



Know Your Region- Failte Ireland team up with Tourism Industry providers to “Take a trip on the Wild Atlantic Way”

By Heidi Doherty

Since the launch of the “Wild Atlantic Way”, major tourism initiative for the western seaboard in March 2015, interest in the long distance route has superseded expectations of the service providers and visitors alike. Tourist Offices such as Buncrana, here in Inishowen have seen a dramatic increase in visitor numbers during 2014 and furthermore during the first half of 2015 Inishowen Tourist Office has had a 60% increase in footfall in comparison to the same period in the previous year.

The Donegal section of the Wild Atlantic Way showcases 1,100 kilometres of coastline, and boasts the most Blue Flag beaches, a total of 13.

Bundoran, Rossnowlagh, Murvagh/Laghy, Fintra/Killybegs, Naran/Portnoo, Carrickfinn/Anagary, Killahoey/Dunfanaghy, Downings/Rosguill Peninsula, Magherwarden/Portsalon, Fanad, Lisafannon/Fahan, Stroove, Culdaff.

Donegal has been described in Failte Ireland literature as “Untouched, off the radar and crying out for exploration” .Locals resonate that in terms of tourism, improvements in infrastructure as a gateway to the North “we are the forgotten county”. Hereditary problems associated with troubled times in the border region have deterred potential visitors from taking the road less travelled in Donegal. With all that chequered past behind us, no physical borders visible today. The WAW new route has finally highlighted an opportunity to discover the beauty of this county. It’s encapsulating rugged and remote iconic sights, in a region that is rich in archaeological content, steeped cultural tradition, expressed through music and language expands the mind, body and soul in Donegal.

The new route aims to create a corridor along the Atlantic coast which will link destinations and attractions together, creating a shopping isle of experiences and opening up access and possibilities for the visitor. As Donegal is one of the largest of Ireland’s counties, service providers are encouraged to learn more about what is on offer in other areas to encourage

dwell time around the county in general. What better way than to visit these and pass on the knowledge to the visitor; this enhances their experience, and in turn enables the customer tailoring their journey to the places, people and attractions that interest them specifically.

Faillte Ireland is working with Donegal County Council further developing the Wild Atlantic Way locally. The route takes in the entire coastline of County Donegal and will be a magnificent showcase for the county. Local signature points en route include Sliabh Liag, Fanad Lighthouse, and Malin Head. We start a journey hosted by our local representatives from Failte Ireland to explore the regions centred on the 3 signature points in Donegal starting with a trip around Buncrana in the Inishowen Peninsula.

Part One -takes in **signature point one -Malin Head** at Ireland's most Northerly point, looking out over the Atlantic Ocean where so many of our inhabitants took long and arduous sailings to distant shores, seeking a better life. In times gone by, periods of hardship here in Ireland propelled those people to leave the Emerald Isle. This is an opportunity to share "what to see and do" when you stay in Inishowen.

Buncrana Familiarisation Trip

09.00 – The Inishowen Gateway Hotel, Buncrana was the designated point for the group of participants to convene and listen to the local representative from Failte Ireland giving an overview of the benefits of the Wild Atlantic Way to the tourist industry for the area and Ireland in general terms.

09.30– Discovery Point: *Lisfannon Beach*



Departing Buncrana heading towards Fahan, the first stop was Lisfannon beach, the first of our three Blue Flag beaches. It is accessible via the R238, through relatively flat landscape with clear continual views to Lough Swilly and distant headlands. This is a sandy beach on the shores of Lough Swilly. The location is a Natural Heritage Area (NHA), an important wetlands site for birds. Fahan Wood within 1km of the beach is classified as being of Regional Importance noted for Oak, Hazel and Rowan.

Lisfannon is a major recreational beach for locals and particularly for day-trippers from Derry City in Northern Ireland. During bathing season, the beach patrolled by lifeguards. Access is on foot through low dunes from the car park. From the sands there are excellent views to the nearby Inch Island and to Rathmullan across the Lough.

Driving south through the village of Fahan, on the R238 on the left hand side, attention is drawn to the history of the area including the church at Fahan, where the St Mura's Cross stands, Mura was Fahan's (Fathain) first abbot, of whom little is known. The 7th century cross stone in the churchyard is remarkable for its artistry, particularly the fine interlace of the "Tree of Life" motif. Fahan is likely to have been a major monastic foundation; its precise whereabouts can only be presumed to have been in the vicinity of the 19th century church. Agnes Jones grave is also situated here in the churchyard a nursing colleague of Florence Nightingale who died in 1868.

As the tour proceeds to Moville through Burnfoot and Muff and along the Foyle, the beautiful day presents picturesque views; sun glimmers across still waters, reflecting a calm and peaceful retreat from city life and a normal working daily routine.. The next stop beckons to:-



Visit: **Moville Pottery**

Moville Pottery has been manufacturing fine hand thrown stoneware pottery for over 38 years. Founded in 1976 by renowned designer and hand thrower Lowry Wasson, the pottery studio is located overlooking the picturesque and historic town of Moville, in the heart of Inishowen, Co Donegal. As well as selling their own pottery items, displayed in the gift shop, a range of Donegal and Irish made goods, including clothing, artworks, lamps, candles and soaps are on offer. Specialised personalised mugs are created on request; famous actors such as Johnny Depp, Marlon Brando, and Sir Derek Jacobi are among those to order their wares.

The group were treated to a demonstration by Brian, firstly passing the clay through a pug mill which helps to get rid of air & lumps. The clay is then formed into individual balls & hand thrown, on the potter's wheel, moulding the required shapes. The pots then need to dry for a day or two; after which they are put back on the wheel as the foot ring is turned on to the base.

Once the pots have been dried any additions can be applied, such as handles. These are then air dried for a number of days, and then given their first firing to 1000 degrees centigrade.

After the first or 'bisque' firing the pots are back stamped and a film of wax is applied to the base. The pots are hand glazed at this point and decorated. The last stage is for the pots to be packed into the kiln for their second or 'gloss' firing. The kiln takes 14 hours to reach the final temperature of 1220 degrees centigrade. The pots have then to be very carefully cooled before being unpacked from the kiln ready to despatch to the customer.

Tel: 074 9382059 <http://www.movillepottery.com/>

10.30 Tea/Coffee Break with a brief tour around Inishowen Maritime Centre and Planetarium in Greencastle www.inishowenmaritime.com Email: greencastlemaritime@eircom.net Tel 074-9381363 Contact: Rose-Marie Moulden

Moving on to Greencastle, Magilligan Point View guards the mouth of Lough Foyle and is home to Lough Foyle Ferry and Martello Tower. This short ferry journey provides the opportunity for visitors to explore the Causeway Coast and subject to time of year and conditions view the dolphins around the shoreline. The Maritime Museum is just a short walk from the terminal area. Welcome light refreshments are taken in the tea room, with a browse around the nautical gift shop or tackle shop catering for all fishing enthusiasts.

A guided tour from a representative informed the group on the collection of artefacts, exhibitions and maritime memorabilia. The Maritime Museum introduces the visitor to the riches of local traditions, cultural and proud maritime heritage. Beside the museum is the Inishowen Maritime Memorial, recording the names and dates of those lost at sea from Inishowen.

The planetarium projection experience is a new edition to the museum. The group were given a snapshot of potential shows that was available. A trailer was played for all to appreciate. It seats up to 30 persons in a comfortable environment that allows full sensory immersion, unlike any standard classic planetarium or cinema. A wide range of shows feature sea monsters, the sea underworld "Prehistoric Adventure" "The Enchanted Reef" and the solar system "Dynamic Earth", Astronomy, "Ibex: Search for the Edge of the Solar system."

Discovery Point: *Inishowen Head*

Climbing from Greencastle to the Discovery Point at Inishowen Head via Stroove Lighthouse, the location boasts a vantage point, revealing coastal views of Lough Foyle across to Magilligan Point. On a clear day, it provides panoramic scenes from an alternative perspective across to Magilligan, Benone Beach and Castlerock. From this area, the second Blue Flag beach is accessed; a lovely sandy beach with picnic tables, perfectly placed in relation to Shroove Lighthouse and just a short distance from the Inishowen Head Loop Walk. The Loop Walk is a popular frequented route for the avid explorer and keen walking enthusiast.

Discovery Point: *Magilligan Point View*

This location provides panoramic views to Magilligan Point adjacent coastline and surrounding hillside. This is located approximately 4km to Greencastle, a small fishing village.

12.00 Discovery Point: *Kinnagoe Bay* and meet Ollie Farren of Go Fish



Following the WAW route from Moville to Culdaff , the tour turns off to Kinnagoe Bay. This is deemed one of the real hidden gems in terms of the “wow factor” as it is the location where the La Trinidad Valencera Spanish Armed Transporter shipwreck lies just off the shore. It was in 1970/71 that divers found this shipwreck, a 1,100 ton wooden ship that limped to shore after a storm and sank on September 14th, 1588. Many artefacts have been recovered from this vessel and can be seen in the Tower Museum in Derry.

This small stretch of beach enclosed and backed by a steeply sloping hillside almost replicates a tropical micro environment that is sheltered from a hillside covered with low growing mature coastal vegetation. This beautiful scenic area, with its aquatic blue waters and golden sand with abundance of caves, Kinnagoe Bay brings to mind a landing bay fit for a scene shot from the famous Johnny Depp “Pirates of the Caribbean” movie.

Go Fish

Situated further on the east coast, there is a chance to catch your own Inishowen Fresh Fish from Culdaff Beach.

+353 87 617 6996 <http://www.gofish.ie> Email: ollyfarren@gmail.com Contact: Oliver Farren

Discovery Point: *Culdaff Beach*

This is one of the blue flag beaches in Inishowen that is accessed through a very picturesque village. There are two fine stone bridges and a triangular green featuring a now disused pump house. Situated on a pretty estuary, Culdaff Beach is a long stretch of sand accessed on foot through a dune landscape, dominated to the west by a rocky headland. The beach strand is broken up by several rocky outcrops, where families can sit and enjoy the scenery while the children play in the adventure park provided adjacent to the car park.

13.45 Malin Head

Signature Discovery Point: *Malin Head*



Arriving at Malin Head, Ireland's most northerly point known locally as Banba's Crown, is an area of great scenic beauty and of historical, scientific and ecological importance. The circuit of the Head will take you round the coast to Banba's Crown, the northern tip of Ireland. The tall derelict building known locally as "The Tower" was built in 1908 by the Admiralty, and later used as a Lloyds Signal Station. During the Second World War, the small huts were built and used by the defence forces to keep a lookout and protect our neutrality. It is a perfect starting point for a ramble along the cliffs to Hell's Hole, a remarkable subterranean cavern 250 feet and 8 feet wide, into which the tide rushes with great force. Nearby is a natural arch called Devils Bridge. A timely place to stop for lunch at the Tower presented itself, amongst visitors admiring the views.

www.govisitinishowen.com

Light Lunch @ Banba's Café and visit Wild Atlantic Gifts. Dominic McBride Tel: 087-6393069 Email: dominic@caffebanba.com

Descending from Malin Head heading along the road via Lagg beach we passed St Mary's Church, which is one of the oldest Catholic Churches in Ireland dating back to 1784 and still in use today. Preceding to Doagh Island the tour's next stop is at the **Doagh Famine Village**

Doagh Famine Village Visitor Centre is one of Inishowen's top attractions which traces the changing times in Ireland from the 1800's to the present day. It tells the story of a family and community living on the edge and surviving from the Famine of the 1840's. Remoteness, isolation and reliance on small plots of land made the area a harsh place to live, yet the same families have lived here for generations. This facility allows the visitor to learn how these people adapted and survived. A designated Guide gives in depth information with visual aids as the interactive session takes you on a tour of the village.

+353 74 93 78078 www.doaghfaminevillage.com Contact: Patrick Doherty
Email: info@doaghfaminevillage.com

Discovery Point: Pollan Bay

Situated close to the Ballyliffen Lodge & Spa Hotel, Pollan Bay, or Pollan Strand, is a two mile long sandy beach at the foot of the hill leading to the village of [Ballyliffin](#) on the Inishowen Peninsula of County Donegal. There are views to Glashedy Island, a large rock jutting out of the sea where many boats have gone aground over the centuries, and the Isle of Doagh which is joined to the mainland by a causeway road. Beyond the Isle of Doagh there are views of the hill leading up to Malin Head, the most northerly point in Ireland.

16.00 Afternoon tea at Nancy's Barn, Ballyliffin, Co Donegal -

An afternoon break is taken at an authentic old style converted cottage /barn formerly known as Nancy's in the heart of the beautiful village of Ballyliffin. The cosy vintage setting offers an array of hand crafted cakes and bakes, a homemade lunch menu featuring their famous Spanish seafood chowder. It opens daily from 10am-5pm 086-8432897. An opportunity to meet Bikes & Toys Cycling owner, Inishowen is appreciated as they specialise in bike hire, and guided cycle tours. They cater for all cycling needs, a day, or tour to follow the WAW to Malin Head at your own pace. They offer 3-7 night packages to explore the peninsula.

Email: <http://dohertydueygmail.com/>

Bikes & Toys Tel: 087-275 8818 info@borderbikes.ie

Discovery Point: Mamore Gap



Driving towards Dunaff, the tour approaches the Mamore Gap. This route does not face the views, however a brief stop at the viewing point allows for the appreciation of the

breathtaking scenery of Leenan and Urris. This is a favourite spot for tourists and locals alike to gaze across the broad sweep of the Atlantic Ocean. For the energetic avid explorer it is the starting point of the Urris Lakes Loop and Butler's Glen Loop Walking Trails. Travelling onwards and upwards is a twisting narrow road over a hilltop. Coming from the opposite direction, the Discovery Point is located just after the descent offering panoramic views toward the Atlantic and equally exceptional views to the hillside behind. A number of holy relics are to be found including a holy well devoted to Saint Eigne.

Discovery Point: at *Dunree Head*.

Dunree Head is accessible by road over a twisting clifftop route along the side of Urris Hills. The curving approach road offers a variety of great views over Lough Swilly. Fort Dunree Military Museum is positioned approximately 10km's north of Buncrana in County Donegal. Situated overlooking Lough Swilly on the on the Inishowen Peninsula, Fort Dunree commands spectacular views of the Lough and its shorelines.



The museum exhibits audio - visual presentations providing an insight in the long and interesting history of the fort. The museum displays show how life at Fort Dunree was for the soldiers stationed here and the vital role the fort played in securing the coastal defence of the area. This location marks the site of Fort Dunree and Military Museum. It demonstrates the vital role in coastal defence and neutrality protection with a complete display of coastal artillery. Newly developed hill-sidewalks enable visitors to get fantastic views of the Fanad Head area over the Atlantic Ocean. An informative "Talk" from David Magee, Manager was incorporated in the stop.

Tel: 074-9361817 Email: dunree@eircom.net

17.00 Returning to the Inishowen Gateway Hotel concluded the familiarisation trip around the Inishowen Peninsula.

