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IRELAND – THE COASTAL WONDER OF DELIGHT

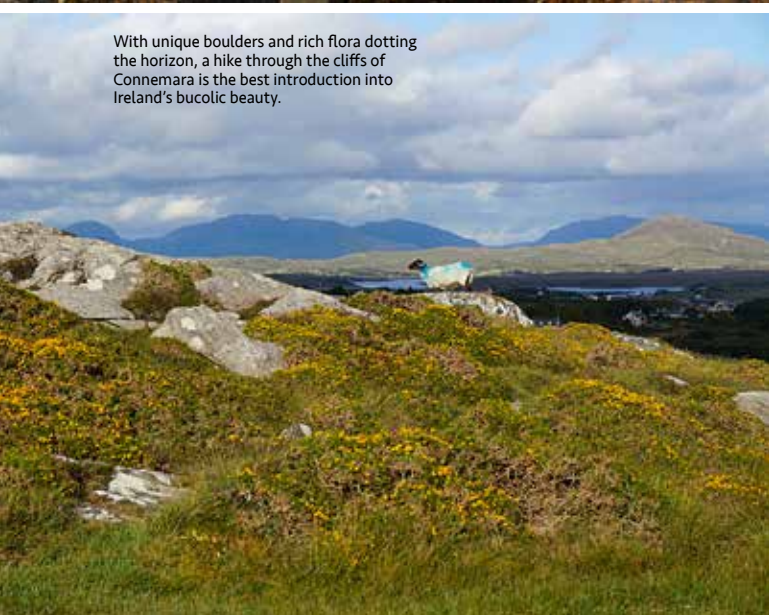
Cinematic nature at its best – this is what Ireland promises. A jolly lineup of colourful villages, each seemingly equipped with its own haunting castle. Add some Irish music jamborees, whiskey jaunts, and seaborne delights, and you’re well set with a most rewarding menu.

You won’t see the sun shining 24/7 in Ireland. But here’s the thing: you wouldn’t want it to. For despite the frequent showers, which tend to wrap up rather quickly, this verdant isle off the coast of England and Wales is a breath of fresh air – quite literally so – in a world of increasing high temperatures.

Ireland is a land of rainbows and shadow play that light up the sky. As you explore its most scenic sights, waking up to an overcast day means nothing; one moment clouds may be rolling in, but clear blue skies show up minutes later. In fact, Irish weather makes for incredible landscape photography and the perfect setting for that bright, chic raincoat you brought along. The sky is a constantly changing stage on which slivers of sun strike through. It’s enigmatic, enthralling, and inviting to deep meditation and disconnecting from it all.

After each session of rain, the green hills emanate almost neon shades, while the vibrant hues of houses pop more than ever. The sky never bores, never disappoints. *Fáilte!* Welcome to Ireland, the dazzling entertainer.

The Cliffs of Moher in County Clare



THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

It comes as little coincidence that Ireland's most magical journey is labelled as wild. Stretching for an impressive 2600 kilometres along the country's western seaboard, make your way towards the Wild Atlantic Way for an unforgettable encounter with nature. From Malin Head in County Donegal up north, down to Kinsale in County Cork down south, this is one of the longest defined coastal routes in the world. It also ranks way up there on the Best of Road Trips list. So do join in – a dollop of adventure and surreal vistas await, and perhaps some friendly leprechauns as well.

If the thought of untainted Irish scenery allured you here in the first place, then you're in the right. There's no heat or dust or maddening traffic in sight. Only jagged cliffs and a bounty of inlets with sheep, horses, and cows bucolically scattered on the meadows. It's all how you might have imagined it, but real – a movie scene of sorts in which Mel Gibson might appear at any moment. Cloudy or not, the horizon always appears distinctively crisp and clear.

And yet, the Irish countryside is much more than that. A simple drive down the Wild Atlantic Way reveals a diverse array of landscapes. It's no wonder this region is a favourite for film locations. It often looks and feels as if you've stepped inside the pages of a 19th-century novel, the mighty waves of the Atlantic a leading character in its own right, feral and powerful as it breaks onto land. It's this laced, intertwined backdrop that has preserved the traditional culture found only in western Ireland, far from the confines of a hip Dublin.

Depending on available time, you can travel the entire Wild Atlantic Way or pick just a portion of it. Unsurprisingly so, the iconic Cliffs of Moher are a crowd favourite. And with good reason. They're utterly spectacular and humbling, whether you're a nature buff or not. Running for some 14 kilometres in total, the most popular (and thus photographed) eight-kilometre stretch was featured in the sixth movie of the Harry Potter franchise, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Take your time to explore and hike on the carpet-like softness of the cliffs, marked as a Signature Discovery Point on the Wild Atlantic Way trail as well as being part of the European Geoparks Network and recognised by UNESCO.

Marvel at the unique sight of the Burren limestone north of the cliffs as well as the boulders of Connemara. Once a submerged seabed, the moon-like appearance of Burren National Park is an unexpected site to discover, and it's also home to a large majority of Ireland's species of flowers, such as orchids.

Most remarkable are the Caribbean-like sandy beaches located on the road to Clifden, Connemara's largest town and often referred to as the district's capital. Roundstone, one of the oldest fishing villages in these parts, is an area of much natural beauty and is thus also a source of inspiration for art. With unparalleled views of the seemingly infinite ocean, the village is a botanist's dream for its exceptional wildflowers, as well as the best place to hike around in the area known as Errisbeg. Lying back-to-back, in horseshoe shape jutting out into the Atlantic Ocean, Dog's Bay and Gorteen Beach are a must-see (and must-stroll) while in the region.

Whatever you do on this blessed coastal route, you can't go wrong. Nature's greatness in all its forms flashes on every turn.

COLOURFUL VILLAGES

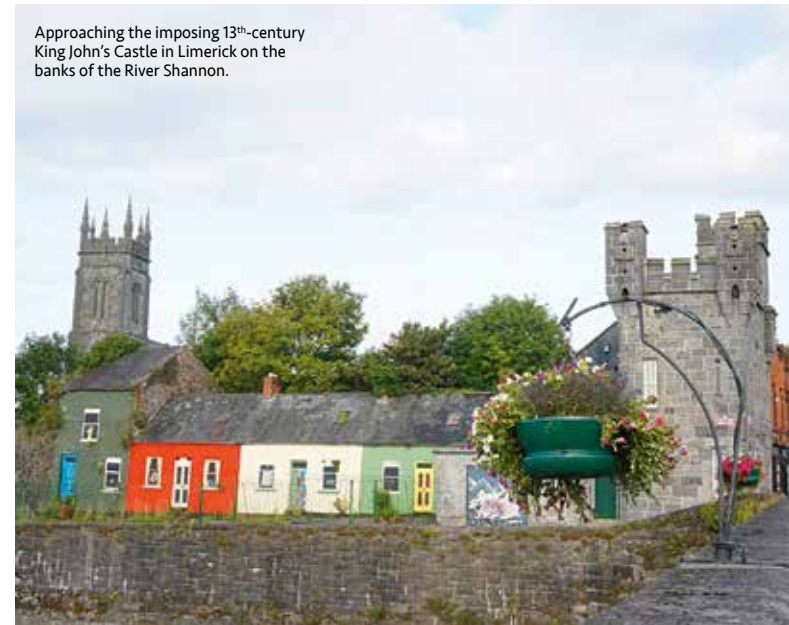
As you continue onwards, you're in for a generous dose of country idyll, good old Irish fun, and lots of heritage. In fact, the west of Ireland is where you most get a feel for traditional Irish culture. Infused with counties where Irish Gaelic is still spoken, the island nation's villages are a sight to behold: Doolin the music town, Adare and its thatched-roof houses, Birr's Georgian architecture. But there's one thing to be aware of – even native English speakers have trouble understanding the thick Gaelic accent here. Consider yourself warned.

The seaside village of Doolin is known as a traditional music and surfer's haven, a most fitting location for pub-crawling. It's charming, well stocked with Irish crafts to take home, and just a ferry ride away from the Aran Islands. Pop in on one of the live music sessions in the evening, where you'll be treated to tasty food and a genuinely good time, *Guinness* refills but a quick order away. Doolin Cave is also worth a visit, a thrilling underground visit to the largest free-hanging stalactite in the world.

Further south, in County Limerick, Adare – popularised as the ‘prettiest village in Ireland’ – is a designated heritage town for its broad main street lined with thatched cottages and brightly coloured doors. A stomping ground for visitors, the welcoming *Blue Door* restaurant is one such example and the definition of cosy and picturesque.

Venturing inland to County Offaly, make sure to wander through the lovely Georgian town of Birr, which is a treat for architecture enthusiasts. From the former largest telescope in the world to the oldest surviving darkroom, Birr Castle (home to the Lord and Lady Rosse, descendants of the Parsons family) boasts no shortage of brilliant contributions to science and technology. But perhaps most alluring are its extensive parklands and gardens, dating back to the 17th century.

As you take in the sights, be on the lookout for shamrocks. You may spot the three-leaved good-luck motif in the most surprising of places – not just in the pastoral lands but also on mailboxes and handicrafts around these lively hamlets. A long-enduring symbol of Christianity from the time of Saint Patrick, the number three is considered mystical by the Celts. There isn't any symbol (or souvenir) in Ireland more meaningful than a shamrock, which simply means 'young clover'.



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Dog's Bay, Galway



A must-stop on the foodie trail is at the long-standing Moran's Oyster Cottage in Kilcolgan, a beloved Galway institution.



A replica of the impressive Pan Am Airways Boeing 314 Yankee Clipper flying boat on display at the Foynes Flying Boat Museum in Limerick.

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SEAFOOD PARADISE (WITH A DASH OF WHISKEY)

For all its natural splendour, Ireland's expansive coastline also delivers a daily feast of seafood, an abundance of fresh fish you'll find as signature dishes in restaurants and labelled as 'catch of the day'. You can sample some of it yourself at various smokehouses in the area, for example, *Burren Smokehouse* and *Connemara Smokehouse*.

With local artisan food products readily available and farmers' markets galore, a trip along Ireland's western coast feels (and tastes) like you've signed up for a food tour. It's certainly a bonus to enjoy locally sourced food in most locales, or to be able to buy fish fresh off the boat from Connemara fishermen. The Irish salmon? Wholesome, flavourful, and just perfect.

From seafood chowder sensations to savoury mussels à la marinière, coastal meals here are persistently mouthwateringly good. And in the West region, it's all about Galway oysters. Make your way down to *Moran's Oyster Cottage*, another thatched-roof local splendour in Kilcolgan. In business for more than 250 years, the seventh-generation establishment serves fresh oysters all year round. Think sea-moss flavour and meaty texture. From September until April, enjoy a local favourite, the native flat oyster. Even if you don't reach *Moran's*, swing by any pub in Galway and ask for a half dozen oysters. They're some of the best on the continent.

Connemara lamb is equally renowned, so ordering rack of lamb for dinner may be a most inspired choice. Galway and Limerick are the top foodie locations on the island nation, with plenty of options to choose from.

And it wouldn't be Ireland without visiting a whiskey distillery or two, a sensorial experience into the distinct oils, spices, and smoothness that Irish whiskey emanates. At the *Tullamore D.E.W. Distillery*, the now legendary taste is owed to self-made man Daniel Edmond Williams. The secret to triple-distilled *Tullamore D.E.W.* whiskey lies within the 'power of three' – a blend of pot still, malt, and grain whiskey. The single malt is also exquisite. Don't miss the fantastic distillery tour, perhaps the best in Ireland.

If you're in or around the Irish capital, the *Teeling Whiskey Distillery* is Dublin's newest destination for whiskey lovers and the first to open in 125 years of the city's long history of whiskey making. Opened in 2015 smack in the centre of the city, this distillery is home to the limited-release *Spirit of Dublin*.

IRISH COFFEE AND FLYING BOATS

Next stop, a proper Irish coffee right from the source, with a surprising twist of glitz and glamour. Irish coffee, as you know it, tastes nothing like it should. The drink traces back to Foynes, a small town of 500 in County Limerick that's seemingly frozen in time (and size). But this commune has brought upon more innovation than you'd imagine: a pioneering start in transatlantic aviation, and a uniquely Irish treat that's still savoured worldwide. As with everything in Ireland, weather played a key role.

Home to the famed flying boats operated by *Pan American World Airways* and others in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Foynes Terminal Building flourished into a primordial hub of air travel between Europe and North America. It's now the site of the Flying Boat and Maritime Museum, open since 1989. At a time when the first long-haul recurring journeys made news around the globe, only a select few, amongst them Hollywood royalty, could afford to hop on these engines of

the future. A sanctuary to the beginnings of aviation and its then-extravagant lifestyle is on view at the Foynes Museum, complete with the only full-size replica of a *Pan Am Clipper* flying boat, the mighty *Boeing 314*, measuring a whopping 32 metres in length.

If you make it past the thick Irish Gaelic accent welcoming you in, you're well on your way to coffee (and whiskey!) nirvana. The Irish coffee – whose appearance strikes an uncanny resemblance to its sister foamy drink, the popular dark brew of *Guinness* beer – is indeed a delight. Starting your tour with an Irish coffee tasting serves as an instant pick-me-up that no other coffee can provide. But why pretend? It will also give you a buzz. Served hot but tenderly creamy, you'll relish and tingle at the contrasting bouquet of aromas. The dab of whiskey gives it the perfect aftertaste, and the desire for more. *Much* more. When it comes to the liquor, 'The secret is to pour just a little bit more,' says Ursula Noonan, a specialist who demoes the authentic recipe in front of visitors using *Powers* Irish whiskey.

It was in 1943 that Brendan O'Regan opened a restaurant and coffee shop in the Foynes Terminal Building. Considered one of the best restaurants in the country at the time, Brendan brought in chef Joe Sheridan, originally from Castlederg, County Tyrone.

The story goes that late one night in the winter of 1943, after a flight heading for Newfoundland was diverted back to Ireland due to bad weather, travellers were escorted into the airport restaurant for food and drinks. Once a Morse-code message was sent to alert the control tower of the impending return, the restaurant's staff was summoned to return to work. When Chef Sheridan was asked to prepare 'something special' for the weary passengers, he simply poured some Irish whiskey into their coffees. Then he added some cream, for extra eye appeal.

One of the passengers approached Sheridan with thanks, asking if the marvellous drink was Brazilian coffee. He jokingly answered, 'No, that was Irish coffee' (an ingenious 3D hologram of this story can be viewed at the museum). A few weeks later, Sheridan presented the new drink to the restaurant owner O'Regan, in a stemmed glass – it was an approach the restaurateur found genius.

As the airport at Foynes became a stepping stone between Europe and North America, movie stars, presidents, kings, and queens all passed through the terminal and sampled Sheridan's now-famed drink. Marilyn Monroe, a young John F. Kennedy, writer Earnest Hemingway, and Humphrey Bogart are just a few who tasted the prominent drink.

In 1945, when flying boats were replaced by land planes, airport operations moved across the estuary to Shannon International Airport, where Sheridan continued serving Irish coffee to passengers arriving from all over the world. Restaurant owner O'Regan also set up the world's first duty-free shop, which is how both Shannon Airport and Irish coffee became firmly established on the world aviation scene.

As the early 1950s rolled in, American journalist Stan Delaplane of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, who had become fascinated by the unique taste of the whiskey-and-coffee blend, brought the recipe back to the *Buena Vista* bar on Fisherman's Wharf. The drink quickly caught on in San Francisco, to a point where more Irish whiskey was consumed in the Bay Area than in Ireland. Just two years later, Shannon Airport's Joe Sheridan was now working in the same San Francisco bar, preparing his own soon-to-be legacy drink in a city he eventually called home, until his death in 1962. At Foynes, you too can find out the original recipe devised by Chef Sheridan. *Sláinte!* Cheers. **bo**



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26	B	SWAN LAKE	
27	B	SWAN LAKE	
28	O	LA TRAVIATA	

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03	B	DRACULA	
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