

# Ireland

A LONG, ENJOYABLE STOP IN THIS MODERN COUNTRY BLESSED WITH A STRONG HEARTBEAT AND SOUL

### About Ireland

A country with a population of nearly four million, its people are predominantly (92%) Roman Catholic. Located in the Atlantic Ocean, its only neighbour is the UK. English and Irish Gaelic are both widely spoken here.



### When To Visit

Spring, summer and fall are all good times to visit, though the tourist season hits its peak in July and August.

### Visa Requirements

Visas are not required for citizens of the EU and most Western countries. British citizens born in the UK or Northern Ireland do not need passports either to enter the republic.

### Getting There

Dublin is linked by air to many major European and US cities. Most visitors fly in from the UK, or take the ferry from Wales or France.



### Bahrain Connection

Trade links have been blossoming. Among the more notable - Aer Rianta, operator of Bahrain Duty Free, has its Mideast HQ in Bahrain; while the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland has established a medical college in the country.



**Travel Tip**  
Don't initiate conversations about politics or religion without understanding they're both emotion-laden subjects in Ireland.

By Kate Mitchell

Pictures: James Davis and Ali Hussain Mushaima

*"In any light, in any weather, any smallest piece of Ireland, hideous or ordinary or lovely, looks only like Ireland, and like nothing else at all."*

— KATE O'BRIEN, *My Ireland*

### PAGE OPPOSITE:

The 18-metre Torc Waterfall, which pushes its way through Friars Glen into Muckross Lake.

**S**EE THAT CHURCH OVER THERE, YOUNG LADY? ONE OF THE WORST CRIMES IN IRISH history was committed there... I got married." For the whole of the journey from Dublin airport to the centre of the city, our husky voiced taxi driver peppered us with fascinating information mixed with dry wit, while showing an honest interest in our trip. This engaging characteristic, we soon discovered, is something of an Irish trait, and was one of the most refreshing aspects of our seven-day trip.

One nice tip we picked up from the taxi driver: Want to know which restaurants and bars are the











most popular? Just count the numbers of people outside with cigarette in hand. Dublin has of course banned smoking in all public places, so patrons have to take it outside when they crave a puff.

And so we arrived at The Fitzwilliam Hotel, in St. Stephens Green. Even though it was a warm afternoon in late August, the fire in the lobby was lit, giving life and warmth to the very modern, light sleek interior of this Georgian facade building. Our rooms are large, comfortable and restful and each fitted with a window seat from which to look out over the Green.

I had last been to Dublin ten years before and had arrived with

no clothes except the ones on my back as the airline lost my bag. Of course, I had to buy clothes to wear that weekend so had headed straight for Grafton Street. What followed was one of the most successful shopping expeditions in my life. This unusual experience had obviously worked its way into my long term memory. So with a spare hour, my mission was to repeat this experience.

This pedestrianised shopping street is only one minute's walk from the hotel and, once again, did not disappoint. Of course, there are all the usual high street names but mixed among these are one-off boutiques, shoe shops, jewelry shops.

Make sure you explore all the little side streets because this is where you will find the more offbeat stores with all those interesting, individual bits and pieces. Brown Thomas is a department store worth exploring. Best explained as an Irish Harvey Nicholls or Henry Bendell, it stocks all

contemporary designer labels.

Shopping is cut short by the need to go and get ready for a night out in Dalkey. To the south of Dublin is a string of seaside villages leading to the Wicklow mountains, of which Dalkey is one of the most southerly.



These villages have become popular as commuter areas and a bit of a beacon for film and music stars. The result – there is a myriad of bars, cafés and restaurants to choose from in each one of them. Until recently they had only been connected to Dublin by the DART (light railway). Now, LUAS (the new tram network) goes part of the way down the coast, finishing at Sandyford.

As Dublin is one of the few cities without an underground train service, the tram should help ease congestion. The first stop of this southbound tram is right outside the hotel. Being only a couple of months old the tram is spotless and glides through the southern suburbs of Dublin easily and silently. It is a long time since I have been in a tram and find it much more pleasant than a subterranean train.

Having been collected from Sandyford by Annette (who had been a nurse in Bahrain for a number of years) we drive through Dun Laoghaire and Blackrock on our way south. Annette explains

**PAGE OPPOSITE:**

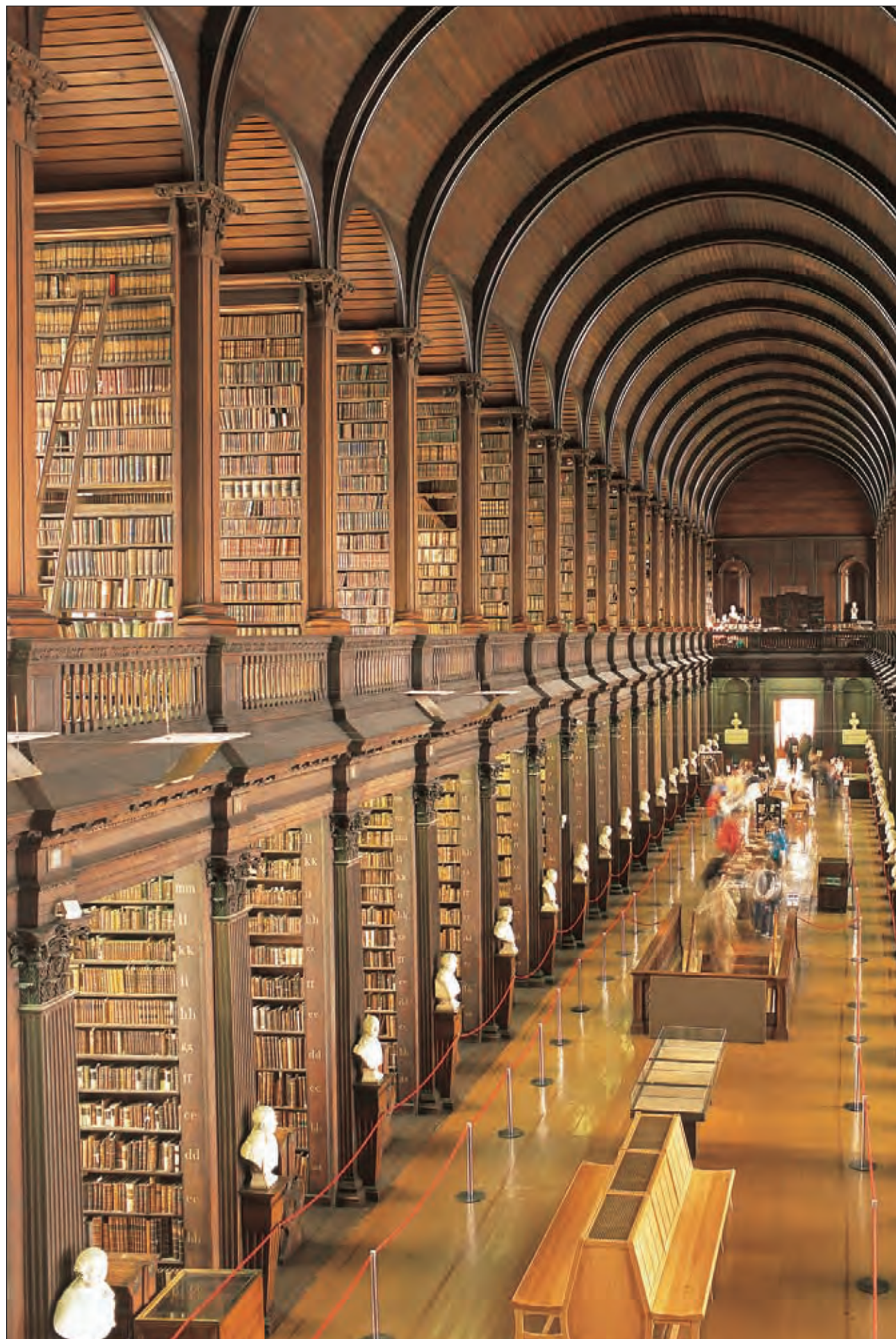
The Fitzwilliam Hotel is a stylish retreat in the heart of Dublin.

The pedestrianised Grafton Street offers a thoroughly satisfying shopping experience.





The imposing library of Dublin's Trinity College, founded in 1592. Some 200,000 of Trinity's oldest books are stored here.



*Travel Tip*  
Don't expect many of the smaller inns in Ireland to accept credit cards (though most gas stations do).





that she is part of a group that goes swimming in the Irish Sea every day of the year... “apart from the time between Christmas and St. Paddy’s Day” (that would be late December until mid March).

Dalkey is a small, pretty seaside village, bursting with good restaurants that are all full and buzzing. I had to stop to think which day it was as it had the feeling of a weekend, but no, this is only Wednesday night. I can only imagine what the weekends are like.



Operators of horse-drawn carriages wait for tourists in Dublin.

For us it was straight to I Ragazzi, a Sicilian restaurant. Small and crowded and warm, there could be no more inviting a shelter from a rather cold, windy night outside. Attentive young waiters make sure that no wish is left unattended and the food speaks for itself. Sharp, strong, simple flavours, which lead one to eat rather more than required or definitely, intended.

My earlier dash into my bedroom in the Fitzwilliam Hotel had revealed what appeared to be a very comfortable bed, thoughts of which intensified my feelings of sleepiness on my way back. I felt quite assured of a good night’s sleep...

#### THURSDAY

...WITH WHICH I AM REWARDED.

But then immediately a problem arises. Exactly what am I going to eat for breakfast? There is so much to choose from. Do I go for the huge traditional Irish breakfast or a series of light alternatives including the ubiquitous soda bread which







Penthouse suite at the Clarence Hotel in Dublin.

is smothered in Irish butter and marmalade. This conundrum is quickly superseded by the delightful worry of how to get round the whole of Dublin in just one day.

The city has changed quite a bit since that last visit ten years ago. The Temple Bar area and Smithfield and Docklands developments were

just run down areas. The Guinness Storehouse, now Dublin's number one attraction, had not yet been developed.

Anxiety about the itinerary is eased by the discovery of the City Tour bus. This is a 'hop-on hop-off' fully guided tour bus with departures every 10 minutes (E20). The commentary is live, in a similar vein to the impromptu observations given by the taxi driver mentioned earlier. As well as plenty of factual information the passenger is rewarded by anecdotes, and snippets of information that you never find in a guidebook. If you were to remain on the bus without getting off, the tour would take one hour and 15 minutes. Otherwise the ticket is valid for 24 hours.

I like riding on buses, and the open air, upper deck of this tour bus is perfect for gaining a perspective of how the city fits together. It occurs to



Right, the justly popular Temple Bar.







me that this is an ideal way for children to tour the city, not only can they see more but little legs are saved from too much walking.

The bus sweeps past Trinity College, the Bank of Ireland (used to be the parliament building), Christchurch Cathedral and Dublinia. An amphibious landing craft drives past, appealing to the child in me. It is crammed with children in Viking hats and high spirits. We learn that this vehicle gives a historical tour of Dublin for children and then splashes into the Grand Canal harbour to continue the tour by water. Distracted by this I forget to get off to visit Dublinia. My loss, as this is a reconstruction of Dublin in the Middle Ages, re-creating all its sights and sounds, thereby pointing out what and how much has changed.

The Guinness Storehouse is the most popular stopping point on the tour. Not surprising really, given that some 10 million glasses of Guinness are drunk every day in 150 countries worldwide. Based at the St. James' Brewery, the Storehouse is a museum devoted to the 250 years of history of the brewery, its family and the beer itself. It is topped by the spectacular, glass-walled Gravity Bar which has a 360 degree view over Dublin city. Little low tables are set out all around the room so that you can take in the view and enjoy your pint (soft drinks are available).

Back on to the bus and we rumble past 1,700 acre Phoenix Park with its zoo; famous for its breeding programmes ("for some reason or another the animals here find each other attractive," explains the driver).

Next stop Kilmainham gaol. This was a working prison until 1924 and it is possible to have a good look around and see what it was really like to be locked up.

Then we move on to the Irish Museum of Modern Art; housed in the old Royal Hospital close by.

There is another opportunity to be hoisted up above the city by visiting The Chimney Viewing Tower in Smithfield village. This is part of the old Jameson whisky brewing plant situated in the old cattle and horse market. And its chimney is a good vantage point. The development that is going on is going to change this once run-down area into a centre for outdoor gatherings and concerts.

In order to get yet another perspective of Dublin from on high we look at high buildings along the Quays (the two sides of the River Liffey) and notice that the Clarence Hotel is raised higher than most and appears to have a roof terrace. Maybe this is the place from which to get a good clear picture looking east down the Liffey. Now this hotel is owned by Bono of U2 and is a place that should be visited anyway as a good example of casual chic. We are lucky, there is a penthouse and it is empty and as a special favour we are to be allowed to go up for the photographer, James, to take his pictures.

Today there is a special frisson in this penthouse

**PAGE OPPOSITE:**  
The picturesque bridge over River Liffey is a photographer favourite.

An amphibious landing craft which offers a historical tour of Dublin before splashing into the Grand Canal harbour to continue the tour by water.





as Bill and Hillary Clinton had been staying there just the night before. It is light, spacious, large and those squasy leather sofas look very comfortable. Its piece de resistance is a rooftop hot tub surrounded by wood panelling to keep away the wind but with a small porthole looking out over the city from sitting height. Its balcony gives superb views down the Liffey towards the port.

We are now on the edge of the Temple Bar area and it is lunchtime. Ali, who has been missing his native Arabic home cooking comes across a Persian restaurant, Zaytoon. We pounce on it. This area is often quite correctly compared to Covent Garden in London or Les Halles in Paris. It has the same feel. There are food, book and fashion markets on Saturdays. There are outdoor entertainers, art galleries, cultural centres and

plenty of restaurants, cafés and bars. In this sense it really comes to life at night.

**T**UCKED INTO THE HEART OF THE CITY OF DUBLIN is Trinity College, founded 1592, the oldest university in Ireland. Its thick perimeter walls ensure that all the noise of the city and its traffic are kept well away, creating a sanctuary within the city. Its main treasure is the Book of Kells; an “illuminated” version of the four gospels created by monks around AD 800. Included in the ticket price is a tour of the long library, surely one of the most serene rooms I have ever come across. Some 200,000 of Trinity’s oldest books are stored here so invitingly that all willpower has to be summoned just to stop picking one off the shelf for a quick look.



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** Stained glass windows of the tiny church on Omay Island; door of a traditional Irish house; an open-top tour bus makes its way around Dublin.





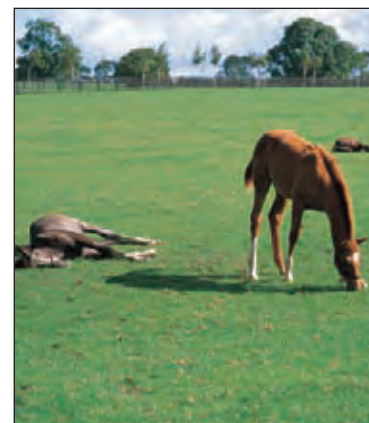
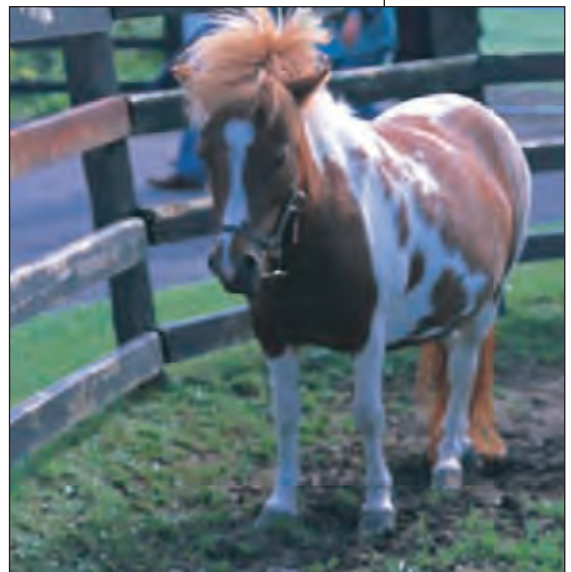
There are other ways in which to delve into the history of Dublin. There are historical walking tours of Dublin, led by graduates from the university, leaving Trinity three times a day. There is also the Zozimus experience – a walking tour that visits the escapes, murders and mythical happenings in Dublin (at night). A more modern take is the Dublin rock ‘n’ stroll which is a self guided tour, or Dublin’s modern music trail (available from tourist office).

Do not miss the Dublin Writers Museum. Situated in a magnificent Georgian Mansion at the top of O’Connell street, this museum was founded in order to celebrate Dublin’s literary history. This is one of those museums that are just a joy to go around. Frank Delaney in his rather seductive voice explains the anecdotal history through headphones. The permanent exhibition itself is

only two rooms but the rest of the house is given over to reading and lecture rooms and special exhibitions and it has a special room devoted to children’s literature. Plan to spend a lot of money in the shop and then stop in the café. As office workers came in for their mid morning coffee I could feel myself slipping into that particular daydream named “If I lived in Dublin... this is where I would come.”

Dublin is a young vibrant city, with a population currently at 1.25 million and growing quickly. Consequently the bars and restaurants are very crowded at night.

Part of this business can also be put down to the fact that the LUAS tram is allowing people to get into the centre without having to worry about driving. Nevertheless, having planned to



**CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT:** A piper gives us the royal reception at Adare Manor, though alas, we weren’t the intended recipients; a Argentine-bred Falabella miniature horse; newborn foal at the National Stud.



go and eat in Temple Bar, we had to wait before getting a table. Well worth the wait. Again, the food is excellent and before we know it, the girls-night-out at the next table is inviting us along to a nightclub. As our journey to the West begins early we have to say no, another exercise in willpower.

## FRIDAY

TURNING DOWN THE LATE NIGHT OPTION has really paid off as we breakfast rather early and therefore very smugly knowing that we can make the most of the day.

Dublin is easy to negotiate by car. Having said that, there has recently been chaos as the introduction of the LUAS system has meant changing the direction of traffic flow in a number of areas - causing utter confusion and a number of collisions. However, what you don't know you can't worry about so for us it was easy. To get anywhere in Dublin, if you just get yourself to the Quays you will not get lost, as these are the main trunk roads east and west with all other arterial roads clearly signed.

Today we are heading to Tully, just south of Kildare to visit the National Stud. This is the only stud in Ireland open to the public. Kildare – The Thoroughbred County – is home to the Curragh, the 5,000 acre plain which has become the home of Irish racehorse training and breeding. It is also the name of the racetrack where all the most important flat racing fixtures of the Irish racing calendar are held.

I did not grow up with horses, so found the Stud fascinating. It is a semi-state company and



as such retains stallions of all classes from the top thoroughbred winner downwards so as to suit everyone's purse. One of their top stallions Indian Ridge costs €85,000 per cover (insemination), down to Medecis at €5,250. There is no payment due without pregnancy and the process of covering is filmed so as to establish exactly who the sire (father) is. The stallions are never ridden and therefore are put out into fields for exercise as much as possible. The grounds are almost impossibly green, soft and well maintained, pointing to the obvious conclusion that not only are the horses loved and respected, they are also big business.

Top stallion Indian Ridge commands a price of €85,000 per insemination.



**PAGE OPPOSITE:**

Adare Manor, set on the River Maigue, boasts 840 acres of grounds which include a parkland golf course.

The mares are obviously kept separately; even the scent of one will get the stallions very excited. A visit between February and June will ensure that you can see a new-born foal every morning. In an adjacent paddock are the Falabella miniature horses that are bred in Argentina. They are kept here to entertain the children and again, usually there is always a mare and a foal.

The horse museum is small but interesting,

there were a few couples that appeared hand in hand on Engagement Bridge. Maybe celebrating, hoping or remembering.

St. Fiachra is the patron saint of gardening and was aptly used to inspire this millennium garden project. This is an Irish garden representing the spirituality of the monastic movement in Ireland. It is informal and produces a feeling of calmness. Within the setting some monastic cells have been built in the style of those found on Skellig Michael off the Kerry coast. To the side of these is a bog, with its black oaks (from which the bog is created) rising from the murky water, a stark reminder of Ireland's geological history.

With our destination as Killarney on the south western coast, we had a further three hours driving and therefore made a decision to break up the journey at approximately halfway at the 18th century Adare Manor. This is a hotel with golf club attached. As we swept up the drive to the entrance we were perplexed to have a piper playing and all sorts of staff rush towards the car door. What a reception... it would have been if we really had been the bride and groom. Our white four wheel drive had been mistaken for the wedding carriage. However, the piper quite happily continued to play for our amusement.

What a grand setting for a very grand wedding. We were allowed to wander around the wedding party and take pictures of the little pink rosebud bridesmaids. In fact no amount of photographs would have sated their desire to be admired in all their finery. All guests at the hotel had been invited to the wedding as a matter of course. Friday weddings are popular in Ireland, probably a good thing as it allows more time for recovery.

Adare Manor is set on the River Maigue, with its 840 acres of grounds containing a parkland golf course. Estate activities offered are fishing, golf,



The Japanese Gardens, which are arranged as an allegory for life itself.

containing the most bizarre and rather macabre exhibit of the skeleton of Arkle, a racehorse dear to all Irish hearts.

Contained within the same grounds as the National Stud are the Japanese Gardens and the newly created St. Fiachra's garden. Laid out at the beginning of the century when all things Japanese were very fashionable, the Japanese garden is arranged as an allegory for life itself. There are stepping stones, paths, bridges and gateways all representing stages of decision in our life. It starts at the Cave of Birth, moves through the Tunnel of Ignorance through to the Hill of Learning, followed by the Parting of the Ways, the Island of Joy and Wonder, through to Engagement Bridge, Marriage Bridge, Honeymoon Path and so on until the Gateway to Eternity. Not surprisingly











Golfers out on the inviting 18 hole Kenmare course adjoining Park Hotel.

riding for all levels, bicycle hire and of course a lot of walking. All this only 35 minutes from Shannon airport.

From whichever way you approach Killarney, it is obvious that you have arrived as your entrance is heralded by masses of bed and breakfast houses and lodges side by side along the road. An hour after leaving Adare we arrive at our destination the Glenna Guesthouse.

#### **SATURDAY**

*“The western hills and the clouds which are their legitimate accompaniment are inseparable; the eye is carried upward from the hill-tops for thousands of feet into the infinite blue. The cloudland is indeed so wonderful a creation that Ireland would be a dull place without it: here it is almost always with us, as vital to our enjoyment as is the landscape itself.”*

– **Robert Lloyd Praeger**, *The Way That I Went*.

OUR LONG DRIVE THE DAY BEFORE HAD RAISED A POINT of consternation. Why is it that the road signs are never consistent in distances between

towns, rising and falling with no apparent cause? This had caused a lot of roller coaster emotions as to how far we were from our destination. The problem was solved at breakfast. “Some of the signs are in miles and others in kilometres, that would be the source of your confusion,” offers the waitress.

Comprising three lakes and the mountains that cradle them, Killarney national park offers days and days of delightful walks, bike rides, horseback rides, boat rides and picnics. The town itself sits on the banks of the so called lower lake.

Killarney is definitely the most touristy place that we visited but this does have its advantages such as internet cafés and plenty of places from which to choose to eat, plus the shops are open until 10pm. There are also the jaunting horse or pony carriages. How very tempting to hire one to take us up to Muckross House but my male companions would have none of it. Plenty of others had no such inhibitions and the carriages could be seen constantly to-ing and fro-ing between Killarney and Muckross House.

So, we arrived by car. I would advise you to head straight for Muckross traditional farms, within the







estate. In my opinion they are an enchanting and fascinating opportunity to learn the local history first hand. Three working farms allow the visitor to watch not only the traditional farming methods but also how the household used to operate. Each farm has a “wife” in situ, baking bread, explaining how life would have been, how they



lived, worked, ate and slept according to income. This is not a lecture but an interaction with life as it was, which is fun and informative without being gimmicky. I had previously thought that it was only my travels through Yemen and the small doorways that had caused me to bump my head a lot; trust me, it happens here as well.

The ever changing weather of the west of Ireland is a bonus, an hour of cloudy greyness can easily make way for clear blue skies soon after, lighting the landscape and lifting its broodiness. A one-hour boat trip will take you from Ross Castle (on the edge of Killarney) to the island of Innisfallen. Again, marvellous running commentary from Johnny the boat owner, not only on the landscape (biggest oak forest on one of the islands) but also weaving stories of the film-making in the area (*Ryan's Daughter*), fairies and wildlife. When he is not chatting to you, Johnny plays Irish ballads and folk music through the PA system.

It's now time to explore the area around the lakes. Chatting in a café had led me to hear of Torc Waterfall. It is a short way beyond Muckross House on the left, but is not well signed; fortunately the parked cars gave it away. This is one

of those walks that we all dream of. Soft damp bronze earth, its path covered by the canopy of large, old trees leads you up to the waterfall.

Slightly panting as you climb the hill, you will soon begin to hear the deep sound of running water as it moves away from the falls. But this is interrupted by something much, much softer. There is the plucking of strings accompanied by clear singing. What is it? Coming nearer, a blonde haired fairy is sitting on the stump of an old oak tree, gently and softly singing Gaelic folk songs. There is no effort involved, she seems to simply belong.

With spirits raised, a few more steps will lead you to the v For the more fit and enthusiastic, a series of wooden steps have been cut into the hillside to take you to the top of the hill which eventually cedes fantastic views of the lakes.

On our descent, the fairy has morphed into a young musician named Kinbria (see Page 152), who has set out CDs of her music that she is selling. Of course we buy a couple so as to allow ourselves to re-capture that magical singing whilst driving for the rest of the trip.

Ladies View is a high point within the national

**PAGE OPPOSITE:**  
A farm 'wife' bakes bread at a Muckross traditional farm, where visitors learn about traditional farming methods. Above, tourists on the boat trip to Innisfallen.





**PICTURE:**  
Kinbria plays the harp near the Torc waterfall in Killarney.

# The singer who dared to dream

**K**INBRIA, the young singer who entranced us with her voice, even before we first set eyes on her, is a woman who dares to live her dream.

It wasn't easy, for there were road-blocks along the way that would've stopped most others in their tracks, or at the very least shaken their confidence.

Kinbria's dream started when she was still a young child in America.

"My mother asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up," she recalls. "My squeaky five-year-old voice replied, 'I'm going to be a famous singer!'"

And so the dream began.

"My mother did her best to prepare me for my big break in the 'I'm going to be a famous singer business'," says Kinbria. "I spent every week of my childhood in dance, voice, and music lessons."

She entered "millions" of talent competitions and shook and hyperventilated before she got on stage. "I lost each and every one of them! But honestly, how could I win when that petite blonde arrived on stage wearing a blue leotard embroidered with the American flag, and did cartwheels with her hand over her heart, while mouthing the words of the national anthem? Not to mention Blondie's mother was one of the judges!"

Kinbria just couldn't understand why it was so difficult for her to succeed in her dream. She was convinced that it was her destiny to be a famous singer, and so she never stopped trying.

"As a teenager, I was completely fed up with losing all the time, so I decided to sing the music people liked. I thought perhaps this was the right way to stardom. I entertained my fans with their favourite songs, and for awhile I felt that I had succeeded as a musician. But their approval was for something and someone that wasn't me," says Kinbria.



"I had a hungry imagination and it was starving for the delicate morsels of creativity and expression. I needed to write. I needed to sing my own songs. I was so proud to present my new compositions to the fans that I trusted. Unfortunately, they said they preferred me singing the other music, the songs I didn't write!"

Kinbria was heartbroken and confused. Should she give people what they wanted or should she be true to herself?

She decided to test the waters and find answers to her questions. She flew to Colorado for a week-long Music Business seminar. The camp was swarming with music industry professionals. Musicians flaunted their goods, and hoped that a talent scout would like what they were selling.

"Everyone told me, 'Give them what they want, not what you want'," recalls Kinbria. "But it was too late for me. I had written a song and recorded the instruments at a studio back home. I was going to sing along to an accompaniment tape and show everybody the very creative and original musician that I was.

"Only problem was, the talent scouts didn't like my style! My sound was Progressive Celtic and had never been tested in the billion-dollar music biz before. This was before the Celtic dance and



music show of *Riverdance* took America by storm, making Irish-Celtic things one of the biggest fads to ever sweep across America.”

So once again, Kinbria’s music was rejected. She returned home and went into isolation. She spent hours in her bedroom-sanctuary, composing music, reading poetry books, and looking at pre-Raphaelite pictures. She sang about nature and love, heartache and suffering, beauty and poetry. She accompanied herself on the piano, cello and guitar.

Finally, she felt it was time to perform again. She found a cosy bookshop/coffee house, which had been converted from an old church. A feeling of peace heavily lingered in the air. People would sit in the choir loft by a stained glass window, reading a book or sipping their cappuccino, while listening to the live performance of this creative young woman.

Everything was set up for her first concert. While she was waiting for the people to walk through the old church doors, she grabbed a book off a shelf and began flipping through the pages. Ireland was so beautiful!

Kinbria had been performing at the bookshop for a few months when she began to hear more and more about Ireland.

“Several people told me that my songs sounded Irish. Yes, I had a strong American accent when I spoke, but when I sang; you might think that I just got off a boat from a distant shore. So, if everyone was telling me that I sounded Irish...I needed to at least know what Irish music was!”

So she began listening to Irish music and was immediately filled with emotion. “It was like the sun of understanding finally broke through the clouds of hidden depths, allowing sunbeams of revelation to embrace me. The blood in my ancestral veins even seemed to jump for joy! I knew that this was a door that I needed to walk through. It was a passage that would show me truth and meaning.”

And so Kinbria decided to go to Ireland.

She arrived in the country with just \$200, her backpack, and a guitar. It was raining when she walked out of the airport, but the raindrops on her tongue felt fresh and sweet. She crossed a few boggy fields and walked for ten miles along a country road, before coming to a main highway where she decided to try hitch-hiking for the first time. “A

car stopped and asked me where I was going and I replied, ‘Westward!’ I had no plan.”

She let her destiny take her where it wanted, and it led her to Doolin, County Clare, where “music floated down the streets”. She asked a farmer if she could camp in his field of wildflowers, and so found herself living in a pretty yellow tent for six months. Every night, she played music at the local pubs, walked down a green road to her tent, read poetry by lamplight, and fell peacefully asleep on a sheepskin rug.

Someone mentioned a famous musician who lived nearby, who had his own personal recording studio. It took a few weeks to persuade him into letting her use his private studio, but he finally agreed to record Kinbria’s first album. This was great news; except that she had no money. Putting together a professional CD, including several famous guest musicians, a photographer and graphic designer, would cost her over \$5,000.

With little choice if she wanted to fulfil her dream, Kinbria became a street performer. She sat for 13 hours every day on a cliff edge and the Cliffs of Moher (a famous tourist location in County Clare) and entertained tourists. She sang in wind, rain, sun, storm, and insect attacks.

Seeing her determination and enthusiasm, an Irish fisherman decided to make a large financial contribution. Combined with her earnings as a street performer, everything fell into place, and she successfully completed her dream.

More than seven years have passed since then, and Kinbria is enjoying her success. She has now released three internationally acclaimed albums, *Dreaming*, *Song Secret*, and *A Pagan In Love*. She is completing two more albums and a poetry book, which contains over two hundred original poems. Kinbria’s albums and poetry book can be ordered over her website at [www.kinbria.com](http://www.kinbria.com).

Kinbria still entertains tourists, who hear her haunting voice and harp drifting through the air as they stroll along a tree-lined path that leads to Torc waterfall in Killarney, County Kerry. Tourists follow the music until they come to a space in the woods, where they see a girl sitting on a rock, which is cut like a throne. Often, this is their most beautiful memory of Ireland.





Ross Castle, on the edge of Killarney.



park that in Victorian times, ladies were driven to, in order to appreciate the view without having to bother themselves with exercise. Luckily there is a café here for us to have some lunch and happily there is a shop attached. I say happily as it seems to be the kinds of things that I like to buy. Colourful mohair and wool blankets, all styles of Irish sweaters and lots of wonderful linen edged in the famous Kenmare lace. Resisting all

else, I had to cave in on purchasing a nightdress. Of the many on offer the most attractive was a simple white muslin bridal nightdress edged in lace and tied with satin ribbons. I kid myself that I will give it away.

The drive on to Kenmare twists and turns in and along the lake, dipping in and out of the woods for half an hour, leading directly into this small, pretty town with cottages, shops and restaurants





painted all sorts of colours, earning it the name Kerry's Heritage Town. Smaller than Killarney, it has more of an air of exclusivity and, as we discovered, is home to one of the best hotels in Ireland. Park Hotel Kenmare is a luxurious country house hotel with a difference. As ever, a fire is lit in the entrance hall, the staff is attentive but not obsequious and every manner of luxury has been incorporated discreetly. There is even

a helicopter landing pad in the garden for those very lucky people.

The Reel room is a mini cinema and the sort of place that you can easily imagine yourself sitting in. Big soft brown leather armchairs allow 12 people to cosy up in comfort to watch any of the classic or family films on offer. Adjoining is the 18 hole Kenmare Golf course and the 40 acre Reenagrass Woodland National Park – there is no





The Spa includes an outdoor hot tub, and the pleasure of indulgence is only heightened by wind, rain or snow outside.

shortage of outdoor activities. However, the focal point has to be the Spa. Named Samas, which in Gaelic means indulgence of the senses, this is the ultimate luxury destination spa.

I cannot have been the first person to openly gasp on seeing the outdoor hot tub. Kept at a constant 38C, surrounded by plate glass but open to the air in the front, the pleasure of indulgence could only be heightened by wind, rain or even snow outside, The Spa experience is a three hour treatment with guests encouraged to relax in the thermal suite, then choose from one of over 60 holistic treatments followed by one hour of complete relaxation in glass panelled rooms overlooking the woods and Kenmare Bay.

Our in-car CD collection doubles with the purchase of music from the Spa, written and played by the saxophonist from Roxy Music.

What a day, leaving a real sense of satisfaction

but a small feeling of anxiety at the lack of time available to do see and do everything that is on offer. We have no time to drive the Ring of Kerry which is the long established route around the Iveragh Peninsula. But following the principle that it is always good to leave something for next time, we retire full of plans for a Sunday jaunt around the Dingle Peninsula.

### SUNDAY

*“But for us now*

*The beyond is still out there as on tiptoes  
here we stand*

*On promontories that are themselves a-  
tiptoe*

*Reluctant to be land. Which is why this  
land*

*Is always more than matter - as a ballet*

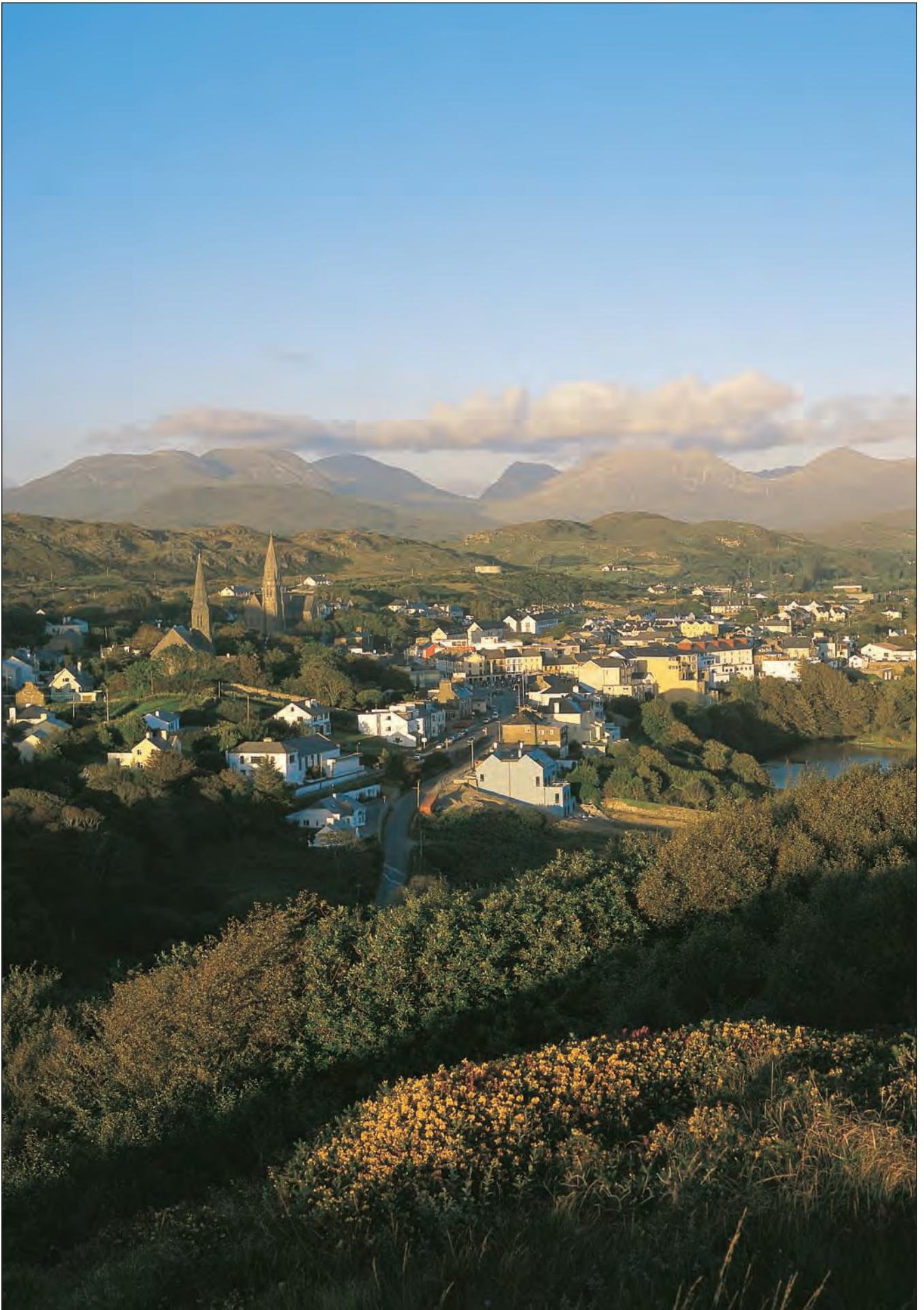
*Dancer is more than body. The west of  
Ireland*

*Is brute and ghost at once”*

– **Louis Macneice**

LITTLE DID I KNOW THAT A BOOK THAT HAS BEEN sitting on my bookshelf, unopened, since the day that I won it as a school prize, would become so fascinating to me now. Appropriately titled “Twenty years a-growing” by Maurice O’Sullivan, this is the story of growing up on the Blasket Islands which are poised out into the Atlantic Ocean, off the western coast of the Dingle Peninsula. Written in Gaelic, this is the story of a small boy growing up on these now uninhabited islands and is a charming read whilst travelling in the area. In the preface to the Irish original he said: “It was a tender thought that struck me to write this book for the laughter and entertainment of the old women of Blasket Island... remembering their







sorrow when I left them, I took up my pen and wrote this book in order to send my voice into their ears again.”

Apart from the widespread use of electricity now, I cannot imagine that life, outside of the main town of Dingle has changed that dramatically. This is one of the areas of Ireland named Gaeltacht, which means that Irish is the spoken language and where Ireland’s social, cultural and linguistic traditions are both safeguarded and promoted.

The Dingle Peninsula was famously used for the filming of Oscar winning *Ryan’s Daughter* in 1970. For anyone who has not seen it, you must. It is the story of frustrated love set against the backdrop of the 1916 rebellion against the English. Directed by David Lean, it is powerful, melodramatic and romantic; there could be no better setting than this bit of Ireland.

Inch Strand is one of those locations. A three-mile long white, wide beach situated on a promontory poking its way into the Atlantic from the southern coast of the mainland, creating good surf. In the 18th century, this beach was used by wreckers to lure boats onto the sand by tying lanterns to grazing cattle. This simulation of the reassuring movement of boats led many a vessel to run itself aground.

For twenty years Dingle Town has had its own beacon with which to attract visitors: Fungie the Dolphin. For a cost of €8, a fishing boat will take you out to the harbour entrance where he is usually found. No sighting of him means that your money

is returned. We did not get a chance to get out to see him as strong winds had whipped the sea into quite a frenzy. But Fungie is definitely big business for Dingle. Tourist shops abound with posters, postcards, tea towels and models of him. Restaurants, cafés and bars are tripping over each other in this little town, which on a bad rainy day is a good thing...

Leaving Dingle and travelling west along the coast road that winds and climbs out to Sleah Head is a fantastic panoramic drive rising higher above sea level, so that the road is finally following the sharp cliffs edge. Stopping points have been created for photography and contemplation. The sea is puffing and panting against the splinter like rocks and cliff faces, every now and again creating huge sprays. Dotted around are little white inviting beaches. The Blasket Islands come into view, spreading out from the headland, called Sleah Head. These are the most westerly point of Europe and it is daunting to think that there is nothing but sea from here to America.

This sea has innumerable tales of shipwrecks;



**PAGE OPPOSITE:**  
View from the top of the town of Clifden. Left, Ali on Omay Island, where the sand is firm enough to drive across when the tide is out.







especially interesting are those of the Spanish Armada that came to grief off this coast. It is also through these waters that the mass emigration to America started in the 1850s. Although most of the ships left from Cobh, near Cork, there are some that left from Tralee, on the northern side of the Dingle peninsula. Not surprisingly, nationalist songs abound in this area.

It is possible to get to the Blasket Islands by boat. There is both a service from Dingle and Dunquin and it is even possible to stay overnight in simple accommodation in five restored houses in the village on top of Great Blasket.

Being westerly, an afternoon visit to Sleah Head will give fantastic views and conditions for photography as the sun lights up the many shades and hues of green, brown and blue.

Having lingered at Dunquin beach for too long, we had to set off at a pace to get the ferry across the Shannon and then drive up to Galway city for the night. Again, there is this wonderful feeling of anticipation combined with ever-present anxiety that there is so much to see and just not enough time in which to do it.

The 20-minute car ferry ride across the Shannon to Killimer leaves from Tarbert in Co. Kerry. Hearts sink as on arriving at the jetty the ferry has just left, meaning a wait of at least 40 minutes. This break, however, was to become one of the most memorable of the trip. It soon became clear that there was some kind of festival going on at the harbour. Bunting had been wound between lampposts and small clutches of adults, dressed to protect themselves against the strong cold wind, were watching young boys walking along a pole that was jutting out into the harbour.

It was a greasy pole competition! With commentary amplified around the harbour, six 12-year-

The coast road west of Dingle provides a fantastic panoramic drive, with the road following the sharp cliffs edge.



old boys slipped and slithered along the pole to see who could get furthest. Their skin was a vivid red, created by repeated dippings in the icy water followed by a good whipping from the cold wind. They did not appear to notice the temperature as they then moved onto a pillow fight while still on the pole. At this point there did seem to be a bit of tactical falling in for dramatic effect. What a wonderful scene that seemed to come right out of the 1950s with plenty of laughing and cheering,

renowned for Irish folk music.

*“Galway is where I want to be  
This city is song enough for me  
To sit in old Eyre Square  
holding hands  
With you love there  
There’s nowhere on earth I’d  
rather be”*

#### -Traditional song



Children enjoying a greasy pole competition, oblivious to the cold winds.

everyone was a winner even if there were no actual prizes.

Ferry journeys are always exciting and this one does not disappoint, especially one across the longest river in Ireland. The river traditionally marks the border between the two provinces of Leinster and Connaught.

There are viewing decks along both sides of the boat, a little kiosk thoughtfully sells coffee, tea, hot chocolate and snacks.

With an eye on the clock we had to fly past all the attractions of Co. Clare including the 200m high cliffs of Moher and the large limestone plateau of The Burren. We had to drive straight through the county town of Ennis which is world

Settled along the River Corrib, Galway was once a centre for trade with Spanish ships. Its beauty having faded over the years it has recently been re-invented as a thriving, exciting university town. The docklands are being renovated and it was here that we were to stay the night at the Harbour Hotel, modern, elegant and only five minutes walk from the city centre.

Head for Quay Street, marked at its western end by Spanish Arch and the River Corrib, it is lined with countless bars, cafés and restaurants, many with outside sitting areas, all with big heaters. Tables outside are buzzing with the chat of locals and tourists, to be increased many fold by the return of students after their summer break. Traditional music is performed in most of the bars on any day at any time, and it is for the ‘crack’, the fun that young people head towards Galway.

This is a free-spirited city that attracts the young through its music and vitality. It is the centre for the music of Galway and Clare but added to this there is the romance of being an old sea port on the western coast. It has long been said that the colouring of many Irish people with their black hair, pale skin and blue eyes, comes from this region where Spanish blood mixed with Irish. There are a series of festivals here throughout the

year, ensuring that Galway is busy throughout the summer. There is the literature festival in late April (Cuir Festival), followed by the Galway Arts Festival during the last two weeks of July, in mid-July there is the film festival (Film Fleadh), then the Galway races in the first week of August, all crowned by the Galway Oyster Festival at the end of September.

The shops of Galway offer everything bright and modern (even the wonderful Brown Thomas) but being the self-styled capital of Gaelic Ireland has meant that there are a lot of jewellery shops selling Celtic style rings, bracelets and necklaces. Of particular note are the Claddagh rings. Claddagh is a fishing village existing alongside Galway, once fiercely independent with its own laws and customs. It is from here that the famous ring originates (two hands clasping a heart). It is worn with pointing towards the finger tip for those who are engaged and towards the heart for those that are married. As a result, Galway has a bit of a romantic draw for those wishing to

become betrothed.

After a long day in some cool breezes we squirreled ourselves away into Martines, a cosy candlelit wine bar and restaurant serving predominantly Italian style food. We seemed to strike lucky every time with restaurants, or is it just a simple case of them all being friendly and serving good food?

#### MONDAY

*"-the misty blues of the distant hills, the golden brown of the mountain, the black and brown of the seaweedy strip of shore at low-tide, the ice-green of the water where the wind whipped it, and the whole of it held in a light to be found nowhere else in the world."*

- Ethel Mannin,  
Connemara Journal

LIGHT MISTY RAIN HAD TAKEN OVER FROM THE SHARP, cold winds of the day, before making it all the more difficult to leave Galway and head out to Connemara and its western coast.

Lough Corrib divides Co. Galway in two and travelling west meant that the landscape changed quickly and dramatically to that of rounded barren mountains rising from flat bog land.

For anyone that has watched *The Field* (also filmed here), the hardships of cultivating land here are well known. This is the same kind of desolate beauty that is found in the desert with colours changing and merging with the height of the sun and the state of



Picture left, Jewellery shops in Galway sell a number of traditional Celtic style bracelets, necklaces and rings, including the famous Claddagh rings.





the winds and clouds.

An hour's drive will bring you Kylemore Abbey. A huge granite, castellated gothic building, with well kept gardens snugly tucked between trees on the bank of its own lough is a surprising scene. Not so, on discovering that the marshy bog land had been drained and planted by its wealthy owner (in the 19th century) in order to build the house and grounds. It was only in the First World War that it became a convent, and is now run in conjunction, as a girls boarding school.

Testament to its beauty is the fact that Kylemore has been the subject of many a publicity photo and postcard. Best taken from the road bridge across the lough, photographs of the abbey reflected in the water are wonderful; the rushes in the water changing colour with the angle of the sun.

Take a walk up through the rhododendrons behind the abbey. Although steep, you will get a view of Connemara's Twelve Bens mountain range as a reward.

Whilst hovering on the bridge taking photographs I was approached by an American cyclist.

Enthusiastically he wanted to tell me about the daily rides he had been on, organised by the hotel, and persuaded us that our next destination had to be to run back on ourselves and head to Leenane and the Ashleagh falls. Here we would feel that we were in New Zealand.

I have not been to New Zealand but have seen Lord of the Rings and the American was right. These peat-stained falls, although not high, are wide and full.

They run straight into Killary fjord, famously the location for the killing scene in The Field. The ten miles of Killary fjord can be discovered from a boat that leaves from Nancy's Point, 2km east of Leenane. If, like me, you wonder what kind of fish is being farmed in the floating pens in the lough, it is mussel.

Equally, there are boats that run out to the Aran

Tourists cycling along the mountain range in Connemara.



**PAGE OPPOSITE:**

A breathtaking sight as the sun begins its beautiful descent in clear sky.

Islands from Rossaveal and Inishbofin from Cleggan.

The landlady of the Connemara Country Lodge is the personification of Irish hospitality. Immensely proud of her heritage, culture and country, there was no barriers to the time that she spent with us to ensure that we experienced as much of this part of Connemara as was possible. Her guesthouse is very comfortable with each room named after one of the Twelve Bens of Connemara. We are encouraged to remember the picture rather than the name which will be much more difficult for us (as they are in Gaelic). Enticingly, next door is a factory shop selling discounted jumpers and shawls.

“All manner of people have been called down up to come down,” explained Mary as she led us into the local town of Clifden. A local girl Marie Walsh, had just won the All Ireland piano accordion championship. The mayor had organised a trailer to be set up in the square to award school children for their achievements and to celebrate Marie’s victory. This soon turned into a big music session, drawing more and more families out to enjoy the evening sunshine, the music and a few drinks.

Cinderella-like, we had to leave this scene in order to get some sunset pictures. Sky road leads directly west from Clifden with a viewing point

on the headland from which to watch and photograph the setting sun. Stretched out in front of us were Inisturk and Talbot Islands. Quite a crowd had gathered drawing exclamations of wonder as the sun began its beautiful descent in clear sky. The colour of the sea turned from blue to dark orange as it reflected the sun, and the colour of the land changed from all kinds of brown to pitch black. All this complemented by the appearance of a full moon.

Earlier, I had spied an attractive looking restaurant in Clifden, and had immediately booked a table. I was very pleased with myself for having done so when, cold and overcome by the Irish music and the sunset, we were hungry and needed to get into the warm. Mitchells was the right choice. Serving traditional, fresh meat and seafood, appetites on all levels were soon sated.

Tucked up in bed that night I wonder what the next day’s singing breakfast will be like?

**TUESDAY**

*Irish poets, learn your trade,  
Sing whatever is well made”*

**-WB Yeats (Under Ben Bulben)**

Marie Walsh poses with other musicians at an event in Clifden to celebrate her All Ireland piano accordion championship victory.



THE TABLE IS LAID, THE BREAKFAST IS SERVED. Tantalisingly, a tape recording of Mary’s singing is played. Once the (very) full Irish breakfast is dispensed with, it is time for the morning serenade. Mary jiggles into position on her seat, explaining that although some of these Gaelic songs are anti-British, we are not to take offence as it is not intended. After about 20 minutes we all emerge in a virtual trance like state from the pleasure of listening to the soft Irish voice, sung simply and unpretentiously in the dining room.













This was only the start. As it is the end of the season, Mary has decided to take the day off so as to show us as much of her local area as possible. We are to head off to Omay Island close to where Mary was born and raised.

This is a tidal island, with sand firm enough to drive across when the tide is out. Of course, caution is required when it comes to timing, with the tide rushing in at double the normal speed as it comes from both sides.

The purpose of our visit is to see a tiny church that had been buried beneath the dunes until 15 years ago. A walker had stooped to pick up what looked like a bit of old stone; it turned out to be attached to a whole church below, which has got to have been a bit of a surprise. It has now been exposed but is untouched in terms of renovation. The beaches here are the old fashioned type with rocks and their pools with plenty of clean white sand and shallow turquoise water.

Although the wind was blowing hard, it was a sunny day with small white clouds in flight across the sky. Sitting on the dunes looking out to the Atlantic we were treated to Mary singing a few more songs including, very appropriately, *Galway Bay* and *Ireland*.

Retreating to the car we come across of a line of tourist-laden Connemara ponies setting off for the beach to have a good canter at low tide, their faces smiling but laughs unheard because of the wind. Sitting on disused currachs (traditional fishing canoes called beetles, because of their appearance when carried by two men) we were told stories of how families and their fishermen fathers had lived in this area 40 years ago before electricity had arrived.

There being no trees in the area, the only source of heat was from peat or 'turf' that was dug up

Kylemore Abbey, the subject of many a publicity photo and post-card. Best taken from the road bridge across the lough, photographs of the abbey reflected in the water are wonderful; the rushes in the water changing colour with the angle of the sun.





from the bog. This practice would begin in May each year, lasting a couple of months through to drying in stacks. In late August these blocks would be collected and taken by donkey to be stored at home, to last the whole of the winter.

After this busy morning, av offered us lunch in her kitchen, as friends. Just simple smoked salmon, she said. With the busy morning behind us and a long journey ahead, I tucked in heartily to all that was offered, fresh wild smoked salmon with



hunks of brown soda bread. And then the fruit cake arrived. Oh well, I think to myself, it looks delicious, I'll have a slice because who knows when we will be able to stop on the way to Dublin. And then the dessert, an ice

Left, Mary presents Ali with a traditional jumper. Right, the very comfortable Connemara Country Lodge.

The people of Connemara were self-sufficient. Pigs and fish would be killed and salted to last the winter. Lamb would be eaten in the spring, complemented constantly by soda bread cooked on the griddle with home-made butter.

Americans are big tourists to this area because of their ancestors, many of whom had been driven away by the famine of the 1850s. Green Connemara marble is world renowned; mined locally it is more often than not turned into Gaelic crosses, holy water fonts, coasters and candle holders. Americans would be 80 per cent of the market for this. Famously, Bing Crosby once imported enough marble to completely tile his bathroom. Beside me on my desk now, I have a marble worry stone, which has an indentation in the middle against which to rub the thumb in thoughtful moments.

cream cake. This is nearly a case of a bridge too far but I manage to finish. "Would you like some bits and pieces to take with you on your journey?" offers Mary. This is Irish hospitality.

*"...how you would rejoice to have but one hours sport on Deryclare or Ballynahinch; where you have but cast, and lo! A big trout springs to your fly"*

**-W. M. Thackeray**

This is a description that would attract most hunter gatherers, and although I could happily forage for mushrooms and blackberries in the woods, fly fishing has never held a huge attraction for me. Of course, getting a hook stuck in my arm as a child whilst standing behind my older brothers casting could have a lot to do with this. However, Ballynahinch Castle





Tourist-laden Connemara ponies canter across Omay Island at low tide.

Hotel, despite its reputation as a world class fishery still holds my interest. Set in 350 acres of Connemara parkland, it is idyllic enough to have attracted His Highness the Maharaja Jam Sahib of Nawanagar to buy the property in 1924. A world class cricketer, Ranji (as he was known) was responsible for most of the present day landscaping.

Ranji would arrive every June to the estate, purchasing five motorcars on arrival in Galway and when returning to India in October, he would give the cars to the locals as gifts. The Avenue up to the Castle was covered with marble chips, which were raked every day. What an exotic history and

of course there is much more to hear about Ranji from the hotel bar.

It is time to tear ourselves away from the cosy comfort of this hotel and the stunning landscape to Connemara, for we must return to Dublin. This time to head for the new financial district that has been created in the Docklands. It seems like time travel – within five hours we have been transported from rugged, empty beauty to the modern bustle of New Dublin.

The Clarion Hotel is on the River Liffey, east of the Customs House. This is the centre of the International Financial Services Centre in Dublin. The hotel is trendy, very busy and offers





Ballynahinch Castle Hotel, set in 350 acres of Connemara parkland.

all the facilities of a hotel that is aimed at the business traveller. It also boasts another fabulous penthouse which has been used for many a party, promotion and photo shoot.

Be warned, like most financial districts in major cities, the bars and restaurants in the immediate vicinity close early. Of course, this was not a problem for us after the lunch that we had been given.

### WEDNESDAY

IT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE YOU WISH THAT YOU HAD skipped breakfast. A weekly street market is being

set up in one of the side streets near to the hotel selling gourmet food, appetite whetting pastries and breads, olives and coffee. There are also stalls selling Irish designed clothes and jewellery. The last day and it's a beautiful one. The sun has lured us out on to the streets for a final exploration through the financial district.

Crammed with gleaming glass buildings, combined with luxury accommodation in flats, this area has the same feel as the docklands in London. As much as possible, the docks, weigh-bridges and old buildings have been preserved. In an effort to avoid the rich man's ghetto and create more of a community, by law 10 per





The Millennium Spire is a fitting image with which to leave Ireland.

cent of accommodation is given over to social housing.

*"It's a beautiful day  
Don't let it get away"*

**- Sung by Bono, U2**

This anthem is hugely appropriate to the bright, last morning in Dublin. The last day is always a difficult one, your head is full of experiences, sights and sounds but without the clarity of hindsight.

I wanted to go and see the Millennium Spire (which was in fact finished in 2003). Situated

in the middle of O'Connell Street very close to the post office, this spire is a very fitting leaving image. Its aluminium outline against the blue sky signifying hope, in the most modern way, also creating a lasting memorial to all those that have died in the search for freedom (this was the sight of the beginning of East Rising in 1916).

To me, the spirit of Ireland can only really be summed up as an amalgam of factors. The four cornerstones would be its history and culture, its people, its ever changing landscape and of course its religion and mysticism. Dublin leads in creating Ireland as a success story, a modern country with a strong heartbeat and soul.

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# Why noted Bahrain artist Al Mosawi was drawn to Ireland

By Roy Kietzman

**B**ACK in the Seventies, Abbas Al Mosawi went to the cinema to watch the newly released *Ryan's Daughter*. While for many seeing a film is just casual entertainment, the young man from Naem, a western precinct of Manama, was captivated by the story.

The movie told a powerful tale of forbidden love but, more importantly, it depicted the life, the atmosphere and how people lived in that far-off land of Ireland in 1916. "Ryan's Daughter really touched my heart," he confessed as he sat mesmerised again and again to view the film.

The budding artist that Al Mosawi was, he concurred with a reviewer's description of the film as "a work of pure and undiluted genius".

"The story depicted the colliding of elements like love and revolution, of beauty and the hard-scrabble life of the people," he recalls. "Even the music affected me profoundly."

But he could never quite grasp why Rosy, Ryan's daughter (played by Sarah Miles), was unfaithful to her schoolmaster husband (played by Robert Mitchum). The puzzle was solved when he later saw an uncut version of the film in Europe as the Bahrain censors had snipped out some too-explicit scenes.

"That made me think that we miss out on a lot of things in life because we're unable to see the big



picture," Al Mosawi said philosophically.

In school, his classmates and teachers quickly noticed that the youngster had a flair for drawing, a talent which he honed over the years to develop his own style. Over the past three decades, he has had solo or group shows in Andorra, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Mauritius, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Singapore.

Al Mosawi also spearheaded the Peace 2000 project that saw children express their desire for peace through art, be it painting, theatre, poetry or music.

Though Al Mosawi had been to Europe on countless occasions, he never got to Ryan's country to meet these people he considered "kind, close to one another, warmhearted, honest." He felt Ireland was perhaps like a piece of Bahrain, merely in a different continent. Finally in 2003, at the age of 50, the artist decided to he had to visit the land





he'd dreamed so much about.

"I knew a family at Spanish Point in Ireland, and they agreed to put up our clan of three Bahraini families totalling 11 people. We rented a van at London's Heathrow airport, and I sort of felt like a modern-day Columbus setting off with my crew to discover a new world. We drove to Liverpool, England, en route to Spanish Point.

"Our visas had been prepared prior to departure but, to my surprise, the Irish customs officers saw our Bahraini passports and just waved us through. We eventually arrived at Spanish Point, which is a small tourist village on the western Irish coast backed by a large area of farmlands.

"We brought with us our art materials as we intended to put on canvas the scenes of Ireland. Each day we ventured out to a different area to view the rolling hills, the forts, churches, clusters of houses and fields delineated by low stone walls.



"The area was very rural but steeped in history, and I felt like we were living a dream. We saw and painted vistas, cliffs, sweeping land- and seascapes, people working in the fields, villagers relaxing."

As oil paintings were completed, Al Mosawi propped them up against the wall of the house or along the old wooden fence. The locals came to admire the work of the artist in their midst, some buying those paintings or ones of Bahrain scenes that Al Mosawi had brought with him.

One of those who joined Al Mosawi on his Irish adventure was Ali Kadhem who knew Al Mosawi since they were both 19-year-olds, studying together and becoming buddies in a friendship that endures to this day. Al Mosawi's wife Samira adjusted quickly to the holiday house at Spanish Point and set about cooking meals for the clan.

Aromas of Bahraini specialities began wafting through the air, the spices and seasonings were

Main picture, Al Mosawi in his studio in Bahrain. Left, Al Mosawi and his wife Samira at the old school building where *Ryan's Daughter* was filmed. Bottom left, children painting during a Peace 2000 workshop in Geneva.







Above, Al Mosawi puts the finishing touches on an artwork in Spanish Point. Far right, the visitors pose with local children.

definitely different from those used in Irish cooking. The neighbours' curiosity peaked, and Samira suggested inviting everyone over for a real Bahraini meal which prompted many to ask their visitors to just stay, open a Bahraini restaurant and art gallery right there.

An art show was set up outdoors so that the townspeople could see what the clan in their midst was up to. It rained during the show, but the people still came, and raindrops just ran down the oil canvases, not spoiling them.

Though the Bahrainis were enjoying themselves immensely, they told their hosts that it was their dream to see the school where Charles Shaughnessy was headmaster in *Ryan's Daughter*. The villagers were a bit perplexed about the visitors wanting to trek off to the other side of country, a trip that'd take at least a couple of hours of driving, just to see an old schoolhouse.

Nevertheless, they helped to get them on their way, crossing the Shannon estuary by ferry, then going through many hamlets and villages where people gathered to meet the Bahrainis and puzzle



over their destination: the school and beach of *Ryan's Daughter*. Older folks knew the film well. Younger people had a vague idea about the 1970 movie but seemed unmoved by its storyline from another era.

"To say that the people we met were friendly was an understatement," recalls Al Mosawi. "They just couldn't do enough for us, inviting us to lunch, for tea, for tankards of ale and listening to our experiences with great wonder.

"The food was fantastic," adds Al Mosawi, "and the Irish bread was absolutely scrumptious. The sun was setting, and we finally arrived at The

School, pretty much of a derelict, unused building these days. Over the years, people had taken stones from it as souvenirs.

“However, this wasn’t just any school. We felt the local authorities could fix it up and make it part of a tourist site with a gallery, café and bookshop with *Ryan’s Daughter* memorabilia.

“It was getting dark, and we decided to spend the night at the place of my dreams. The next day we visited other nearby beaches, the school again, a restaurant close to the schoolhouse, filming every nook and cranny as well as some of the people who’d been in the cast of the film as extras.

“Everyone stopped to ask us where we were from, leaving the Irish in a state of wonderment. We showed our paintings with scenes of near and far, and they were all sold. We also presented two of my paintings – one of Bahrain, another of Spanish Point – to the director of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI).”

Bahrain’s Prime Minister, HH Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, was in Dublin around that time, as was Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Khalid Kanoo. Both recognised the Abbas Al Mosawi style of painting and were surprised when they learned that the artist was in Ireland at that moment.

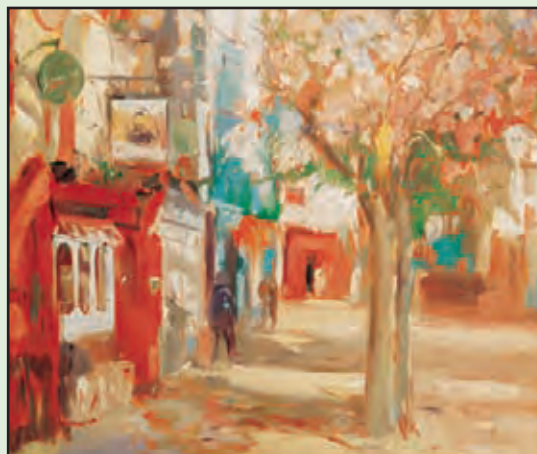
The RCSI officials began to recount to their Bahraini guests some of the adventures they learned about Al Mosawi and the three Bahraini families’ voyage of discovery through Ireland.

Two years later, the college invited Bahraini artists to exhibit their works at the college campus in the capital in a show held in November 2005. Among those featured, apart from Al Mosawi, were other renowned artists Balquees Fakhro, Shaikh Rashid bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, Jamal Abdul Raheem, Lobna Al Ameen and Abdul Rahim Sharif.

“The college wishes to link art with the fine art of surgery,” says Al Mosawi.

The celebrated artist from Naeem has undoubtedly been a catalyst in helping to strengthen the bonds between two peoples and two countries.

• For more information about Al Mosawi and his work, you can visit his website, [www.almosawigallery.com](http://www.almosawigallery.com).



Left, some of Al Mosawi’s impressions of Ireland, captured on canvas.