiet, though we spied a few chinks of light peeping out from behind curtains. Truth be told, we were lost. Inching through the near-impenetrable blackness, our car was approached by a ghostly figure. Happily, this specter was most obliging, and soon set us on the right way to Rosbeg Cottage, our abode for the next couple of days. On reaching our destination, the members of our gang who'd arrived earlier greeted us with hot food, a roaring fire and a necessary cup of tea.

### *Walk on the wild side*

There wasn't time to get too cozy, as Cape Clear Island beckoned. We were up at the crack of dawn to catch the ferry from Baltimore out to the island. Cape Clear, or Oilean Chleire, is Ireland's southernmost inhabited island. It is also a Gaeltacht, which means that the majority of its 140 inhabitants speak Irish. It had been a while since any of us had practiced our "cupla focail," but we gave it a go. Everyone we met was patient with our mistakes, and seemed glad to talk to us. It's worth noting, though, that in the summer months the place is flooded with teenagers who come to perfect their Irish for school exams.

Cape Clear is a wild, untamed place with a dramatic, rugged landscape and lots of jagged cliffs. Bird watchers will be in their element, as this is the most popular spot in the country for ornithology. It's also a place that's had its share of tragedy. Before the famine of the mid 1800's, the population was about 1,200, with most families living off sheep herding, fishing and growing flax.



*Bridge to the end of Ireland*

When in West Cork, it's practically required that you go to Mizen Head and lean over the southernmost tip of Ireland. The signal station at Mizen Head was built in 1905 to warn ships of the cliffs in inclement weather. The station is on an island, connected to the mainland by an arched bridge. Along its 99 steps, visitors take turns doing their best "I'm the king of the world!" Titanic impressions over the edge of the rail. The rocky, mountainous scenery here is spectacular, more like Wyoming than what you'd expect to find in Ireland. Mizen Head's visitor center provides extensive information about what to look out for in the area, including geology, flora and fauna. There's a good deal of information offered on the area's history. Also on the peninsula is Three Castle Head, a series of Tower Houses built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century on the site of a Bronze Age Promontory Fort. Standing beside a cliff-top lake, these buildings are cur-

rently unstable, and access to them is limited.

While you're on the peninsula, there's a lot to do. You might want to stop by one of the quaint little towns like Goleen, Ballydehob or Crookhaven. There are numerous beaches in the area-Barleycove is highly recommended. Archaeology buffs will enjoy the numerous structures from the Neolithic, Bronze and Early Christian periods that dot the beautiful countryside. Golf and sailing are also popular here.

### *Impromptu music*

Back in Schull, we found the pubs hopping. Hackett's is a particularly good bar, and often has live music. I took a shine to the Courtyard Bar. It's one of those great hybrids, typical of rural Ireland, with a specialty shop at the front, a café in the middle and a pub out the back. The staff is friendly and the food is homemade. Needless to say, we stopped in more than once during

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# Finding the *Best* Deal on an Irish Sweater—A Pro's Tips



By *Monica O'Brien*

If you want to find great wool goods in Ireland, I recommend two top sources. One is a world-famous producer visited by tourist buses galore, while the other is a less-known shop with unique sweaters.

On the many shopping tours I've lead in Ireland, I've found my two favorite places to buy Irish wool products are Blarney Woolen Mills, which has several retail locations, and Aran Sweaters in Killarney.

Blarney Woolen Mills, which has several retail outlets around Ireland, has a big reputation. Happily, it's well deserved. On the annual shopping tours I lead in Ireland, I always make a bee line to their large store in Blarney after arriving at Shannon. It has the biggest selection of any of their five stores. Then, before getting on the plane back home, I often visit their

smaller shop in Bunratty, to get some last-minute gifts for aunts, uncles and other assorted relatives.

Even in Ireland's current high-priced environment, Blarney Mills offers some great deals on both new and old Irish designs. I'm often puzzled by why some items are on sale, as they seem like the best pieces to me. Many Irish people come in to buy fine business suits, some of which have fairly trendy designs. But Americans, who generally favor more traditional pieces, also find plenty to suit their taste. And even if you're not in the market for clothing, you'll find all sorts of nice runners for your table and other fine linens.

Another real pleasure for weary travelers at Blarney Mills is Christie's Restaurant (at the Blarney location), where you can get very good scones in the morning, or a pint of Guinness in the afternoon. If it's not raining, I like to sit in the courtyard with a snack.

## ***Aran Sweater Market***

Aran Sweater Market, on College Square in Killarney, is a lesser-known gem. But it's the ultimate source if you want to shop for a fine Aran sweater and learn the fascinating history of these garments. The market has a full wall covered with the various "Family Weave" sweaters from the Aran Islands. Years ago, each island family developed their own distinct weave. When a fisherman was drowned, his sweater would often be the only thing washed up on shore. The weave would tell a family that their loved one had been lost. Aran Sweater Market has done an extensive research project on

the diverse family weaves, and has them all displayed in the familiar off white "ecrue" color. If you visit the Aran Islands, you'll find a small museum on Inishmore, which also has a good exhibit on the history of family sweater weaves. Aran Sweater Market also has a wide variety of more recent designs. My own favorite is a contemporary weave called "Eye of Ireland."

## ***The finer points***

Both shops offer three basic types of sweaters – machine-made, handloom and handmade. You can get a nice machine-made sweater for about 60 Euro. Machine-made garments are consistent – which means the size and arm length is the same on every one. Hand loom sweaters are still fairly consistent, but generally have a looser weave. The expensive handmade sweaters vary greatly, depending on the person who's made them. If he or she has a tighter hand, the weave will be tight. If you're buying for a tall person, handmade is the best, because the arms on them tend to be longer. ♦

**Blarney Woolen Mills** has shops in Blarney, Bunratty, Dublin, Killarney and Tipperary. For further info, visit [www.blarney.com](http://www.blarney.com)

011 353 21 451 6111

**Aran Sweater Market** has two stores: College Square in Killarney

011 353 643 9756

Inishmore, Aran Islands

011 353 99 610 11

[www.clanarans.com](http://www.clanarans.com)

*Monica O'Brien runs O'Brien's Irish Cottage, a fine Irish gift shop in Sterling Heights, Michigan*

## **Wild West Cork**

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the weekend. Be aware that music is, in general, spontaneous in Schull – it's best to keep an eye out for posters in the area announcing sessions for the evening. If you happen to be a student of the Irish language, you might be interested in the "seachtain na Gaelige" (Irish festival), which takes place in Schull every March.

Local Carol O'Donovan told us "I always felt a part of Schull, perhaps because my parents were both buried here. Before I moved here I would visit, year after year. Every time I had to leave, I left a part of me here. It means that much to me." ♦

*Maeve Tynan lives in Limerick*

# Clare's Secret Peninsula

***Loop Head, in easy reach of Shannon Airport, is a haven for outdoorsmen and lovers of quiet, untouched villages***

*By Maeve Tynan*

**L**oop Head is one of Clare's lesser known hideaways. Lying just a half hour's drive from Shannon airport (via Ennis and Kilkee), it features a breathtaking coastline, with ranges of sea stacks rising up 80 metres from the sea in places, in what seems like an unending battle between the land and the raging Atlantic. I'm told that some nutters actually climb the rocks here—the thought of it makes me dizzy.

The far end of Loop Head peninsula is a strikingly remote spot, with a distinct "edge of the world" feel to it. A whitewashed lighthouse stands at the tip of the head, but there are no shops, no signposts—nothing but birds, wild flowers and the surf pounding against the cliffs.

On a recent visit, there were so many shrieking gulls flying around I felt a bit like Tippi Hedren in *The Birds*. But sitting down to a picnic was wonderful with the waves roaring below. As it was April, the area was quiet. Just a few other visitors strolled by now and then.

If you're the type who revels in this kind of isolation, you'll be glad to know that the Loop Head lightkeeper's three-bedroom cottage (right next to the lighthouse) is available to rent. The accommodation is absolutely traditional: the place has no telephone, television or micro-

wave. The closest amenities are three miles away in the town of Kilbaha, which has a post office, shop and a pub (you can also hire boats there). The cottage can be rented from The Irish Landmark Trust, for a weekend rates of 363 Euro in "mid season" (June & September) or a 7-night rate of 770 Euro in July and August (no weekend rental is available in summer). Call 011 353 1 670 4733 or visit [www.irishlandmark.com](http://www.irishlandmark.com)

After our picnic at this delightful spot, we continued on to the village of Carrigaholt (which means "Rock of the Fleet"), an historic fishing port, on a fine bay at the mouth of the Shannon. Carrigaholt is an attractive little town, where a good deal of Irish is

spoken. The airport at the other end of the river seems far away here.

The town's most dominating landmark is its "tower house" style castle on the waterfront. Built around the end of the fifteenth century by the MacMahons, chiefs of the area, its ivied battlements are impressive. The castle has five storeys with a vault on the fourth floor and common features of the time like a "murder hole," a room just inside the entrance where owners could attack intruders from balconies above.

## ***Dolphin playground***

A small shingle beach here is pleasant enough for sunbathing or swimming (there are better ones in nearby Doolin or Kilkee). But what really

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## Loop Head

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draws the people to Carrigaholt is dolphin and whale watching. The Shannon estuary is the longest sheltered, naturally deep estuary in the country, and is a playground for bottleneck dolphins. A group of over 100 of them live in the estuary between the Loop Head and Kerry Head peninsulas. The Dolphin Watch company offers 2-hour boat trips daily, where you can learn about the dolphins, sea birds and local features (call 011 353 65 9058156 or visit [www.dolphinwatch.ie](http://www.dolphinwatch.ie)).

### Best pubs

The town has great pubs and eateries, and not too many tourists. My choice of pub would be the Long Dock on West Street, with its stone walls, flagstone floors and warm fires, all of which provide a cozy atmosphere. There's a great selection of seafood – the Long Dock has received the "Pub Lunch Award" from the Irish Fisheries Board. It also has regular traditional music sessions around 10 pm.

As in most parts of Clare, accommodations are easy to find and reasonably priced. If dolphin watching is not your thing, you might consider fishing. The Glencarrig B & B and Sea-Angling Centre is an ideal place to fish and stay (in fact, they have a website called [www.fishandstay.com](http://www.fishandstay.com)). This big old house on the beach is located 1½ miles south-west of the village on the Loop Head Drive, and can handle parties of up to 7 fishermen at a time. Owners Luke and Mary Aston are delightful hosts (call 011 353 65 9058209).

Loop Head, as striking as it is, is just one more of County Clare's amazing landscapes. What always strikes me driving around here is the sheer diver-

# Just Beyond Dingle

***Spectacular scenery and a great night's sleep at Ireland's "western-most farmhouse" are only a few hairpin turns away***

*By Peter Green*

**O**n most tours of western Ireland, you can count on making a stop in Dingle. But if you've got a car and want to escape the tourist bustle, there are two great spots very close to Dingle town where you can relax in a much quieter, more rural atmosphere.

**Slea Head Farm**, in nearby Dun-

quin, is relaxing once you actually get there. The drive there from Dingle, along the Slea Head Road, is a real thrill-ride, particularly for American drivers mixing up their lefts and rights. My wife and I were particularly amused by the sight of full-size buses taking hairpin turns beside us,

with bus drivers waving their arms, pointing out sights to passengers or singing them an Irish folk song. Personally, I've lost side-view mirrors to oncoming cars on such roads, so I now move off the road altogether when the buses appear.

Dunquin (Dun Chaoin) is a small, Irish-speaking village. Slea Head Farm bills itself as the "western-most farm

sity of scenery packed into a small area. From the limestone flats of the Burren to the boggy landscape near Kilrush and sculpted cliffs and sandy beaches along the coast, Clare never gets monotonous. ♦

*Maeve Tynan is a writer living in Dublin*

and guesthouse in Ireland," and features spectacular views of Dingle Bay. Our room overlooked a beach where *Ryan's Daughter* was filmed. The breeze off the water was so strong that, with windows open, we had to remember to keep everything securely put away so as not to be blown all over the place.



The sound of the waves crashing against the cliffs at night here is mesmerizing, giving you a good night's sleep like you'll find nowhere else.

Slea Head is a working dairy farm with about 20 cows. When we visited, they also happened to have a new batch of cute Border Collie puppies running around. As in most homes in this area, Irish is the primary language, but hostess Caitlin will be happy to speak English if needed. Her husband Michael might nod at the appropriate moment, but don't count on it. [www.sleaheadfarm.com](http://www.sleaheadfarm.com)

There are beautiful beaches in Dunquin, but only one you can drive to. To

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## Just Beyond Dingle

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get to the others, put your car in the village car park, go across a stony grass field next to it and then down the narrow lane directly across the street from the village green (it's denoted only by a flag pole behind the bench where people wait for the bus!).

### Mountain drive

If you're feeling adventurous, take a drive through the mountains toward **Cloghane**. Along the way you'll get spectacular views of two valleys and a rugged shoreline. This particular area is still considered sheep country. The coastline is sprinkled with mini-cliffs, with little fingers of land sticking out between them where you can find some stunning secluded beaches. There are also a few art galleries, antique shops, beautiful churches and at

### The sound of waves crashing against the cliffs is mesmerizing

least one castle along the way. Cloghane town is an interesting mix of old and new. A number of uninteresting new stores have been built, but the main shopping area still has its original charm. If you're considering this adventure from Dingle, be aware that it's a full day's trip, as the drive over the mountains will take almost three hours. But remember, it's not the distance that matters, it's the road!

Dingle is great for pub-walking, but a quick drive out to the end of the peninsula is recommended if you want peace and quiet, and breathtaking views all to yourself. ♦

## Dining in Style

# A Culinary Classic

**Ballymaloe House, in Shanagarry, County Cork, offers elegant country style and a new menu every day**

By Regina Sexton

If you come in springtime, you'll find hand painted-signs lining the long driveway asking you to "Drive Slowly: watch the lambs." If you visit in summer, the front walls of the country house, parts of which date to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, will be clad in drooping bunches of mauve wisteria. But in any season, you'll enjoy some of the finest cooking in Ireland, served in luxuriant surroundings, at Ballymaloe House.

This is a place of silver service and starched linen tablecloths, with waitresses dressed in navy blue uniforms with white frilled aprons. It's all the creation of Myrtle Allen, one of Ireland's top opinion-makers on food, and on the need for environmentally sustainable food production.

Myrtle first opened a restaurant in her home in 1964, with an uncomplicated, unpretentious approach to food. This was a novelty at a time when most in Ireland felt grand French cuisine was the epitome of fine dining. Her philosophy is explained in the menu: "It has been our endeavour to emulate the food of the best country houses in Ireland. To this end we have always gone to our own garden and glasshouses, into the local butcher's shop and to the pier at Ballycotton to collect our produce. We write a new menu each afternoon when we see what we've got."

In a classic Irish country house style, everything is unfussed, seasonal, local and of the highest quality. As the



menu changes daily, it's hard to describe a typical meal. But enduring favorites include bacon chops with Irish whiskey sauce, chicken liver pate, fish terrine with cherry tomato sauce and crab and mussel soup.

Dinner is a five-course affair, where the greatest delight, for me at least, comes on the desert trolley. The selection of treats offered goes from ice cream mounted in an ice bowl to meringue roulade with mango and passion fruit, jellies of fresh raspberries with fresh mint cream chocolate almond gâteau.

Should you be too full to make it home after all this indulgence, you can stay in one of Ballymaloe's quaint guest bedrooms, and have an outstanding breakfast to look forward to as well! ♦

**Ballymaloe House**, which is also a hotel, is about 20 miles east of Cork City. It is signposted from the main Cork-Rosslare Road.

Dinner, Euro 65

Lunch, Euro 35

Tel. 011 353 21 4652531

[www.ballymaloe.com](http://www.ballymaloe.com)

# The Last Harbor

***Cobh, one of Ireland's most colorful, upbeat towns, was once a sad point of departure for millions of emigrants heading west***

*By Regina Sexton*

When Laurel and Hardy came ashore at Cobh in 1953, bells rang out over a din of whistles and hooters from a flotilla of small boats gathered to extend a tumultuous welcome. It's not hard to picture a comic scene like this unfolding in Cobh, a town near Cork City that resembles a set for a children's film, with houses colored in vibrant yellows, blues, reds and greens rising on steep hill above the harbor. But Cobh's cheerful atmosphere today belies its history as an emigration port, and its often tragic relationship with the sea.

## ***Hilltop vistas***

Cobh (pronounced "cove," for the cove of Cork), one of those odd spots in Ireland with a strong Mediterranean feeling, is visited by plenty of tourists, but doesn't seem overwhelmed by them. Colorful fishing boats are tied up along the quays, along with the occasional ocean liner. Just about anywhere in downtown Cobh, you can turn and walk up a hilly street, and find yourself in a high and very quiet spot, enjoying a stunning vista of Ireland's southern coast.

It's easy to see the spot outside the harbor, near Roche's Point, where the Titanic parked to receive 123 passengers on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1912. It was the liner's last stop before heading out to sea. Three years later, the ocean brought tragedy into the town even more powerfully, when the Lusitania was torpedoed 10 miles off the Old Head of Kinsale in May 1915. Of 1,959 passengers on board, only 761

were saved. Many were ferried into town for medical assistance, while 150 of the dead were buried in mass graves in the Old Church cemetery just outside town.

Predictably, there's a "Lusitania Bar" in the middle of town, and a "Titanic tour" that goes several times a day. Real Titanic nuts (including the editor of this publication) enjoy stopping by the town's former post office by the water, which has changed little in appearance from the days when it was the White Star Line's passenger terminal.

Cobh's status as the best port in Ireland made it important long before the Titanic passed through. The town lies on Great Island, in what was considered to be the largest natural harbor in the world until Sidney Harbor was discovered. Politics have changed the town's name twice. In 1849, British rulers dubbed it "Queenstown" in honor of a visit to Ireland by Queen Victoria in that same year. It kept that name until 1922, when the Free State of Ireland was established, and the name was changed back to Cobh.

In the late 17th century the harbor was a key point for shipping Irish salted beef and butter to support Brit-

ish war and naval efforts. In the mid-19th century, people became Cobh's largest export. From 1845 (the year the Great Famine began) until 1950, over 2.5 million emigrants left from the quays at Queenstown (of the 6 million total who left Ireland in this period).

The townscape is topped by impressive St. Coleman's Cathedral which has a carillon of 47 bells in its tower.



In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, St. Coleman's tower was remembered by emigrants as the last landmark in Ireland, seen from the stern of a ship heading for America.

In the early years of the emigration, especially during the Great Famine of 1845-50, many perished on "coffin ships" en route to the New World. The history of these events is told in the

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# 51 Races and Big Hats, Too

***Galway's age-old racing festival attracts lovers of fashion, craic and ice cream. The horses are also worth a look...***

*By Geraldine Keane*

**T**hough born a Galwegian, I'd be a poor source of tips if you wanted to put down a bet at the Galway Races, which take place in early August. Over the years, I've paid little attention to the actual sporting event. But I've always enjoyed the charged atmosphere the races bring to the city.

For weeks in advance, the city streets and pubs are full of racing talk, as opinions and theories fly on all sides. Each horse's form and forecast is researched intensely. Then, Galway's crowded streets seem to change overnight as the summer arts festival clears out to make way for the race festival.

The Galway Races are among the oldest in Europe. The first race day took place in Ballybrit in 1869, though racing in Galway can be dated back as far as the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century. It seems

everyone can find something to love about the festival. Naturally, there's a large contingent who feel it's strictly about the horses and the thrill of a gamble. But many in town have told me it's not about the racing at all, but "the craic and the buzz of the place." You need not be a horse fan to enjoy a trip out to Ballybrit Racing Park during the festival.

When I visited the racing park this year, I found weathered bookies of all ages from all over Ireland, expertly tending to the betting process. Small

blackboards everywhere advertised the hot favorites and odds for each race, while a chorus of racing jargon in various dialects rang out on the breeze.

I had come armed with a few tips,

but neither my friend nor I had a clue of how to place a bet. The hand gestures and winks of seasoned bettors went over our heads like some secret language. Fortunately, we met a man



amidst the chaos who took time to show us the ropes. We somehow won in the first race, and were immediately taken by thoughts of quitting work to

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## The Last Harbor

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impressive Cobh Heritage Centre, a converted railway building on Deepwater Quay -- the point where mail bags were exchanged between ships and trains for decades. The Centre tells the story of emigration from the Famine times up through the glory days of the transatlantic liners. The multi-media display is an educational and moving experience, particularly if you have Irish ancestors. In front of the Centre is a statue of Annie Moore and her two brothers. Annie was the first emigrant to be processed in Ellis Island when it

officially opened in 1892 (a similar statue exists on Ellis Island). The museum's displays are a reminder that Ireland's modern history was a long story of departure, until many emigrants began returning in recent years.

Apart from the town's attractions, Cobh is also a good base for exploring east County Cork. Located outside of town, for instance, is Frank Hederman's smokehouse (011 353 21 4811089). Frank produces some of Ireland's finest smoked wild Irish salmon. Visitors are welcome. About ten miles east is Fota Island, a country estate, wildlife park and country house. Its Regency-style house been

restored in recent years and is open to the public. Its grounds and gardens are internationally famous, particularly the arboretum. Along the main Cork to Rosslare road, you'll find Barryscourt Castle. This 15<sup>th</sup> century tower house of Anglo-Norman design is beautifully restored, and open to the public. In the castle's orchard, visitors can see old varieties of Irish apples.

Cobh and the surrounding area of East Cork tell a story that's a cross-section of Ireland, from the invader to the emigrant, right through to the more relaxed and affluent present. ♦

*Regina Sexton lives in Cork.*





become professional gamblers. Three losses in a row then brought us down to earth, but we never forgot the joy of an unexpected win.

### ***Local reunion***

Galway natives see the event as a reunion of friends and family. Older people often tell you how they visited the races as children, recalling the ice cream their parents bought with the day's winnings more vividly than the horse that crossed the finish line first. Many local businesses give half or even full days off on Wednesday and Thursday – the main days of the event – so employees can take part. If you've grown up in Galway, Ballybrit can feel like second Christmas on these days. Wandering the grounds, you're sure to bump into people you haven't seen in a while (of course, some prefer to take a holiday *out* of town, to escape the nightmarish traffic the event creates).

Thursday is Ladies' Day, the main event for fashion fans. This year, an

inch of rain fell on Thursday morning. By, afternoon, things had dried up enough so that stilettoed fashion plates in flamboyant feathered hats could make their parade through a special little clearing at the grounds. The Best Dressed Man earns a mere €200 shopping voucher, while the Best Dressed Woman gets her photo splashed across the next day's newspapers, overnight fame (albeit short-lived), and a €3,000 shopping voucher. This year, almost 40,000 people attended on Ladies' Day, and over €5 million in bets were placed. €1 million of that was wagered on the Galway Hurdle, making it the biggest collective gamble on a single Irish horse race to date. Overall, the week-long program of 51 races added some €60 million to the coffers of the local economy.

Galway's skies hum with a continuous stream of helicopters bypassing traffic below to get their patrons to the track, and the phrase "more money than sense" seems to take on a re-

newed meaning. By night, the city's streets are thronged with people spilling out of crowded pubs into the cool evening air. Hotels can (and do) triple their prices, and extended licensing hours keep the party going on till the wee small hours with jazz bands in all of the bigger establishments.

Some find it a bit silly how much focus the event puts on who's who, how well you look and how much you've got to spend. But there's still something real going on at the track. Even a non-racing fan like me can't help but notice how the air at the track pulsates with tension. Sweaty palms grip tightly wound betting programs, and the shouting and cheering for horses can seem to have a life or death significance. Watching people's reactions is a sport in itself. Between the horses and the characters, there's little room for boredom. And if, by chance, you still can't find something you fancy, the ice cream is pretty good.  
[www.galwayraces.com](http://www.galwayraces.com) ♦

*Geraldine Keane lives in Galway*



# Fun Facts about Southwest Ireland

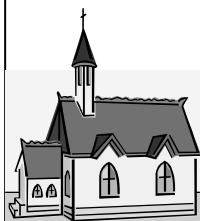
## DID YOU KNOW THAT:

So called **“Black Irish”** people, who have distinctive black hair, are believed to descend from a group of Spanish sailors shipwrecked off County Clare in 1588, and who came ashore at a place now known as “Spanish Point.”

As recently as the early 20th century, fishermen on the Aran Islands **did not learn how to swim**, because they believed it would only prolong the agony if they fell into the Atlantic.

The **“Puck Fair”** is held in Killorglin, County Kerry, every August. Some believe it is a modern variation on the old celebration of Lugh, the Irish god of light. Others say the fair relates to pre-Christian celebrations of a fruitful harvest. “Poc,” the Irish word for a he-goat, is a pagan symbol of fertility.

Scattery Island, near Kilrush, is an uninhabited outpost with **the remains of seven churches on it**. Area residents go out each Sunday morning to celebrate mass in one of them.



The last inhabitants of the island left in 1979.

The Irish fiddle, which offered the accompaniment for many a wild dance party, was once called **“the devil’s box”** by fire-and-brimstone preachers.

The oldest known yacht club in the world is the **Royal Cork Yacht Club**.

The Drombeg Stone Circle in County Cork was built around **150 BC**.

Seaweed was once very widely eaten in Southwest Ireland. Some chefs have recently tried to revive it’s popularity by using it to flavor cheese, among other things. Publicans once stocked a seaweed called “dulse” because it’s **saltiness worked up a strong thirst among customers**.

*The Irish Farmer’s Journal* recently stopped publishing it “lonely hearts” section, which was immensely popular with rural singes for 40 years. The column is now offered online. According to the *Journal’s* editor, **“Cupid is going electronic”** down on the farm.

Rock n’ roll bassist **Noel Redding, of the Jimi Hendrix band**, lived in

Clonakilty and played in a local pub there each weekend until he passed away in May 2003.



Virtually all the known photographs of the **Titanic** were taken by Father Francis Brown, a Jesuit who got on the ship in Southampton England and disembarked in Cobh, Ireland (then known as Queenstown).

There are over 30,000 ancient **“ring forts”** in Ireland, 2,300 of which are in County Clare.

At upscale Longueville House in Mallow, County Cork, **5,000 pheasants** are released onto the grounds each year for the pleasure of hunters.



It rains about twice as much in the West of Ireland as in the east. **Clouds come in off the Atlantic heavy** with moisture and tend to release as they hit Ireland’s coast.

**The Blasket Islands**, off the tip of the Dingle Peninsula, have been uninhabited since 1953, when the government paid the few remaining inhabitants to move to the mainland. The main inhabitants of the islands are now seals.

The Feast of St. John, December 27th, was once believed to be a “good luck” day for **farmers to borrow money** to buy seed for the spring season.

The father of Henry Ford, founder of **Ford Motor Company**, came to America in 1847 after being evicted from his land in Ballinascarty, County Cork.

**The intricate stone walls that cover the Aran Islands** were built by farmers to prevent howling Atlantic winds from blowing all the soil off the rocks.

Allihies, on the Beara Peninsula, was the center of a **copper mining industry** until the 1930’s. Open mines can still be seen in the hills around the town.



# Favorite Beds

***A selection of favorite southwestern accommodations, in all price ranges***



*Top of the high end: Luxurious Glin Castle*

## **- Harbour Sunset Farm -**

Liscannor, County Clare

Extremely kid-friendly farmhouse B&B with animals to pet and feed, and music at night in a parlor warmed by a fragrant peat fire. Hostess Bridget is tops, and the surrounding landscape, including nearby Liscannor village, has a faraway, old-world feel. Near the Cliffs of Moher. Moderately priced  
www.harboursunsetfarm.com  
011 353 65 7081039

## **- Park Hotel -**

Kenmare, County Kerry

This large luxury hotel built in 1897 by railroad barrons is set in a huge pastoral estate, even though you're practically in the middle of bustling Kenmare when you walk out the front door. Antique furniture, large rooms and world class service from an attentive staff. Expensive  
www.parkkenmare.com  
011 353 644 1200

## **- Lake Hotel -**

Killarney, County Kerry

Pleasant stop-over with stunning views of mountains and lakes. Lots of outdoor activities, along with steam rooms, outdoor Jacuzzi and other big hotel perks. Priced in upper mid-range, starting at about 135 Euro per person (slightly less in mid-week)  
www.lakehotel.com  
011 353 64 31035

## **- Best Western County Hotel -**

Ennis, County Clare

Utterly unremarkable but clean, friendly and well-kept hotel that's perfect if you need a long afternoon's sleep after a flight over from the US. Very close to Shannon. Moderately priced  
011 353 652 8421

## **- Berry Lodge -**

Spanishpoint, County Clare

Delightful country home with just 5 guestrooms. Top spot for golfer's playing Doonbeg or Lahinch, where the spouse isn't into the game. Proprietor Rita Meade offers great cooking lessons in the afternoon. Rooms are not tremendous, but rates are moderate, at 38 to 42 Euro per person.  
http://www.berrylodge.westclare.net/index.html  
011 353 65 708 7022

## **- Adare Manor -**

Adare, County Limerick

5-Star hotel in a very large castle with a huge estate and golf course. Adare town is a postcard-picture collection of thatched cottages, with great craft and antiques shops. Very expensive, standard rooms start at around 400 Euro per night  
www.adaremanor.com  
011 353 61 605200

## **- Cregg Castle -**

Corundulla, County Galway

A very different accommodation that's more like a family home than a castle-hotel (there's no bar or restaurant, other than the breakfast room, for instance). Cregg's eccentric, dressed-down atmosphere is likely to result in you spending an afternoon or two sipping wine, laughing and talking with other guests you've never met before by the great hall's gigantic fireplace. Guest rooms are all different. If you want a private bath, ask for one as not all rooms come with one. Don't waste time — rumor has it the castle may be sold before long! Moderate (65 to 85 Euro per person. Kids get a discount)  
www.creggcastle.com  
011 393 91 791434

## **- Glin Castle -**

Glin, County Limerick

One of the world's most over-the-top luxury manor homes, where a movie star is not an unusual sight. Nestled in a huge estate, Glin feels like a dream world. The proprietor is the current Earl of Glin. Very, very expensive  
www.glincastle.com  
011 353 68 34173

## **- Hanratty's Hotel -**

Limerick City, County Limerick

Classic, very old 3-star hotel with a homey atmosphere and friendly staff. The "Wild West" bar is a bit wacky, but lots of fun. Moderate, about 80 Euro per person  
011 353 6141 0999

## **- Sea View Guest House -**

Allihies, County Cork

Nestled in a great little town at the end of the Beara Peninsula, the Sea View is a very well run, pleasant little hotel where you can relax and enjoy the area's great scenery. Proprietor Mary O'Sullivan is a ball of energy. Allihies is one of the most peaceful spots on earth. ♦ Reasonably priced  
www.seaviewallihies.com



*Fun at HarbourSunset Farm*

# Where to Hear The *Best* Music Sessions in County Clare

By Julee Glaub

It's only one musician's opinion, but I've long believed that the real musical heartbeat of Ireland is in County Clare. Over the years, Clare has been an extraordinary place for me to find songs for performance, teaching and recording. Whenever I visit Ireland now (I once lived there for six years) I always find myself drawn back to the rich flow of traditional music that exists in the "Banner County."

Clare is full of people who live for music, from the famous to the unknown. Best of all, they always seem willing to pass on their traditions freely – even to non-natives like myself. On more than one occasion, I've shown up unannounced at the door of a singer who had a song I was looking for – based on a tip from some fellow musician – and been welcomed with open arms.

One of my favorite visits was on a friend's flute teacher, a Mr. Ned Coleman, 10 years ago. I phoned him one Sunday afternoon out of the blue, and showed up less than an hour later with a friend, a fine fiddler from North Carolina. Locating his cottage was a real challenge. I recall veering off onto a cattle path in my rented car, and then driving in reverse for about a half-mile through big briars to find the place. We were greeted with a spread of Irish tea and sandwiches. When we started playing, Ned (then in his seventies) not only jumped right in on his flute, but also decided to phone over a dancer

from down the road. A ten year old girl who'd won several dance championships promptly arrived, and started dancing around to our tunes (I think Mr. Coleman was in the habit of calling her whenever visitors arrived). The day seemed to sum up the Irish way of living in the present. Whenever there's live music being played, well, call in the dancers and play until you can't play another note.

## ***Families that play together***

County Clare has a distinctive style, with a rougher, more slurred style of ornamentation than other regions. It's shared by entire families of music, dance and song. Whenever I meet a fine Clare player, it seems, I find they come from a long line of musicians stretching back in their household for years. Siobhan Linnane, an acclaimed fiddler in the Ennis area, was brought up in Clare by singer Maria Linnane and Tommy Peoples, often called the king of the Irish fiddle. Her grandmother was Kitty Linnane, who started the Kilfenora Ceili Band, one of the first dance bands to gain recognition outside Ireland.

Though many of the best players have left to play concerts or even live elsewhere, they always seem to come back to "get filled up again." Kevin Crawford, bred and buttered in Ennis, tours the world with Lunasa, one of Ireland's most famous traditional groups. But he still calls Ennis home,



and has remained actively involved in the music scene there.

## ***The best seisiuns***

A session, or seisiun, is a gathering of musicians and singers of all ages who exchange tunes and songs for hours, usually in a pub. You don't have to be a musician to enjoy a "mighty" session. Listeners are always welcome, and there's always a good pint of something available to enhance the experience. My favorite session in all of Ireland has always been at Peppers, in Feakle, County Clare. Whenever I've been there, it's been standing room only, and packed with locals. I will never forget taking a friend from

*continued next page*

## Music in County Clare

(continued from previous page)

Dublin who, believe it or not, had never attended a session in her life. I chuckled as she turned to me in the height of the music wafting and the farmers dancing and said, "Isn't Irish culture amazing?" I was reminded of the film *Waking Ned Devine*, where the Dublin fella is razzed in the countryside for knowing so little about Irish culture. Peppers, clearly, can impress even an Irish set of ears.

I advise you take in as many sessions as you can on your visit to Clare. Here's a list of the best ones, which take place every week all year long (since scheduling can change, it's advisable to call before heading to one):

### **Bunratty:** Durty Nelly's

Tues. & Thurs. (011 353 61 364861)

### **Cooraclare:** Turbridy's Bar

Friday (011 353 65 58107)

### **Crushen:** Fogarty's

Saturday (011 353 65 27322)

### **Doolin:** McGann's

Any night 011 353 65 74133

### **Doolin:** O'Connor's

Any night 011 353 65 74168

### **Ennis:** Ciaran's Bar

Wed. - Sun. 011 353 65 40180

### **Ennis:** Kelly's

Sat. or Sun. 011 353 65 28155

### **Ennistymon:** Colley House

Thurs. - Sun. 011 353 65 71712

### **Ennistymon:** Daly's Matchmakers

Thurs. - Sun. 011 353 65 719199

### **Ennistymon:** The Archway

Fri., Sat. & Sun. 011 353 65 71080

### **Kilaloe:** Archer Inn

Wednesday 011 353 61 376108

### **Kilaloe:** Pipers Inn

Fri., Sat. & Sun. 011 353 61 376885

### **Kildysart:** The Alders

Thurs. - Sun. 011 353 65 32990

### **Kilfenora:** Linane's Pub

Sat. & Sun. 011 353 54 88157

### **Kilfenora:** Vaughan's

Mon., Thurs. & Sat. 011 353 65 88004

### **Kilmihil:** Daly's Pub

Sat. & Sun. 011 353 065 5005

### **Kilrush:** Crotty's

Tuesday 011 353 65 52470

### **Kilrush:** The Colleen Bawn

Thursday

### **Lahinch:** The Nineteenth

Saturday 011 353 65 81414

### **Tulla:** Torpey's

Saturday 011 353 65 35130

## How to act!

A good session can be spontaneous or planned, in a pub or in a home, with instrumentals or songs. Everyone is always welcome to listen in, but there is a session etiquette. It's proper to wait to be asked to join in, especially in regard to singing. Lots of Americans seem to want to march in and sing a song. It's not a good idea without an invitation from the players. On the other hand, you must be ready for the moment you're asked. I'll never forget PJ Hayes, fiddler and father of Martin Hayes, in Peppers Pub, stretching his bow out to where it almost touched my nose, and declaring that the time had come for me to "give us a song." Happily, I had one ready to go.

## A few other tips on where to enjoy County Clare's music:

### A Famous Record Shop

My favorite music shop in the world is Custy's, located Francis Street in Ennis ([www.custysmusic.com](http://www.custysmusic.com)). Though its space is tiny, it has a vast selection that

includes many rare Irish CDs. You'll find recordings by many local musicians and singers you can't get anywhere else. A member of the Custy family will no doubt serve you. Every one of them is a musician – don't be surprised if you hear a music lesson going on in the back of the shop. Be sure to ask where the best sessions are, or where you might find a local concert or dance. In addition to recordings, Custy's also sells handmade bodhráns, books and videos.

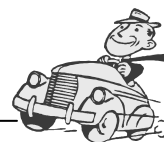
### On Your Car Radio

Clare FM, at 96.4 on the FM dial, is one of the best stations in Ireland, with a great representation of local music you have probably never heard before. It's the perfect companion on your car radio as you tour the county. The last time I was driving through Clare, I tuned in and heard about a traffic jam on a country road caused by a sheep. Only in Ireland! When you return home, you can keep listening on your computer at [www.clarefm.ie](http://www.clarefm.ie)

### Songs At the Cliffs

The Cliffs of Moher can, as we all know, be a bit crowded with tourists in summer. One benefit at this time of year, however, is that there's usually a local musician playing a harp or fiddle, or even singing on the path up to the Cliffs. I've always found this to be a real pleasure. If you have time, take the cliff walk all the way down to Doolin, and you'll more than likely find live music in the town pub any time day or night. ♦

*Julee Glaub is an outstanding singer, who is about to release her third CD of Irish and Appalachian songs. Find out more at [www.juleeglaub.com](http://www.juleeglaub.com)*



## HALLOWEEN ON THE ARAN ISLANDS

*A strange silence prevails*

*By Regina Sexton*

During the dark hours of Halloween Eve, adults on Inis Mór, the largest of the Aran Islands, simply aren't themselves. No one goes out until about 9 p.m. Then, as the pubs fill slowly, a visitor feels overwhelmed by the complete silence. To preserve their disguises, no one speaks a word. Drink orders are given to the barman on hand-written scraps of paper, and regular Guinness drinkers buy gin and tonics to create confusion about their identities. People even drink through straws to avoid lifting up their masks.

The silence, broken only by the ticking of the clock, is odd and a bit disturbing. My husband and I have enjoyed this strange rite on Inis Mor (*Inishmore*) twice, first as observers and then as participants, with our own straw costumes. It's more fun to actually take part than to just watch.

Many of the island's residents begin planning elaborate costumes months in advance. Generally, homemade costumes are the most prized and respected. But if you prefer, you can buy ready-made rubber masks of Ronald Regan, Bill Clinton, the Pope and Queen Elizabeth, among others, in a small shop on the westward point of the island. Outsiders are welcomed in the pubs during the evening. In fact, small groups of people often come out from Galway to take part. At midnight, the silence lifts, and everyone collects in the island's Big Hall for a Halloween dance where prizes are given for the best costumes. ◆

## Tipping a Pint at Cork's "Hi-B"

*A song with writers, failed writers, poets & failed poets*

*By Regina Sexton*

It's like stepping into someone's private sitting room. The nine high chairs that hug the wooden bar will invariably be taken, mostly by men – some of the city's best known characters – writers and failed writers, poets and failed poets. This is Cork's Hibernian Bar, affectionately known as the "Hi-B." It's one of the city's most eclectic and eccentric pubs. Brian, the proprietor, ivory skinned with thinning white hair, will greet you with a witty quip. Of course, only if he takes to you. If you seem suspect, you'll be given the once over with a frosty eye. The last time I saw Brian he quoted me a nugget of good advice: "Have something to love, something to do and something to hope for."

The Hibernian's floor is covered in red lino. Along the burgundy walls are leatherette sofas to sink into and, often, the deflated balloons from some past event. Brian's latest dictates are posted on the wooden mirror behind the bar: "Absolutely no mobile phones," and a favorite, "Those who drink to forget, please pay in advance."

### *Piano man*

One recent weeknight, I stop in to listen to Dick O'Sullivan play piano. Dick won't start playing until around 10pm, so we pass the time drinking glasses of Murphy's (Cork's version of Guinness). When Dick finally brings out the "piano," some kind of light-frame keyboard, the place is energized. Dick,



## A Favorite Drive:

## Up and Over The Healy Pass

*By Robert Sullivan*

My favorite drive in Ireland will always be the Healy Pass, over the Caha Mountains on the Beara Peninsula. If you drive up from Glengarriff, you find yourself on a pretty modern road (R571) heading out onto the peninsula. But turn north at Ardri-gole, and you're soon creeping up the impossibly steep, curvaceous Healy Pass. Good luck trying to go more than 8 miles per hour. There are almost no houses up there, only sheep watching you and a huge, slightly spooky religious monument on top. Coming back down the north side, you pass a mountain lake that looks like something out of Switzerland.

When I go this way, I'm heading for Gurrane, where my Grandad came from. His old townland sits on the small piece of County Kerry jutting out onto the Beara's north coast. That right turn onto the Healy Pass always feels like a step back into the very different kind of world he came from. ◆

white haired and wearing heavy tweed trousers, starts with "Ain't Misbehavin," following with "Down by the Sally Gardens." When Dick sings, the whole pub sings. People come to the piano to sing solo, while others croon from the safety of the bar. Dick finishes up with some fast finger work. We all clap and he directs us to a sign over the bar: "No Dick for two weeks." He's going on holiday, but we all savor the innuendo and the night's last laugh. The Hi-B is at Oliver Plunkett St. & Winthrop St, 2nd fl. ◆

# Galway: Hometown to the World

***Galway is one of the fastest-growing cities in Europe.***

***An American ex-pat's tips on how to enjoy this high-energy university town***

*By Noreen Bowden*

**F**unky, festive Galway teems with vibrant atmosphere. It's a tourists' paradise, but many of the biggest draws for tourists are blowins, who arrive for a visit and wind up falling in love with the place and never leaving. How best to take advantage of this casual city? Simply stroll around, relax and soak in the vibe. Here are some tips on how to enjoy it like a local:

**Brush up your Irish:** Pop down to **Club Árús na nGael** on Dominick Street, where you can order your pint in Gaeilge. Just say "Pionta Guinness, le do thoil" (a pint of Guinness, please). It's ok if you forget the wording – signs up on the wall will help you, but you won't be chastised if you cheat and say it in English. Feeling peckish? Just across the street is **Banana Phoblacht**, a casual little café run by an Irish-language enthusiast from Holland. It's a warm, unpretentious spot for a cup of coffee and tasty sandwiches and salads. The menu is bilingual, and you'll find Irish-language books and magazines available.

**Enjoy a pub chat:** Enjoy live bands while you mingle at bars like **The Quays** and **Roisin Dubh**. But don't miss the virtues of the quiet, old-fashioned bars. Venture into **Neachtain's**, **Freeney's** and **Murphy's**, no-frills, no-pretension bars where the sound of conversation still rules. Neachtain's is particularly beloved among Galwegians, and there's no better spot for people watching than at

one of the pub's outdoor tables.

**Browse the book and record shops:**

**Kenny's Bookshop** has achieved near-legendary status as one of Ireland's best bookstores. The sprawling, family-run shop carries a fantastic selection of Irish books. There's also a delightful art gallery at the back entrance of the shop. Bargain hunting book lovers should also check out **Charlie Byrne's** on Middle Street. If you're more of an audiophile, hit **Mulligan's Records**, a few doors up from Charlie Byrne's, for a wonderfully diverse range of music, including an extensive vinyl collection.

**Jazz it up:** As you'd expect, Galway has great traditional music. Catch a session any day of the week, either at **Tigh Coili's** on Mainguard Street or **The Crane** on Sea Road. But don't miss Galway's surprisingly eclectic jazz scene. Try Saturday night at **Brennan's Yard**, and enjoy the Sunday brunches at **The King's Head** and **Busker Browne's**, and swing on Monday night at **Cuba**.

**Mind the buskers:** A stroll through pedestrianised **Quay and Shop Streets** provides free entertainment galore. Many of the buskers come around year after year, and every local has a favorite. Mine is the talented puppeteer from Florida, whose little wooden pal draws a crowd with his bold antics. The loveable rogue is fond of lifting women's skirts, picking fights with men and dogs and eating children's ice

cream cones. Other buskers to watch out for include the hilarious "plink plonk" man, who plays a selection of cardboard guitars, the hard-working Eastern European singer/guitarist who happily takes requests from tipsy revel-



*Street life in front of Kenny's Bookshop*

ers, the Australian singer who does duets with a one-eyed dog and the bohemian man who travels with a scruffy menagerie of musical mannequins.

**Visit the swans:** **The Claddagh**, home of the famous ring, is no longer populated with scenic fishing cottages, but the area is still worth a visit for its most famous current residents: the 150 swans who form one of Europe's largest swan colonies. To see them up close, just cross the bridge near the **Spanish Arch**, and take a walk past the colorful Galway hookers on the pier. The colony is located at the entrance to a park, and the short walk will give you great views, from one of the more peaceful spots in this energetic city. ♦

*Noreen Bowden grew up in New York, and is now the General Manager of Emigrant Online ([www.irishemigrant.com](http://www.irishemigrant.com)) based in Galway.*



# Ballybunion:

## GRAND DAME OF IRISH LINKS



**L**ots of Irish courses claim they've achieved "must play" status. But none can say they define the pinnacle of Irish golf quite the way Ballybunion does. Is it just good PR or is there really something different about this place? Visitors come here with high expectations, but this grand dame of old Irish links seems to live up to them.

The marriage of landscape and course layout on this rolling site over the Shannon estuary makes even hard-nosed visitors wax poetic, using words like "serenity" and "peace" to describe their round there. Tom Watson, who was in charge of the course's most recent facelift, once called it a "beautiful test." When Ballybunion's managers say these 18 holes were designed by God, nobody seems to laugh at them.

In truth, the course is about the same age as Lahinch. But Ballybunion got noticed by the worldwide golfing community, and by Americans in particular, much earlier. The presence of a 12-hole links on this site was first mentioned in an 1893 newspaper article, which said that it had particularly "springy turf." Respect, however, did not come immediately. In 1897, *The Irish Times* called the place "a rabbit warren below the village, where a golfer requires limitless patience and an inexhaustible supply of golf balls."

### *A rough start*

Ballybunion actually struggled financially until 1908, when a group of eminent locals came together to finance what became the foundation of the current club. Only in 1926 was it ex-

tended to a full 18 holes. A series of ladies' and mens' golfing tournaments over the next fifty years gradually raised the club's profile. Then, in 1971, it seemed to suddenly catch the world's attention when a new clubhouse was built and a famous golf writer Herbert Warren Wind said Ballybunion was one of the world's top ten courses in a *New Yorker* article.

Many would say Ballybunion's quality truly caught up with its reputation in 1995, when Tom Watson was brought in, not for radical surgery, but to give the old lady a nip and tuck that would keep her in the top ranks for another 100 years. Watson worked hard to keep the course true to its original design, and to preserve what he called "the wild look of the place."

### *Hill and dale*

How does Ballybunion play now? Its mystique hits you early, in the form of a graveyard full of Celtic crosses staring you down from the right side of the first fairway and the sea on the other. The landscape here is sharp—not as towering as Doonbeg, but full of hills and swales that seem to pull you into some kind of hidden world.

It's a world without many flat surfaces. Ballybunion will make you play every kind of uphill and down dale lie imaginable. Oddly enough, though, a lot of players come away saying the course looks like a beast, but has a forgiving heart. Memorable holes include the tricky par 3 third with its severely narrow green, which Tiger Woods managed to bogey on a 1998 round

after landing in a bunker. A real test of your short game will come on the sixth, a 364 yard long par 4 known as "The Kiln," because fires were once built here to make lime. It will only take a moderately good tee shot to get you in position for a short, even easy-looking approach shot. Watch out, though. According to Tom Watson, this is one of the most difficult second shots most golfers will see in a lifetime. Hole number 7 features a green that was re-conditioned under Watson's direction, using old films and comments from old members to help reconstruct it's original shape. Getting on and staying on, once again, requires excellent touch on your approach shot.

From here in, Ballybunion's extraordinary beauty truly unfolds. The 11<sup>th</sup>, a par 4 along the ocean with a 3-part fairway of descending shelves, has been called one of the 18 best holes in the world by Nick Faldo. Coming off the tee with anything less than a great shot will lead to big troubles. The course's signature combination of landscape and great design are clear on the 15<sup>th</sup>, a par 3 with bunkers ringed around its two-tiered green, and the dog-legged 17<sup>th</sup>, a par 4 that looks too pretty to be real, and actually offers a birdie opportunity if you can get into position for a short second shot.

"Tough but fair" is how many golfers describe this great old lady of County Kerry. After a round you may feel, as CBS commentator Ben Wright did, that "Ballybunion is one of the shrines and treasures of the game." [www.ballybuniongolfclub.com](http://www.ballybuniongolfclub.com) ♦

# The Golf Widow's Guide to Ireland

**Shopping, spas and other delights for herself near the courses he's be dying to play**

By Clodagh McCoole

**Y**ou married him for better or for worse, right? But then he fell in love again – with a little white ball and miles of open space. Now, he disappears for 4 or 5 hours at a go (depending on the lure of the 19<sup>th</sup> hole) while you go through everything from frustration to rage, and even jealousy.

Stop fighting it! He's hooked on golf and let's face it, for him, it will never get better than golfing in Ireland. Girls, the trick is not to let him jet across the Atlantic to all those beautiful locations without you. While he's hacking away on Ireland's top courses, there's plenty nearby for you to entertain yourself with. Then, by the end of the day, you'll both have "earned" a fabulous dinner. He's happy; you're happy. Need I say more?

A favorite starting point is the **Mount Juliet Estate & Golf Course** in Thomastown, County Kilkenny, with its beautiful old manor house set in 1,500 acres of spectacular parkland scenery. The golf course, designed by Jack Nicklaus, has been host to many international championships and the site of the Irish Open three times. For you, there's a health spa with beauty treatments and pampering. You might even try their new "dead sea discovery" flotation room, which is said to offer "an unparalleled relaxation experience." On the other hand, if you're feeling beautiful enough al-

ready, but long for a bit of outdoor life, there's horse riding for all levels at Mount Juliet's own stables. Take a leisurely walk or trot across the grounds with one of the riding instructors. Tennis is also available.

Nearby, there's retail therapy...our favorite! Just a few miles down the road is **Jerpoint Glass Studio**. Spend an hour watching the glass being blown, and then blow a few euro in the shop. The glassware is very distinctive, with wild splashes of color – great gifts. More money to spend? Lucky you. Kilkenny City is less than 20 miles away. It's home to world-famous **Kilkenny Design Centre**, where you will find all that's best in Irish artwork and crafts, along with interesting clothes – all with a very modern, natural twist.

To the west is **Adare Manor** in Adare, County Limerick, a 5-star hotel in a spectacular manor house (more like a castle, really) overlooking the river Maigue. Like Mount Juliet, it's golf course is in a "parkland" type setting. It was designed by Robert Trent Jones.

## Dresden China

Adare is a picture postcard town with pretty thatched cottages lining it's main street. It has an interesting collection of craft and antique shops as well as the **Adare Heritage Centre**, which recalls the history of the area. Try exploring **The Irish Dresden Workshop**



in Dromcollogher. Founded by a German couple fleeing the destruction in their homeland during World War II, the workshop offers delicate Irish figures made in Dresden porcelain. Nearby Limerick City has the **Hunt Museum**, one of Ireland's best known art troves, which houses an eclectic collection ranging from historical artifacts to paintings by Picasso and Renoir. Near the Hunt, there are several art galleries worth exploring in Pery Square, among them **The Limerick City Gallery of Art** and **Angela Woulfe Gallery**. Finally, if your forbears hail from the Limerick area, take a short detour to the Limerick Ancestry and Archives, where you'll find out more about your family line.

## Quieter Travels

Ireland's newest links course, which Greg Norman has called the "best site in the world" for golf, is **Doonbeg**, near the village of Doonbeg, County Clare. This is a quiet part of Ireland, with lots of beaches and open vistas of the wild Atlantic ocean. For accommodation, I recommend a little country house



**Berry Lodge** in Spanishpoint. Proprietor Rita Meade offers cooking lessons using simple, wholesome ingredients, many of which are grown in her own garden. There's a restaurant attached to the house, which serves

*continued next page*



## Golf Widow's Guide

(continued from previous page)

plentiful helpings of fresh local produce.

Just two miles away, **Miltown Malbay** is a very traditional village, with lots of old shopfronts in a multitude of colors. It hosts "The Willie Clancy Festival" of traditional Irish music every June, and many of the pubs offer live music year-round. **Hillery's** on Main Street is always great for music, and so is **O'Friel's** (though the old sign over it's door reads "Lynch's").

A short drive north from Doonbeg will take your golfer back in time to **Lahinch**, another famous links course built in 1892, and updated in 1927 by the co-creator (with Bobby Jones) of The Masters course in Augusta, Dr.

Alistair Mackenzie. I recommend staying nearby at **Moy House**, in Lahinch, a beautifully restored Victorian Home with 14 individually decorated rooms, overlooking Liscannor Bay.

Dinner is served each night for house



*Riding at Mt. Juliet Estate*

guests only in an intimate dining room, in an atmosphere where you'll relax and make new friends. The nearby town of **Lahinch** has lots of craft shops worth exploring. Enjoy an hour watching surfers brave the Atlantic rollers from **O'Looney's Pub**.

Then, when you're ready for a snack, head to Ennistymon (just two miles away) for dessert at a great German-run bakery called **Unglerts**, with it's great selection of pastries and breads.

Further north, past the Cliffs of Moher, is the town of **Doolin**, home to one of Ireland's most famous music pubs, and the departure point for boats to the Aran Islands. Less famous but equally inviting is Doolin's wonderful craft store which features lots of locally-made clothes, jewelry and art, and has a delightful tea shop where you can sample Clare Jam and scones.

Undoubtedly, your golfer will want to try his hand at two of Ireland's top courses, **Ballybunion** and **Waterville**. Drive south from Doonbeg, and save time by taking the ferry at Killimer to Tarbert, County Kerry (along the way, you'll get great views of the Shannon River as it nears the ocean). Ferry service is not year-round, so please check first. From Tarbert, it's about a 30 min-

ute drive to Ballybunion.

Along the way, you might want to spend a few hours in the town of **Listowel**, a lively spot which hosts the Listowel Writers Festival each year (June 2<sup>nd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> in 2004). On the other hand, if you craving some exercise yourself at this point, try spending a day at **Cap-**

**panalea Outdoor Education Centre** at Caragh Lake, near Kilorglin. Day courses include rock-climbing, canoeing and windsurfing.

Near Kerry's other famous course, **Waterville**, there's a great chance for us girls to spend a bit of time exploring **Muckross House**, an incredible 19<sup>th</sup> century mansion and garden center open for public tours. It's also a pleasure taking in the scenery by driving or strolling around the famous Lakes of Killarney. Try staying at **The Lake**

**Hotel**, Killarney, which boasts a jacuzzi with stunning views of the mountains and lakes. You should also take a journey through the **Gap of Dunloe** in a pony and trap, even though it's terribly touristy, and then return by boat via the Killarney Lakes.

## The nun's lace

No, I haven't forgotten about shopping. **Kenmare Lace**, a unique little store based in **Kenmare's Heritage Centre**, carries on the delicate handwork started by the Poor Clare nuns. Admission to see the artisans at work is free. Lastly, I'd suggest a foray into Dingle (halfway between Ballybunion and Waterville) where many famous artists live, including goldsmith **Brian de Staic** and potter **Louis Mulcahy**. Both have their own stores in Dingle.

So fellow golf-widows, there you have it - your very own "alternative" golf tour. A chance for you to explore, shop, all for yourself. Just remember, he need never know this trip is anything but a punishment for you! ♦

*Clodagh McCoole grew up in Limerick, and now lives in New England*

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# Stones, Wildflowers and Solitude

***With a landscape that doesn't resemble anything else in Ireland, the Burren is an amazing place for a long, silent walk***

*By Geraldine Keane*

**O**n a summer's day with hazy sunshine and a gentle breeze, there are few places as light and calm as the Burren in County Clare. Taking its name from the Irish word "Boireann," meaning "rocky place" or "place of rocks," this landscape seems tilted and strangely barren at first glance. The low stone walls are more jagged and angular than elsewhere in the country. And while the bare limestone takes up just 20% of the total surface area, it marks a stark contrast to the rest of Ireland's lush green countryside. But if you enjoy an amazing show of wildflowers and archaeological sites, or just like walking in solitude, there are few places like it anywhere in Europe.

The Burren takes up the portion of northwestern Clare bordered by Kinvara on the south, Corofin to the south and east, with the wild Atlantic to the west.

## ***Karst walkin'***

It's one of Europe's few "karst" areas (a limestone area with caves, fissures and underground streams), so named after a similar region in Slovenia. If you're driving, you can get some of the most stunning views I in the area from Corkscrew Hill, on the Galway to Limerick road that passes through Lisdoonvarna and Ballyvaughan. But in my opinion, the only way to see the Burren is to get out and walk it. Only then do you get a sense of its intricate charms.

My first real memory of walking



*Forbidding at first glance, the Burren is a place of intricate charms*

across the weathered limestone is from my school days, on a field trip where the "clints" (blocks of limestone) and "grikes" (cracks that can be several meters deep) that fascinated my schoolmates and I. Since then, I've returned many times to walk it again. As hill walking in Ireland goes, it's one of the easier places to hike, though the cracks in the limestone are easy to stumble into and possibly break an ankle. The low limestone hills are well rounded and the highest peak (Slieve Elva) is a manageable 344m high.

Unlike some other walking and climbing areas, the paths here don't require any high-tech gear, other than a good raincoat (it is Ireland after all!). You'll easily get by with a pair of

sturdy trainers (running shoes).

I've walked it on wet winter days and in the bright light of summer, and driven through in all the seasonal shades in between, and I've never been disappointed by its effect on me. There's something comforting in the gentle roll of the landscape that's absolutely unique. The passing car traffic on the roads can be almost soundless in the expanse of open air.

Thanks to this unusual atmosphere, the Burren has attracted a wide array of craftspeople, poets, artists and alternative healers of all denominations. Some claim it's the light that draws them or the slower passing of time in this wide open countryside.

The Burren is famous for its explo-

*continued next page*

## The Burren

*(continued from previous page)*

sion of wildflowers in the late spring and summer. In July and August, the smell of wildflowers on the breeze give the place an other-worldly feel. Burren meadows offer a diversity of flowers that's unmatched in Ireland. With the combination of limestone soils and mild climate, this is one of few places on earth where you can see arctic, alpine and Mediterranean flowers growing side by side. Of the 27 species of orchids recorded in Ireland, 23 are found in the Burren.

For archaeology fans, the region has over 2,500 megalithic tombs, holy wells, forts and other historic sites. Poulnabrone is one of the country's most famous ancient sites and dates back around 5,800 years. Rising up out of the landscape, this impressive portal dolmen is made of slabs of rock that create a wedge-shaped tomb. It's a bit too close to the road, but one can't help but marvel at its scale.

### Where to walk

If you're planning your first walk through the area, the "Burren Way" is a good one to try. This marked route stretches from The Cliffs of Moher to Ballyvaughan, 22.9 miles away, and alternates between coastal and inland walking. (For a shorter trek, start in the middle at Ballinlakin, and walk toward the cliffs or Ballyvaughan.) There isn't a path to follow the whole way, but it's signposted, so it's hard to get lost. If you have a car, you'll need someone to go ahead and pick you up at the end of the walk (or along the way if you don't want to do the whole walk). Using the bus system is a great



solution too. You can start from either end. Most of the Burren Way is across private lands, where you're welcomed, and you won't find all the tourists you'll get at the cliffs.

I've generally found that the path is quieter than, say, the paths through the Kerry or Dublin mountains. A map to guide you can be purchased at most news agents or bookshops in the area. Ordinance Survey Map #51 covers the Burren, and costs about 6 Euro.

If you're more inclined to create your own path, get a map and try just about anywhere along the coastal stretch between Black Head and Doolin, where the limestone hills roll down dramatically toward the Atlantic. For shorter routes, anything around Black Head is a winner. You'll definitely need a map to do this, and a compass isn't a bad idea either. There's virtually an unlimited number of spots where you can park your car and view this beautiful coastline.

Last but not least, you can simply leave your car in Ballyvaughan, head

### Scenic Ballyvaughan

off down the road and then cut inland wherever your heart desires. When you return to Ballyvaughan town, try the **Fear Gorta Tea Rooms** for a quaint reprieve with home-baked goodness, or **Monk's Pub**, which offers a hearty fire and fresh seafood.

If you're travelling between Galway and Limerick, do take the time to stop off and walk the Burren. It's a whole world away and, for me, always well worth the effort. ♦

*Geraldine Keane lives in Galway*

What's really going on these days in dear old Ireland?

Both good and baaaaad I'm sure!



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