



Pack up and go...

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Home or abroad, our weekly travel page has all the best deals and ideas you need for getting away

Hidden Sligo

ork, Kerry and the west of Ireland get lots of attention from tourists but Sligo in the northwest is one of the most underrated and yet most beautiful counties in Ireland, writes **Yvonne Gordon**.

Sligo has beaches and mountains, cultural links like Yeats Country, megalithic graves, surfing and seaweed baths and is an ideal place for a long weekend.

The unusual flat-topped mountain of Ben Bulbin is one of the first sights you see when you arrive in Sligo from any direction, its colours changing dramatically with the passing clouds — sometimes it's grey and covered in mist, but minutes later its gentle slopes can turn to a vibrant green.

The mountain has many legends, from the 'fairy door' on its north side (which is said to be a portal into the underworld) to legends of Fionn mac Cumhaill and Diarmaid and Grainne, as I discovered during a climb to the top with local guide John Ryan.

While John told me the ancient stories, we looked down from the top over the countryside which inspired WB Yeats to write some of his best-known poetry after spending some of his youth in Co Sligo.

We could see down over Lough Gill, the setting for The Lake Isle of Innisfree, and Glencar Lake, where the waterfall sometimes flows back up the mountain.

At the foot of Ben Bulbin, WB Yeats is buried in Drumcliffe graveyard, where there are also the remains of a round tower.

Stretched out before us were the sand



dunes at Rosses Point, which has golf, beaches and a sailing club, and nearby,

Coney Island. To the right we could see Mullaghmore and the shape of the mysterious Classiebawn Castle.

We could also see across to the distinctive mountain Knocknarea, further south.

The large stone cairn on the mountain top is said to be the burial place of the legendary Iron-age warrior Queen Meabh, who is said to be buried standing up in full battle dress.

Knocknarea is an easier climb than Ben Bulbin (for which you need a guide), with a walk of about 40 minutes from the carpark taking you to the top.

From here, you can look down over the popular surfing village Strandhill, which has a surf club, surf schools and Voya seaweed baths for relaxing post-surfing tired muscles.

Enniscrone and Easkey to the south are also popular surfing spots – and Enniscrone's seaweed bath house at Kilcullen's first opened in 1912.

The day after the mountain climb, we went surfing at Streedagh in north Sligo, a quiet beach down some back roads near the foot of Ben Bulbin. The unspoilt beach is also popular with walkers, with great views over to south Donegal.

If history is more your thing, Sligo has lots of archaeological sites dating back to the megalithic age. Just behind Knocknarea, Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery is the largest megalithic site in Europe, with more than 60 tombs, while the lesser-known Carrowkeel to the southeast in the Bricklieve Mountains has 21 neolithic cairns.

● *The Radisson Blu Hotel at Rosses Point in Sligo arranges activity breaks with golf, fishing, surfing, hiking, music, spa or family breaks, from €144 per person sharing for two nights' accommodation, activity and a dinner. Call 071 914 0008 or see www.activitynorthwest.com.*



LEGENDARY — Knocknarea Mountain (above), which overlooks Strandhill (left) in County Sligo

DEAL OF THE WEEK

GET ON COURSE FOR THE RYDER CUP

Calling all golf fans! If you long to attend the Ryder Cup at Medinah Country Club, Chicago this year, take a look at Killester Travel's five-night package (from September 26 to October 1).

For €2850 per person sharing (single supplement €495), you get return flights from Dublin to Chicago, transfers and five nights' accommodation at the four-star Marriott Hotel Naperville (pictured).

The deal also includes Ryder Cup entrance tickets (Thursday to Sunday) and transfers to the course, a welcome dinner, a celebration evening and a Ryder Cup gift.

Top Irish golfers Rory McIlroy and Graeme McDowell are both expected to make the European Ryder Cup team.

To book call 01 833 6935, see www.killestertravel.com or email golf@killestertravel.com.



GOLF ROOM: Marriott Hotel in Naperville

MORE DEALS

HAPPY DAYS IN FERMANAGH

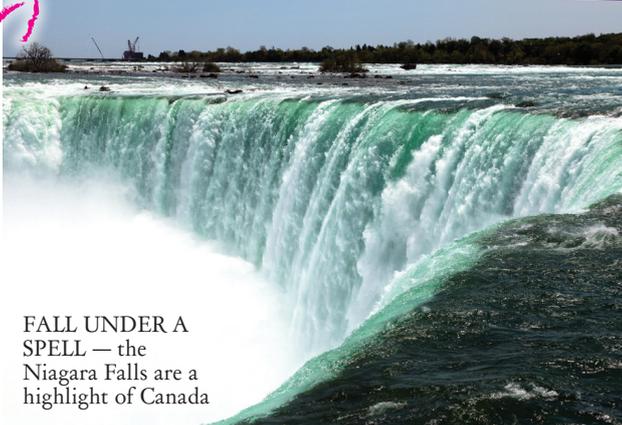
This week will see the first ever Happy Days Enniskillen International Beckett Festival, celebrating the work and influence of Irish writer Samuel Beckett.

It runs from August 23 to 27 and boasts a distinguished artistic line-up with a host of Irish and UK premieres including Teatro Plastico as well as Pan Pan Theatre's highly acclaimed production of *All That Fall*.

Visitors can enjoy a scenic drive to Lough Navar to view a dramatic cliff-top viewing point with a sweeping view across Lough Erne, as well as a range of visitor attractions including the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark where the fascinating guided tour includes an underground boat journey.

For further information on places to stay or things to do in Co Fermanagh, call 01850 230 230 or click on www.discovernorthernireland.com.

HIGHLIGHTS OF CANADA IN TORONTO OR MONTREAL



FALL UNDER A SPELL — the Niagara Falls are a highlight of Canada

● If you've always wanted to visit the home of Niagara Falls or explore some of Canada's most famous regions such as Toronto or Montreal, check out some of these Canadian offers from American Holidays.

In Toronto, stay three nights at the five-star Le Meridian King Edward from €649pps, including return flights from Dublin, departing on October 23.

● For Toronto and Niagara Falls, you can stay for four nights at the four-star Le Meridian King Edward Toronto and two nights at the five-star Shearson on the Falls, Niagara Falls from €1,009pp. This includes flights from Dublin, departing October 9.

There's also six nights in Montreal at the three-star Sandman Hotel from €809pp including flights, departing on September 20.

To book call American Holidays at 01 433 1020 or call into their office just off Grafton Street, Dublin (18-19 Duke Street).

GET THE F1 ACTION

Take in the action at the Belgian Formula One Grand Prix this year with www.holidaysonline.ie.

You can enjoy three nights in a four-star hotel in Brussels, including return flights from Dublin, transfers to Spa Francorchamps Circuit and general admission tickets for Saturday and Sunday, from €795 per person.

The departure date is Friday, August 31. For information, see www.holidaysonline.ie or phone 01 764 0469.



ON THE CIRCUIT — Belgian Grand Prix



FESTIVAL — Get a deal to visit Oktoberfest this October

Get to the party at Oktoberfest

Hit Oktoberfest in Germany for €445 with Contiki. Oktoberfest is best known as a beer festival but there's also a party and amusement park with lots of attractions.

Contiki's trip includes three nights' tent accommodation, three breakfasts, coach transfers, a walking tour of Munich and an optional day trip to Dachau concentration camp memorial.

The trip departs on October 3, with prices from €445pps, which include direct return flights from Dublin to Munich. Other dates and accommodation types are also available.

For more information, call your local travel agent, call 01 775 3838 or log on to www.contiki.com.

THE BEST OF EUROPE



EASTERN RHAPSODY — The tour visits Venice (below), Hungary, Croatia and Slovenia

If you'd like to see the best of Eastern and Central Europe, Insight Vacations have reduced the price of their Eastern Rhapsody tour, an 11-day tour to Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia and Italy, by €565.

From the bath houses of Budapest to the canals of Venice, you can venture through a diverse scenic landscape of lakes, mountains and islands, where the cultural traditions of Eastern and Central Europe mix with the Mediterranean.

Highlights include dinner in Venice and a traditional Dalmatian lunch with wine on the Island of Hvar in Croatia.

The tour costs €2,204pps (reduced from €2,769) departing September 1 and includes flights from Dublin and ten nights in first class hotels.

Contact your local Travel Agent, visit www.insightvacations.com, or call 01 775 3803.