



How I learnt to make it
Life: 2



You're going to love this
Food: 5



Rewiring an electric future
InGear: 17

Sunday

Swoon over Sligo

Explore the county where normal people go for a staycation Page 11

Travel

An adventure in Sligo



ALAMY; ENDA BOWE

15

ALL ABOARD
SUE BRYANT ON
WHY WE CAN START
CRUISING AGAIN



As Ireland reopens for domestic travel, *Yvonne Gordon* looks at the spots in Yeats country where you can avoid the crowds

Standing at a cairn in the Bricklieve mountains, on ridges of karst limestone and surrounded by hills, you can see down over Sligo, to Sligo Bay and even as far Donegal Bay in the distance. The carboniferous limestone here is full of ancient sea creatures and coral from the time this hilltop was actually the sea bed, more than 300 million years ago.

Before lockdown, I went on a tour with maritime archaeologist Auriel Robinson from Seatrails, who told me about the fossils, and also how the hills were formed after glacial deposits were left

a mere 15,000 years ago, when Ireland was under ice a mile thick. An old miners' track led across the mountains to Arigna coal mines.

Thinking back on it now, the fact you can stand on an old miners' trail, in an ancient sea gorge which was widened by glaciation, helps put recent events into perspective; reminding us how things are constantly changing, and how a few months or years are just a tiny dot in the timeline of this ancient landscape.

From here, looking down, you can see over the adventure playground of Co Sligo
Continued on page 12 →

Sweeney from Your Wellbeing Warrior offers yoga and surf lessons on Strandhill beach, above

Sunday Travel



→ Continued from page 11
 – with mountains, hills and woods to walk and climb, beaches for swimming, surfing or horse riding, as well as sea, rivers and lakes perfect for kayaking, paddling, sailing and fishing. These all suit the type of post-lockdown travel we're now looking for: trips with the safety of social distancing, activities with small groups of families and friends, and an outdoor setting.

A few days after my walk with Seatrails, I am on a beach at Strandhill, where the waves often arrive in neat rows, capped by white surf – it's an ideal spot for those of us who like to fly towards the shore on a board. I've surfed here many times, but today I am lying on the sand looking at a collection of wetsuit-boot-clad feet in the air, above which grey clouds are gathering for a rain storm.

A group of us is doing a beach yoga and surf lesson, and our yoga instructor, Bláithín Sweeney, is taking us through some warm-up exercises as walkers pass by, their curious dogs sniffing around our colourful surf boards.

The pre-surf yoga activates the muscle groups we'll use for surfing, and also releases any muscle tension, so we'll have more agility in the water. Sweeney explains how the breath work takes our nervous systems out of "fight or flight" mode, too, leading to less nerves and more confidence in the waves.

"Breathing deep and finding presence in yourself enhances every surfer's experience, whether a first-timer or an old pro," says Sweeney. "You will see most long-time surfers watching, listening and observing the ocean before getting in."

The rain soon clears away as we take to the water and I do feel more energised than usual while tackling the waves. So much so, I sign up for a dawn stand-up paddleboarding outing with Northwest Adventure Tours on the river Garavogue from Sligo town the next morning. I have to avoid my own "fight or flight" response when my alarm goes off at 5.30am but, arriving at the river's edge, there's a flutter of excitement when we hear some ducks quacking in the dark as we get our boards ready.

As we set up the river – quietly paddling past the old Hazelwood estate towards Lough Gill – swans glide slowly along the reeds on the other side of the river, and as the sky starts to brighten up we can see a low mist over the water and hear the sounds of different birds singing the dawn in.

Paddling through the dawn chorus and seeing the sun rise from the water is a special experience. I can see why the area inspired poets such as WB Yeats.

A night hike in Union Wood is another way to see a different side of the county. We walk along a narrow forest trail until we reach a platform at the top where we can see the lights of Sligo town below us and Knocknarea mountain in the



“Sligo suits the type of post-lockdown travel we're now looking for”

Robinson, left, of Seatrails, leads a walking tour; a box of treats from Pudding Row, above; TV series Normal People, below, was filmed in various locations in Sligo; Classiebawn Castle, bottom

distance, where Queen Maeve of Connaught is said to be buried in the cairn on top. It's a calm, still night and we turn off our head torches to pick out constellations in the sky above. Looking out for meteors and passing satellites. We descend on a board walk and a mountain biking track, before stopping for tea at the edge of the forest.

On another day, I do a morning of kayaking and hillwalking in the Ox mountains with Wild Wet Adventures, discovering ancient cairns, crannogs (man-made islands) and ringforts said to be inhabited by fairies. Afterwards, we tuck into a beautiful picnic at the shores of Lough Talt, with oysters, Guinness bread, soup, quiches and cherry scones with local jam, all from Cawley's guesthouse.

With domestic tourism reopening from tomorrow, adventures such as these could be just what the doctor ordered for blowing away the lockdown cobwebs, with the outdoor settings offering lots of social distancing space and fresh air. Another advantage is they can be done as day trips, and tours can be booked privately for groups of families and friends.

The Adventure Sligo network has a "post-lockdown bucket list" of adventures to try, with operators incorporating new safety measures and social distancing. Dawn paddles, moonlit hikes and cycling tours with Northwest Adventure Tours start from July 15, with options for private tours. Robinson of Seatrails is looking forward to showing visitors Sligo's megalithic sites and wilderness areas, with walking and horse-riding tours, including private tours, from July 1.

"I am very happy to see business come back to Sligo after what has been a very challenging few months," says Robinson. "It is always great to see Irish people enjoying their own country."

Sweeney from Your Wellbeing Warrior offers beach yoga from August 1, with two-metre distancing, hand sanitisers, wipes and optional temperature checks (participants bring their own yoga mat). Other activities include hiking, biking, kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding and yoga – all options with lots of distance and fresh air.

All that adventure will build up a good appetite and one of the nicest inventions during lockdown has been the tasty takeaways and treat boxes from members of the Sligo Food Trail – great for picnics or self-catering accommodation.

A day of adventure could start with Sweet Beat's Brunch Box for two, which comes with breakfast pots, sourdough bread, turmeric butter, lemon-and-poppyseed scones and 3fe coffees. Or if you're over in Easkey, order a customised box of treats from Pudding Row, with everything from homemade bagels, cakes and scones, to jams, chutneys and coffee.

The barbecue kirk from Hooked in Sligo town has local pork, burgers, cheeses, cordials, chutney and barbecue sauce.

Accommodation providers are adapting to new requirements, too – and many now offer exclusive areas or rental. In Tubbercurry, you can reserve the eight-bedroom wing of Cawley's guesthouse – or add the six additional rooms to have the restaurant, bar and garden all to yourselves. The team there can organise everything from picnics and cycling tours to whiskey tastings.

Or check into Ox Mountain Adventure Camp, where you can do hiking, bushcraft and team building. Accommodation includes a treehouse, shepherd's hut, mountain cottage and camping area, and it is about to launch a

Fans of TV series Normal People might like to check out the Sligo filming locations too

restored double-decker bus for sightseeing tours. At popular glamping spot Teapot Lane, you hire the entire venue, with a cottage, four yurts and a vintage caravan, plus campfires, barbecues and picnic tables.

Fans of the TV series *Normal People* might like to check out the Sligo filming locations, too – much of the series was filmed in the town of Tubbercurry, and you'll recognise local businesses such as Brennan's pub and Burkes garage. Scenes with Marianne and Connell were also filmed on the beach at Streedagh Point, another popular walking and surfing spot.

Ironically, though, travel in Ireland might seem far from "normal" for a while, but you could argue that in Sligo, with so much history, that's always going to be the case. With sea beds on top of mountains, mysterious lakes, ringforts with magical properties and cairns for

warrior queens, adventures here just scratch the surface.

THE BRIEF THINGS TO DO

Sligo Megalithic Trail tour (€45pp), seatrails.ie; paddle trips and night hikes (from €30pp), northwestadventuretours.ie; beach yoga and surf lessons (€50pp, from August 1), yourwellbeingwarrior.com; Appetite for Adventure with two activities and lunch (from €55pp), wildwetadventures.ie. For food boxes, see sligofoodtrail.ie

WHERE TO STAY

Family package in the private wing (from €99pp per night with dinner; minimum 10 people), cawleysguesthouse.ie. Ox Mountain Adventure Camp (from €80 for two per night), oxmountainadventurecamp.ie. Teapot Lane (from €1,600 for two nights, sleeps eight to 20, available from September), glampingireland.ie. The Wild West activity package (from €190 per night, with two nights' B&B, one dinner and one activity), theglasshouse.ie. The Radisson hotel and spa (from €149 per night, B&B, for two adults), radissonhotels.com. Coopershill country house (€640 for two nights' B&B with a guided kayak tour), coopershill.com. ● Reopening dates vary



Stand-up paddleboarding on the river Garavogue at dawn

TRAILFINDERS

THE TRAVEL EXPERTS

TAILORMADE TRAVEL WORLDWIDE

01 881 4953

CRUISE TRAILFINDERS

01 881 4948

FIRST & BUSINESS CLASS TRAVEL

01 881 4954

Awards 2019

Which?

Travel Brand of the Year

SETTING THE STANDARDS IN TRAVEL SINCE 1970

TRAILFINDERS – MARKET LEADERS

Our Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Belfast Travel Centres are now open. Our consultants are available to welcome you in store 10.30am to 6pm 7 days a week. Our phone lines remain open 8am to 6pm (Monday to Friday); 9am to 6pm (Saturday & Bank Holidays) and 10am to 6pm (Sundays).

Book now to have a holiday to look forward to, as we have unprecedented offers worldwide and now **Trailfinders' tried and trusted travel insurance policy covers Covid-19.**

It's the most extensive Covid-19 cover you will find anywhere, including cancellation prior to travel, curtailment of your trip and medical expenses while overseas.

Trailfinders is absorbing the entire premium increase, meaning there is no unwelcome additional charge for you.

As well as TF providing full refunds within 14 days, our Trailfinders Financial Guarantee ensures your money is totally safe when you book your holiday with us.

No.1 for Travel Insurance

Trailfinders guarantees to make good any money paid to us in the event of a financial collapse of an airline, tour operator or any other transport provider. This pledge has been honoured since the foundation of Trailfinders over 49 years ago. No client has suffered financial loss or ever been left wanting.

50

1970-2020 ANNIVERSARY

TRUST TRAILFINDERS – NO ONE LOOKS AFTER YOU BETTER

Trailfinders is licensed by the Commission for Aviation Regulation, 160542