

THE CRUISE

Story and Photography
by Yvonne Gordon



Emerald Islet

Sail to a remote, mysterious island off the coast of Ireland



Around seven miles northeast of Ireland's most northerly point, Malin Head, lies a tiny green island. Inishtrahull (*Inis Trá Tholl* in Irish) is little known even to the Irish—*island residents were subject to a compulsory evacuation in 1928—but it's a beautiful place, and one that recently became more accessible to visitors.*

No ferry reaches Inishtrahull, but those who wish to venture out to the island can book a day trip on the luxury yacht *The Amazing Grace*. The cruises, which accommodate up to 12 guests, set sail from Bunagee Pier, on Donegal's Inishowen Peninsula. The journey out takes around an hour and a half (keep your eyes open for dolphins and basking sharks in the water), and, upon arrival, skipper Eddie Doherty, who has been exploring the island since he was a child, will point out historic features such as an old schoolhouse, a graveyard, and the ruins of stone cottages.

"You can see how simple life was," Doherty says. "They all had their own bit of ground for vegetables, and cattle for milk and homemade butter. The men went fishing. If they would see a passing ship, they would do a bit of bartering, maybe swapping fish for a barrel of rum or whiskey or diesel."

The most prominent man-made fixture is a working lighthouse, which has been automated since 1987, when the last resident lighthouse keepers took their leave. While Inishtrahull is still owned by the Commissioners of Irish Lights, the island has been designated a Special Area of Conservation, and today its only inhabitants are rabbits, deer, gray seals,

and thousands of seabirds—including northern fulmars, eider ducks, kittiwakes, and black guillemots—as well as rare plant species.

"It's so calming," Doherty says. "All you hear is the water bashing on rocks, the seals calling, the birds whistling. It's the most peaceful place you could ever be." \$120, including lunch, amazing-grace.ie.

From above:
The Amazing Grace in one of Inishtrahull's small coves; the island's working lighthouse

