

## **DID YOU KNOW...?**

“If you ever go across the sea to Ireland...” the famous song begins.

In this year of “The Gathering,” when all of us in the Irish Diaspora are invited to come “home” to Ireland, you might, indeed, watch the sun go down on Galway Bay. But there are hundreds of other wonderful and interesting things to do and places to see, if you get off the beaten track. Do not settle for the “tourist attractions!” Your experience of Ireland will be richer and more authentic.

Did you know the highest cliffs in Ireland are in County Donegal? Slieve League cliffs are the 6<sup>th</sup> highest in Europe. Donegal gets fewer visitors, but is one of the most beautiful counties in a country where almost everything is beautiful. The lovely Glenveigh National Park was donated to Ireland by Henry McIlhenny, of the tobasco family.

Ceide (kay’juh) Fields, on the northern shore of County Mayo boasts of cliffs higher than the famous Cliffs of Moher. A 5,000 year old civilization lies buried in the fields. An interpretive centre tells the story, and a guided tour of the grounds may reveal an artefact.

Not far from Ceide is the village of Foxford, home to the famous woollen mills. Participants in my tours know the story of the nun who turned to local economy around during another potato crop failure in the 1880s. In a marvel of technology, Sr. Mary tells you her story! Next door to the mills is a small museum dedicated to the Foxford-born founder of the Argentinean navy, Cdr William Browne.

Ballintubber Abbey is another gem in Mayo. This 13<sup>th</sup> century church, known as “the abbey that refused to die”, was destroyed by Cromwell’s army. The local people were back within days to pray amidst the ruins, so it has been in continuous use since the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Now restored, it is the locus for an annual pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick.

Delight in a boat trip on the fjord-like Killary Harbour, off the coast of Connemara. Or check out the little monument to American pilots Alcock and Brown, pilots of the first transatlantic flight, who crash-landed near Clifden. Another hidden gem for history buffs is the summer home of Padraic Pearse, leader of the 1916 Easter Rising, is now a small museum in Rosmuc, County Galway.

There’s enough here to keep you busy for many days, and I’ve just scratched the surface!