



GUINNESS, GOLF, AND GOURMET FOOD

VICTORIA ABBOTT RICCARDI gets a taste of true Irish cuisine



It's shortly before noon in County Clare, Ireland and Wade Murphy, executive chef at The Lodge at Doonbeg, steps up to his stove and shows guests how to make his signature seafood chowder of fresh shrimps, mussels, scallops, and salmon. Bowls of chopped vegetables, smoked bacon, and Irish Rooster potatoes sit waiting to form the base of the soup, along with homemade fish stock and sweet Irish cream.

"The whole food ethos in Ireland has changed," says Murphy, sizzling onions, carrot, celery, and bacon in a pot. "In the 1990s we had a bad reputation and were known for bacon and cabbage. But then many chefs began to travel and this upped the standard. Using techniques they learned elsewhere, they began cooking with our great local ingredients, while staying true to Irish food. We now have eight Michelin-star restaurants in Ireland."

Murphy stirs homemade stock and then cream into the pot, followed by the seafood. Once everything is cooked, he adds fresh parsley and a squeeze of lemon juice "for brightness."

Photos by Victoria Riccardi, Tourism Ireland



SCENTS AND FOOD

In 2011, the Burren became a member of the UNESCO-supported Global Geoparks network. As a result, the perfumery now only uses pure botanical extracts from the same kinds of flowers, mosses, and tree woods growing in the Burren, but sourced from elsewhere. An adjacent tearoom also offers a lovely place to relax over organic pastries, soups, salads, and pots of tea made with herbs plucked from the perfumery's garden.

For more substantial fare, head down the road to Burren Fine Wine & Food (www.burrenwine.ie). In this century-old former coach house made of stone, you'll enjoy market-fresh meals, like ginger butternut squash bisque and chicken-leek pie served on blond wooden tables topped with Irish linen runners.

After ladling the chowder into bowls, he sets them on a table next to baskets of whole-meal brown bread and tells everyone to dig in, explaining that the seafood comes from the Atlantic Ocean just outside their window. The chowder has a briny, rich taste with lashings of butter and smoke. Brimming with delectable, local treasures, in many ways, it's not unlike the area of County Clare.

LAND OF DRAMA

I had long wanted to visit Ireland—a windswept land of poets, pubs, and potatoes, rooted in a history of heartbreak brought on by famine, poverty, and war. I had heard the people were warm and welcoming, the villages picturesque, and the landscape staggeringly beautiful—particularly along the dramatic west coast of County Clare, where I had set down my anchor for several days.

The Lodge at Doonbeg was to be my port, a luxurious five-star retreat only an hour's drive from Shannon Airport. Set on 400 acres overlooking Doughmore Bay, the lodge resembles an English manor with an authentic links golf course designed by two-time British Open champion Greg Norman.

A SCENT-SATIONAL TIME

County Clare, of course, offers far more than golf, as I discovered on my second day when visiting the Burren. Taken from the Gallic word “Boireann,” which means a place of stone, this 259 square kilometer karst landscape near Galway Bay consists mainly of terraced limestone.

It was once a tropical sea floor over 335 million years ago, and today the Burren houses thousands of stone monuments and hundreds of alpine and arctic plants and wildflowers. Over 70 percent of Ireland's 900 native plant species, in fact, grow in the Burren, mainly in the cracks and crevices of the craggy stone.

One of the best ways to appreciate the Burren's flora, besides visiting June through August when the wildflowers are in bloom, is to visit The Burren Perfumery, the oldest perfumery in Ireland run by the same family for more than three decades.

“Originally, we used the flowers, herbs, and various [tree] woods from the Burren to make everything,” says a saleswoman, dipping a paper stick into an eau de toilette for visitors to smell. “But now we can't because the plants are protected.”

A TRUE CLIFFHANGER

Not far from the Burren are the famous Cliffs of Moher, the second biggest tourist attraction in Ireland after the Guinness Storehouse factory tour. These black, jagged shale and sandstone cliffs span approximately eight kilometers along the western seaboard of County Clare and measure 214 meters at their highest point. While you can see the Cliffs on foot by strolling to the edge, a boat cruise is highly recommended and much safer.

“See those little black dots up there,” says Eugene Garrihy, our Doolin 2 Aran Ferries cruise boat (www.doolin2arranferries.com) host, pointing to the edge of the Cliff. I was looking up at the Cliffs of Moher from a boat, and by squinting I could indeed see the dots. “





Those are people,” Eugene continued. “There’s not much up there in terms of railings and the wind is strong. There have been stories of a gust of wind coming along and blowing people over the edge.”

We also got a better view of the Cliffs and the birds this way.

“The people on top of the Cliff look out and only see the sea,” says Garrihy. “But those who come by boat look out and see the Cliffs.”

Not far from the Cliffs, our boat pulled toward one of the largest seabird colonies in Ireland. As we neared the finger-like tower of rock protruding from the sea, the cry of gulls filled the air, puffins paddled about, and razorbills (which resemble tiny penguins), dove off the rock’s bottom ledge.

ARTISANAL TREASURES

In addition to natural beauty, County Clare has exquisite ingredients—produce, dairy, seafood, and meat. Food artisans are plentiful in this part of Ireland and well worth visiting to get a taste of the area.

Homemade preserves

Less than 10 minutes by car from the Cliffs of Moher boat pier lies The Clare Jam Company, a small cottage shop selling over two dozen homemade preserves, including strawberry champagne jam, Connemara whiskey marmalade, and tomato chutney. Delicious with cheese or meats on a picnic, these preserves also make tasty gifts.

Smoked salmon

The nearby Burren Smokehouse makes some of the most heralded smoked salmon in Ireland -- and for good reason. The rose-orange fish is silky soft, lightly salted, and tinged with a pleasing hint of smoke.

The Curtin family started smoking salmon in the late 1980s to serve in their family pub, The Roadside Tavern, which dates back to 1865. The smoked fish proved so popular that the family started smoking the fish and selling it commercially, along with smoked trout and mackerel. Last year, the Curtins even served their smoked salmon to Queen Elizabeth II of England when she visited Dublin Castle.

Goat cheese

Not far from here is St. Tola Organic Goat Cheese farm, which offers tours and generous tastings of its award-winning goat cheese. This family enterprise has been in business for over 25 years and makes fresh and aged goat cheese, including feta, cream cheese, and a hard, Gouda-style cheese.

After visiting the super-friendly baby and adult goats in the barn, we donned lab coats and booties to see how cheese is made and aged.

“We milk the goats in the morning and evening, and it comes out the perfect temperature to make the

SWING THAT BALL



Like a true links course, The Doonbeg Golf Club overlooks the ocean and lies on a tree-less strip of land featuring sandy soil, tall, reedy grass dunes, and an undulating topography. The routing is “out and back,” meaning the first nine holes lead out from the clubhouse, linked together like pearls on a string. The golfers then turn around and play back the nine holes, ending at the clubhouse. Golfers try to play firm and fast to outsmart the winds, deep sand bunkers, and knolls and knobs on the green that cause the ball to bounce around at challenging angles.

Golf enthusiasts usually play at two other nearby golf clubs—Lahinch Golf Club, circa 1892, in the town of Lahinch with one links course and Ballybunion Golf Club in County Kerry, with two links courses.



DINING WITH STARS

Ireland now has eight Michelin-starred restaurants.

Anniar Restaurant
www.anniarrestaurant.ie

Bon Apetit
www.bonapetit.ie

Chapter One
www.chapteronerestaurant.com

The House Restaurant
www.thecliffhousehotel.com

L'Ecrivain
www.lecrivain.com

Locks Brasserie
www.locksbrasserie.com

Patrick Gilbaud
www.restaurantpatrickgilbaud.ie

Thornton's Restaurant
www.thorntonsrestaurant.com

cheese,” says female cheese maker Siobhan Ni Ghairbhith, who speaks fluent Gallic. The tour ends in the tasting room, where every kind of St. Tola cheese sits waiting to be sampled, including the silky fresh goat cheese found on numerous restaurant menus in the area.

The Roadford Restaurant in the nearby village of Doolin, for instance, serves it in a fried spring roll appetizer garnished with chutney. It’s the perfect spot for an elegant dinner after a Cliffs of Moher boat cruise.

DRINKS ARE ON US

When it comes to drinks, Ireland excels in crafting hard cider and beer – particularly Guinness – which appears in every pub (usually along with live Irish music). Unlike imported Guinness, Emerald Isle stout has a smooth, nutty, molasses-like flavor and very little bitterness. If you think the stout still tastes too harsh, however, ask for a Black N’ Black, which is particularly popular with women. It involves putting a shot of black currant liqueur into a pint of Guinness to give it a sweet, fruity touch. If you’re lucky, the bartender will even “draw” a shamrock in the stout’s ivory head, the same way a barista creates art in the foam of a cappuccino.

Then, of course, there’s Irish coffee, the perfect way to cheer up a rainy afternoon or end an evening meal. Always served in a glass that resembles a small wineglass, the authentic recipe consists of Irish whiskey, hot brewed coffee, and a topping of sweet, whipped cream to form a seal over the hot liquid.

Ironically, despite the popularity of Irish Coffee, Ireland’s café culture is in its infancy and focused mainly on the big cities. County Clare, like most rural areas, lies steeped in a strong tea culture. Throughout the area you’ll find a bounty of tearooms like The Tea & Garden Rooms in Ballyvaughan (www.tearoomsballyvaughan.com), a favorite spot of American film director Steven Spielberg. The famous director reportedly only had six hours to spend in Ireland last summer; he landed in Shannon with his family and drove one hour to the teahouse for another piece of their beloved cheesecake.

RETAIL THERAPY

Since every good vacation involves a bit of shopping, I sleuthed out County Clare’s best options. Turns out the top boutiques lie in the quaint seaside town of Lahinch, also famous for its surfing. Kenny Woolen Mills (www.kennylahinch.com) has the most extensive offerings of pottery, tweeds, and knitwear, including cream-colored Irish knit sweaters, hats, and mittens for children and adults. The store also ships worldwide.

Across the street, Donogh O’Loughlin (www.lahinchbeach.com) has a terrific selection of men’s tweed jackets and blazers, while down the street you’ll find a variety of shops selling books, women’s clothing, and art.



As I prepared to leave this romantic coastal swath of Ireland, I began to realize what made the area so special, beyond obvious attractions like food, golf and lovely hotels. County Clare offers a true immersion into Irish culture. Life moves slowly, allowing you time to stare out at the sea, watch the sheep graze near crumbling stonewalls, and enjoy a pint in a neighborhood pub. You can walk along the beach, stroll through tiny towns filled only with locals, and have your own Irish experience – one that isn’t in a guidebook and that you didn’t necessarily plan; yet it’s one that you can most certainly claim as your own. ■

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NEED TO KNOW

County Clare is a peaceful and accessible destination in Ireland's midwest region. It is a perfect getaway for those seeking a relaxing holiday, as it offers excellent accommodations and dining, world-class golf, cultural and adventure experiences, and awe-inspiring landscapes.

TRAVELER'S CHECKLIST

VISA REQUIREMENTS

Filipino passport holders need a visa to enter Ireland. You may apply for one at the Consulate General of Ireland in Manila: 3/F Max's Building, 70 Jupiter St., Bel-Air I Village, Makati City. Tel (63)(2) 896-4668 | www.inis.gov.ie



EXCHANGE RATE

1 Euro = Php 53.88



TIME DIFFERENCE

The Philippines is 7 hours ahead of Ireland.

PHILIPPINE EMBASSY OR CONSULATE

There is no Philippine consulate or embassy based in Ireland. The nearest is the Philippine Embassy in London at 6-8 Suffolk Street London SW1Y 4HG. Tel (44)(20) 7451-1780 | philembassy-uk.org



HOW TO GET THERE

Ireland's major airports including Dublin and Shannon are accessible from most international hubs in Europe including London and Amsterdam. KLM flies to Ireland from Asia via Amsterdam.

WHEN TO GO

County Clare is beautiful and charming all year round, but avoid peak summer season when it gets quite crowded with tourists and local vacationers.



WHERE TO STAY

The Lodge at Doonbeg is a luxurious five-star hotel tucked away in a coastal haven along the Atlantic Sea. Surrounded by rolling sand dunes and cresting blue waves, its location is just as impressive as the establishment itself. www.doonbeglodge.com

Gregans Castle Hotel is an elegant Irish house located in the Burren. Aside from the fine antique furniture and elegant gardens, the hotel also boasts of an incredible dining experience. The Dining Room, the hotel's flagship restaurant, was awarded the Best Restaurant in Ireland by Food and Wine Magazine in 2011. www.gregans.ie



Ballinalacken Castle Hotel was built in 1840 by the O'Brien clan, who also own the adjacent 15th century castle ruins. Located within striking distance of the Cliffs of Moher, the Aran Islands, and Galway bay, you would be hard pressed to find a better-located accommodation. The hotel itself is no slouch either, being described in the press as one of the most beautiful homes in Europe. www.ballinalackencastle.com

WHAT TO DO

PLAY GOLF

Lahinch Golf Club is a world-class golf course and a true masterpiece of the great golf-course designer, Dr. Alister MacKenzie. It has two 18-hole courses, the Old Course and the Castle Course, with the latter having a 14th century castle as its dramatic backdrop. With diverse wild and plant life living around the courses, hitting a ball off the course is sure to bring some unexpected delights of its own. www.lahinchgolf.com

Ballybunion Golf Club offers you a beautiful view of the Atlantic Ocean set behind a foreground of rolling dunes. The two 18-hole courses offered here exist peacefully with nature as long grass covers the dunes that tumble throughout the course, giving it a wild, yet majestic look. www.ballybuniongolfclub.ie

VISIT A PERFUMERY. The Burren Perfumery is a delight for the senses, offering a wide array of quality products such as creams, soaps, balms, botanicals, and oils, all drawing inspiration from the nearby flora of Burren. They involve their customers in their product development to ensure the quality and affordability of their offerings. www.burrenperfumery.com

GO ON A CRUISE. Taking a Doolin2Aran cruise gives you the liberty to explore beautiful beaches, staggering cliffs, ancient sites, cool cafés and enchanting islands all in one trip. It boasts the newest ship fleet in Doolin and is dedicated towards the customer's safety and comfort, ensuring that they are free to enjoy their unique destinations without worry. www.doolin2aranferries.com



WHAT TO EAT

Clare Jam Company's marmalades and jams. A

short visit to the Clare Jam Company is the perfect way to cap off a visit to the nearby Cliffs of Moher. While browsing through its array of delectable jams, marmalades, and chutneys, you are also treated to one of the best views of the Clare coast. If you are feeling a bit adventurous, try their unique Connemara whiskey marmalade or strawberry champagne jam. Luogh North Off Coast Road, Doolin Village, County, Clare, Ireland



Burren Smokehouse's smoked salmon. Don't miss the world-famous smoked salmon served in the Burren Smokehouse. Among their many food-awards, they are also a member of Ecotourism Ireland and thus are committed towards sustainable tourism in order to conserve their beautiful surroundings. www.burrensmokehouse.ie

St. Tola's organic goat cheese. St. Tola Organic Goat Cheese was founded over 25 years ago and since then has blossomed into one of the most sought-after artisan products in Ireland. Its fine gourmet cheeses are still handmade in small batches despite its international recognition. www.st-tola.ie

Dinner at Roadford Restaurant. The Roadford Restaurant offers a very personal dining experience with the married owners often waiting at the door to greet you, share local secrets, make you feel at home, and even help plan your day. www.roadfordrestaurant.com



WHERE TO SHOP

Kenny Woolen Mills is a family run business established in 1971. This one-stop shop located in Country Clare offers a selection of Irish woolen products ranging from golf clothing, to men and women's fashion, to children's clothing, and even to Celtic jewelry, and all at an affordable price. Main Street, Lahinch, County Clare, Ireland. www.kennyirishgifts.com

Formerly a shop famous for its sweets and periwinkles, Donogh O'Loughlin has since undergone a transformation into a successful and drapery and knitwear business, boasting a wide array of fashionable jackets and blazers. *Main Street, Lahinch, County Clare, Ireland.*