Ireland's Eiffel Tower... only bigger and better

It wasn't a slam dunk. There were quibbles about branding and signage. Councillors in Waterford and East Cork protested their exclusion from the route, and critics wondered whether the Wild Atlantic Way was a genius idea, or a €10m marketing wheeze that simply stuck fresh signposts along a coastline that was already there.

But results came quickly. By September 2014, a survey of hotels by the *Sunday Independent* found visitor numbers in Donegal had risen between 20pc and 40pc. "We are checking in Spanish, Italian and German visitors, and the visitor numbers from Britain are up too," Terry McEniff of the Mount Errigal Hotel in Letterkenny told the paper. The Wild Atlantic Way "is such a simple idea — but it's so effective".

Tourism Ireland's marketing machine kicked in overseas (you might even have seen billboards on the Paris Metro), but Irish people were engaging, too. In 2014, I wrote about a foraging walk in Killala Bay, Co Mayo, with Denis Quinn of Wild Atlantic Cultural Tours. He plucked shellfish from the sand with a soup spoon and cooked mussels on a camping stove ("You can't get fresher than that!"). On the same trip, I tucked into a seafood platter at Eithna's by the Sea in Mullaghmore — piled high with local mackerel, squid, crab salad, lobster bisque and dillisk crisps for all of €12.50. Beforehand, I might have seen the two experiences as people, and places, apart. But the Wild Atlantic Way joined the dots; the combination of authentic encounters and salt-on-your-lips adventure felt like a new and exciting way to explore the west coast.

In 2015, 25-year-old Daithí Gallagher set out to drive the entire 2,500km route with friends. "We should have been out in Thailand, but we decided to spend a couple of grand on a camper, bring a guitar with us, and discover these little communities that we'd been passing by for years," he says. "The three words just gelled everyone... across GAA rivalries and everything, it didn't matter."

By 2019, the Wild Atlantic Way was attracting one million more international visitors than it did in 2014. Tourism in the west was sustaining 80,000 jobs. And today, Gallagher is a Wild Atlantic Way manager with responsibility for its Gaeltacht areas.

"Suddenly, in Ireland, we had our Eiffel Tower," Carroll says. "But it was bigger than that because it gave opportunity to many more businesses. It's not just one site, it's multiple sites, and multiple communities can benefit from it... It may have started with Fáilte, but it's owned by everyone who lives along the Wild Atlantic Way now."

Ten years on, the route has morphed far beyond those original maps, adding offshoots like the Shannon Estuary Way and attractions — from the revamped Blasket Islands visitor centre in Co Kerry to the National Surfing Centre in Strandhill, Co Sligo. There are Wild Atlantic Sessions in Doolin, Wild Atlantic chowders in Connemara, multiple books, documentaries and travel guides. Ireland's tourism development map has been completely reimagined as a family of regional experience brands — the Wild Atlantic Way, Dublin, Ireland's Ancient East and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands.

"I do love when people say, 'God, it's so simple, why did no one think of it before?'" says Carroll. "It wasn't simple to do! We had to bring people with us... and take a gamble on this, because this wasn't how Ireland had been seen before."

"Maybe, like a lot of the great ideas, I think there was a recognition that it had always been there," says Keeley. The Wild Atlantic Way "gave us the hook to tell the story of the west in a more compelling way... very early on, you felt that we were onto something here, that this is potentially game-changing. And I think so it has proven."

In branding terms, 10 years is young. And the Wild Atlantic Way faces challenges. Covid halted its gallop, the northwest doesn't get the same visitor numbers or spend as the southern half, and peak-season crowds continue to pinch beauty spots like Achill Island's Keem Bay. Broader tourism challenges like rising business costs, staffing shortages and tourism beds lost to state accommodation contracts apply too.

"Memories have been made, it's time for a younger generation to take the helm," Eithna O'Sullivan wrote on Facebook this February. She has closed Eithna's by the Sea due to challenges she faced finding staff and running a small business.

On the Pirate Queen sailing towards Inishturk, O'Grady continues to scan the horizon. "I'd say that's the early mackerel," he says, watching gannets dive-bombing into the blue near Caher Island. The return of overseas holidays and a drop in tourist beds has taken a toll, he says.

"Last year was the quietest in a long time."

Fáilte Ireland plans to continue its work to stretch seasons, develop and reboot attractions like Fort Dunree in Co Donegal, or Westport Estate in Co Mayo, and grow the route sustainably and evenly — taking the "value over volume" approach now central to Ireland's tourism plans. Communities remain at its heart, it says. "We want to bring everything closer to wildness, rather than away from it," Kennedy says.

And the next 10 years?

The Wild Atlantic Way will become one of the "top five touring routes" in world, she says. "This isn't where the story ends. This is the beginning."

The A-Z of the WAW

In 10 years, the Wild Atlantic Way has become a bona fide bucket list adventure. Pól Ó Conghaile, Nicola Brady and Yvonne Gordon map 26 stories that show how it changed our coastal holidays...

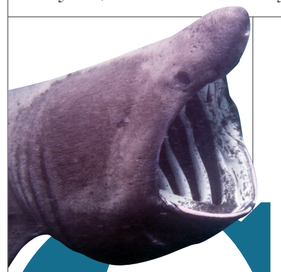
A ...is for Ahch-To

If there's one movie that's had a monumental impact on the Wild Atlantic Way, it's *Star Wars* (sorry, *Banshees*). In fact, shooting for *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* took place in Kerry at the dawn of the Wild Atlantic Way, back in 2014. Skellig Michael, once home to sixth-century monks, became the planet of Ahch-To, where Luke Skywalker was exiled. It was a big coup, particularly as Mark Hamill took on an unofficial role as an Ireland ambassador. Since then, we've seen it all — a May The Fourth Be With You festival, huge ad campaigns from Tourism Ireland (including a billboard in space) and specialised tours. Bren Whelan of *donegalclimbing.ie* worked on *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* when it was being shot in Donegal, and he runs walking tours of Malin Head, combining local history with insider *Star Wars* knowledge — you can even don Donegal tweed Jedi robes. "Malin Head has such a long, rich history, and *Star Wars* is a new chapter in that story," he says. *— NB*

B ...is for Basking sharks

If you don't follow Joshua Nueva on Instagram (*@joshuanueva*), you should. His wildlife photography is spectacular, particularly the videos he captures of basking sharks in Keem Bay in Co Mayo. "The first time I found out basking sharks existed was seven or eight years ago," he says. "They are the most gentle giants — they look scary and are absolutely colossal, but they are extremely curious and gentle." The best time to spot them is between April and October, and while they can be found up and down the coast, Keem Bay is a great place for sightings, along with minke whales and dolphins. "I didn't intend on seeing them there... I was paddling along the headland and a couple fishing on the rocks shouted to say there was something in the water. It was incredible." Check the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group website for live sightings. *iwdg.ie — NB*

C ...is for Céide Fields



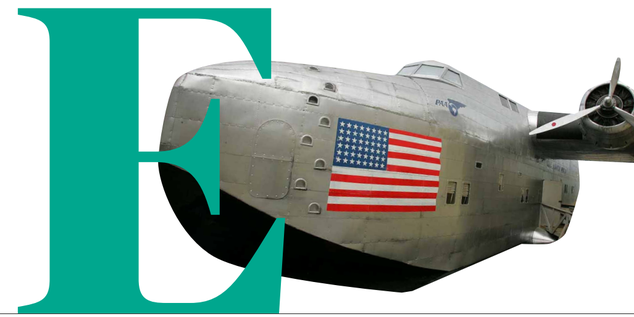
Dún Briste is a sea stack off Downpatrick Head said to have broken off the mainland on the north Mayo coast during a storm in 1393. There's dramatic spray from the Poll na Seantoinne blowhole on rough days. Mary Munnelly of Mary's Bakery in Ballycastle says the Wild Atlantic Way Signature Discovery Point helped people discover Downpatrick Head. "A lot of people go to Downpatrick Head and then feed along to Céide Fields." The Céide Fields Neolithic Site and Visitor Centre tells the fascinating story of the stone-walled fields discovered under the bog in the 1930s, which date back nearly 6,000 years, while tours with Belderrig Valley Experience bring visitors into the surrounding landscape. Community activist Noel Kelly says the area has been unchanged for thousands of years. "It is phenomenally dramatic in places," he says. *heritageireland.ie; belderrigvalley.com; northmayo.ie — YG*

D ...is for Dark skies

With low population densities and low light pollution, lots of the Wild Atlantic Way is perfect for observing the night skies, where you can see everything from the Milky Way to meteor showers on a clear night. It's now home to two special reserves: the Kerry International Dark Sky Reserve, which covers 700 sq km, and Mayo Dark Sky Park, which covers 150 sq km. The latter includes Wild Nephin National Park, which has three signature dark sky viewing points (Ballycroy Visitor Centre boardwalk, Claggan Mountain Coastal Trail boardwalk and Letterkeen trailhead) and a stargazing safari with Terra Firma will take you to the park's darkest places. Further south, you can float under the stars and sometimes spot bioluminescence on a night kayaking experience on Lough Hyne or Castlehaven Bay in Co Cork with Atlantic Sea Kayaking. *kerrydarkskytourism.com; mayodarkskypark.ie; terrafirmaireland.com; atlanticseakayaking.com — YG*

E ...is for Estuary

The Wild Atlantic Way crosses the mouth of the River Shannon, where you can take a ferry from Tarbert in Co Kerry to Killimer in Co Clare, looking out for some of the river's resident dolphins on the way. Scattery Island Tours has gone from strength to strength in in recent years, with awards for its heritage visits to the uninhabited island at the mouth of the Shannon. A section of the Wild Atlantic Way also dips inland along the south of the estuary to the Foynes Island Viewpoint, where the water was a runway for luxury transatlantic flying boats in the 1930s. There's a life-size replica of a B314 flying boat at the Foynes Flying Boat and Maritime Museum which has just undergone a €5m refurbishment, with an Irish Coffee Centre, new cinema and library and Maureen O'Hara exhibition. Its director, Margaret O'Shaughnessy, says the museum always got bus tours, but the route brought more individuals and families. "The people with campers are using it. New walks being developed adjacent to the museum will be brilliant, because they are looking right down over the harbour and the viewing point." *scatteryislandtours.com; flyingboatmuseum.com — YG*



F ...is for Fungi

For decades, Fungi was the face of Dingle. When the Wild Atlantic Way arrived in 2014, there was already a statue to the bottle-nosed dolphin in the town, and at least eight boats taking visitors to see him bopping around the bay. You could buy the T-shirt, keychains... even a Fungi pizza. Then, in October 2020, he disappeared. The pandemic had already taken the peninsula's overseas visitors; now the beloved dolphin — a fixture since 1983 — was gone too. Dingle was devastated, but it hasn't dropped off the map. The town's pubs, restaurants, stays, distilleries and clever off-season festivals like Other Voices (December) and the Dingle Food Festival (October) are as vibrant as ever, and its hub status for walking, driving and boat tours remains. Businesses have evolved, too. Dingle Sea Safari, for example, has just added a fifth boat for its rib tours of the bay and the Blasket Islands. Fungi won't be forgotten, but there are more fish in the sea - from basking shark to seals, puffins and migrating whales. "Without Fungi, we wouldn't be doing what we're doing," says its director, Jimmy Flannery. "He put us on the map." *dingle-peninsula.ie; dingleseasafari.com — PÓC*

G ...is for Gaeltacht

"The Wild Atlantic Way has brought a wealth of people to our shores over the last few years," says tourism spokesperson and native Cape Clear islander Niamh Ní Dhrisceoil. Located 13km off the coast of Cork, the island (Cléire or Oileán Chléire in Irish) is a Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking area) that comes alive during the three-day Cape Clear International Storytelling Festival at the end of August. But, the rest of the time, you can enjoy peaceful walking trails, a heritage centre, migrating seabirds and boat tours to the iconic Fastnet Rock while trying your Irish on some of the island's 120 residents. "Nearly everybody you come across has some 'focail Ghaeilge'," Ní Dhrisceoil says. "Tourists like to hear you speaking Irish and they like the opportunity to use their own cúpla focal. It reignites in some of them a spark and an enthusiasm to go back and learn the Irish language. So many people say they regret not learning Irish in school, and I always say it's never too late." Recent initiatives on the island include Cape Clear Distillery and preparations to host the first Cape Lavender Festival from July 12-14. *capeclearstorytelling.com; capeclearferries.com/fastnet-rock-tour; capeclearlavender.com — YG*

H ...is for Hat

If you've ever walked along Sliabh Liag on a chilly day, you'll know that a good hat comes in handy on the Wild Atlantic Way. And, in recent times, the classic Donegal tweed cap has had a resurgence in popularity, along with heritage pieces in general. Hanna Hats in Donegal has been on the go for 100 years, and Eleanor and John Patrick are the third generation of Hannas to take the reins. Like a lot of the small craft businesses along the way, they've benefited from increased footfall on the touring route — Donegal Craft Village is another, and places like Inis Meáin Knitting Co have made the Aran knit sexy again — though Patrick Dempsey's visit back in 2021 didn't hurt... *hannahats.com; donegalcraftvillage.com; inismeain.ie — NB*

...is for Islands

When you think of the Wild Atlantic Way, it can be easy to just focus on the mainland. But the islands along the coast have benefited hugely from the route. Andrew Murray is the owner of the most westerly hotel in Europe, Murray's Doonmore Hotel, a family operation on Inishbofin that his mother started back in 1969. "It's a lovely story, like a Maeve Binchy novel," he says. "And it echoes through the walls of the hotel." Andrew was at one of the earliest meetings announcing the idea of the Wild Atlantic Way, and says its success "was beyond anyone's wildest dreams". The route "has opened people's eyes as to the raw beauty that's on their doorsteps. But the islands, and specifically Inishbofin, are the jewels in the crown." Both he and the island have seen a boost in numbers since the campaign began. "There's been a marked difference in shoulder-season occupancy over the past few years, and I definitely put that down to the Wild Atlantic Way." *doonmore.com — NB*

...is for Jarveys and Jeeps

Aonghus and Pádraig Hernon come from a long line of jarveys on the Aran Islands, but they've made an evolutionary leap in the family tourism business. Instead of horses and carts, the brothers lead tours in slick black 4x4 jeeps. "It's very similar to the horse and carriage, because it's very personalised, with small groups and numbers, and it's a slower pace," Aonghus says. Their Land Rover Defenders take visitors to off-radar beauty spots on Inis Mór — think Poll na bPéist (The Wormhole), or The High Road, a filming location from *The Banshees of Inisherin*. "It's lovely and peaceful; I would say that maybe 4-5pc of tourists go there. And the few that do are probably lost!" Bouncing back after Covid, the Wild Atlantic Way is playing "a massive part" in how busy the islands are," Aonghus says. "It feels like everyone that's on our tours has been to the Cliffs of Moher either the day before, or will be the day after." *aranoffroadexeprience.ie — PÓC*

...is for Killary

One of the Wild Atlantic Way's most unusual coastal features is Killary Harbour — a long, narrow fjord shaped by a glacier thousands of years ago. It runs 16km inland from the coast between Co Galway and Mayo and is overlooked by Mweelrea Mountain. Explore it with a 90-minute Killary Fjord Boat Tour or try kayaking or paddleboarding with Killary Adventure Company during summer. It also runs speedboat rides along the fjord to Rosroe, where you can walk back along the shore-side Famine Walk, taking around three hours (it has a 10-bed lodge, too). Nearby Killary Sheep Farm runs fun sheep dog demonstrations on the mountainside. "People are realising it's an amazing place to visit," says Shane Young of Killary Adventure Centre. He's always looking at plans for innovation in the area, such as creating a zip line across the fjord. "The last 10 years have been really good, but we're looking at the next 10 years and saying, 'How do we make it even better?'" *killaryfjord.ie; killaryadventure.com; killarysheepfarm.com — YG*

...is for Oyster

They were a peasant food in Ireland long before we enjoyed them with champagne. And while Irish oysters have long been exported to some of the best restaurants in the world, they never taste as good as when they're eaten fresh, al fresco, with the scent of the Atlantic in the air. Nowadays, you can slurp them in Connemara at the Dooncastle Oysters food truck, book a tour and a tasting with Sligo Oyster Experience or learn how to shuck 'em yourself at the Flaggy Shore Oyster Experience. The Wild Atlantic Way brand has seeped into many a menu, with restaurants and hotels along the coast highlighting the best produce sourced from our shores. *@dooncastle_oysters; sligooysterexperience.ie; flaggyshoreoysters.ie — NB*

...is for Peig's Cottage

The Blasket Centre, on the Dingle peninsula's Slea Head Drive, tells stories of the cultural and literary heritage of the Blasket Islands offshore. The islands were inhabited until 1953 and accounts by Irish language writers like Tomás Ó Criomhthain (1855-1937) and Peig Sayers (1873-1958) brought tales of harsh island life to a wide audience. The Blasket Centre, which underwent a €2.9m redevelopment in 2022, also has a viewpoint across to the islands. You can take a six-and-a-half-hour boat trip to Great Blasket Island or book an overnight in one of three self-catering cottages, one of which was the former home of Peig (April to October). There are also daily ferries from Dunquin Pier. Each year, hundreds of couples apply to be 'island caretakers' for the season, to experience island life while running the coffee shop and overnight accommodation — this year, two secondary school teachers on a career break will take on the roles from April 1. *blasket.ie; greatblasketisland.net — YG*

...is for Lighthouses

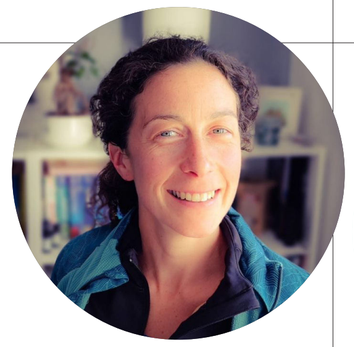
For hundreds of years, lighthouses around Ireland have acted as guiding beacons along the rugged Atlantic coast. Built on remote headlands and cliffs, teams of lighthouse keepers lived and worked at the towers to keep the beams illuminated. As lighthouses became automated in the 1980s, however, the keepers were no longer needed, allowing some of the lighthouses to be given new life as accommodation. Great Lighthouses offers stays at eight lighthouses, including five along the Wild Atlantic Way, from Galley Head in Co Cork to Fanad Head in Co Donegal. You can also take tours of four others along the route, including at Blacksod, Co Mayo, and Valentia Island, Co Kerry. St John's Point lighthouse in Co Donegal has a remote setting at the end of a long, narrow peninsula, with views across Donegal Bay to Sligo and Mayo, where you can enjoy a quiet headland and the surrounding sea and bird life. The lightkeeper's cottage at Loop Head Lighthouse, Co Clare, is another great place to get up close to the wilds of the Atlantic; the tower is open for day tours. *greatlighthouses.com — YG*

...is for Misunderstood Heron

A decade ago, you'd be hard pushed to get anything beyond a petrol station sandwich if you were driving the coast. But now, there's a wave of food trucks dotted along the shore, selling everything from barbecued lobster and mussels at *@juliaslobstertruck* to spirulina and coconut acai bowls at @bean_and_berry_ in Garretstown. One of the biggest success stories has to be Misunderstood Heron, where there's almost always a crowd looking for their fix of Killary mussels, Connemara pasties and salted caramel brownies. Kim Young and her husband Reinaldo started the food truck back in 2017. "The location is so much of who we are," says Kim. "I grew up at the end of that road, and that view is to die for." Back then, they wanted to move back down to Connemara, but bring in a food offering that simply wasn't around at the time. "You would have found food trucks at markets or festivals, but they weren't as prolific as they are now. It wasn't until Covid that they took off. We were trying to do something unique — nowadays, you can find lots of interesting, cool food trucks which are trying to do something different." *misunderstoodheron.com* — NB

...is for Ireland's most Northerly pub

Head to the very tip of Donegal, open the door of Farren's Bar and you'll find yourself in the northernmost watering hole in the country. And at a time when rural Ireland's pubs are closing at an alarming rate, a USP like that can make all the difference. There's also the fact that Malin Head marks the start point of the Wild Atlantic Way, and the kudos brought by the numerous awards the pub has scooped over the years. It's also another spot with a *Star Wars* connection — there's a Yoda mural on the side of the building, and a stormtrooper boot displayed behind the bar, signed "forcefully yours" by Mark Hamill. — *NB*



...is for Rachel

"I don't want to be stuck in an office," Rachel Nolan once told me. We were cycling from Belleek Woods to Rosserk Friary near Ballina. Stopping for a break, she pulled out scones freshly made by her mum, Marjorie ("She's mad for the baking"). Having grown up in her family's B&B in Ballina, Nolan spent 12 years studying, working and travelling overseas before returning to Mayo to figure out her next steps. While chatting to a family of guests, she shared some of her favourite spots in Mayo and they asked her to lead them on a tour. Rachel's Irish Adventures was born — a business guiding small groups seeking authentic, personal experiences from walks to whiskey tastings, cycles and castle stays (and even baking classes with Marjorie) along the coast. Her office is the Wild Atlantic Way. *rachelsirishadventures.com — PÓC*

...is for Queens (and kings)

The story of Pirate Queen Grace O'Malley is one of the wildest you'll hear along the Wild Atlantic Way. But did you know that you can tour her dungeons beneath Westport House, and do some swashbuckling yourself at the new Westport Adventure Park set to open this summer? It includes the country's largest net park as well as a 100m dual zip line and giant swings. Linking culture and storytelling to the touring route has been a theme since its get-go, aiming to paint a richer picture and encourage visitors to stay longer. Have you heard about the king with donkey's ears that lived in a castle on Lough Hyne, Co Cork? Did you know that Queen Maeve is said to be buried atop of Knocknarea in Sligo? Or that the last 'King of Tory' island in Co Donegal died in 2018? — *PÓC*

...is for Skellig Coast

Guide, naturalist and marine wildlife photographer Vincent Hyland is passionate about the Ring of Kerry's Skellig Coast, and his 539-page book *Wild Derrynane* is an incredible encyclopaedia of the area's diverse species, from solar-powered green sea slugs and sand pansies to Kerry lilies. Hyland says that while tourism has brought economic benefits to the area, pressure on the environment from factors like over-tourism in peak season and pollution is causing species to decline. "It's important to respect local byelaws and signage like 'Don't Park Here' or 'Keep Your Dog on a Lead', or stick to the trails," he says. "If you're in the water or taking a boat or kayak, be mindful if you come across whales, dolphins or basking sharks that you give them enough of a wide berth, switch off your engine and don't harass marine life." *skelligcoast.net; derrynane.ie — YG*

...is for Top Gear

A Rolls-Royce Dawn on the Ring of Kerry? In 2016, Matt Le Blanc put a cobalt-blue convertible through its paces for BBC Two's *Top Gear*. Local TD Brendan Griffin revealed that he'd pitched the Wild Atlantic Way as "a perfect fit for the programme". It's just one example of how canny marketing, word of mouth and hosting support from Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland have helped the route go global. Think of Ryan Tubridy's outside broadcasts, TV shows by Adrian Dunbar and Christine Lampard, or an episode of Italian MasterChef hosted from Kinsale. In 2018, a 'Call of the Wild' campaign saw Angela Scanlon, Vogue Williams, Paul O'Connell and others share stories on social media. Heck, long before he took to Dalkey with his SuperValu bag, even Matt Damon was dreaming about buying a lighthouse after a Wild Atlantic Way holiday in 2017. — *PÓC*

U ...is for Unique stays

Co Clare's Labasheeda Peninsula protrudes like a tonsil into the Shannon Estuary. It's little-known, little-trafficked and means 'silken bed'. It's also home to Beds of Silk, a clutch of luxury shepherd's huts designed for couples. "We like to call it glamorous glamping," says co-owner Pádraig Neylon. "This is not roughing it! You have all the bells and whistles. All you need to do is bring yourself, and food and drink." It's just one of the creative and unique stays that have popped like mushrooms along the Wild Atlantic Way, from glamping tigíns on Inis Mór to Slow Cabins near Kinvarra or bell tents on Bere Island. "For donkey's years, Labasheeda has been the poor relation" in tourism terms, Pádraig says, describing the touring route as "a catalyst" for the Beds of Silk business plan. It has grown from three huts in 2018 to eight today, including "as far as we're aware, the only fully wheelchair accessible hut in the country". From €149; *bedsofsilk.com* — *PÓC*

W ...is for Waves

"They're literally addicted to it," said the local standing beside me in Strandhill. It was just before the pandemic, and we were watching two surfers walking towards the water, wrapped head to toe in black neoprene, silhouetted by a low winter sun. I shivered just looking at them. Of course, surfing had been riding a wave before the Wild Atlantic Way came along (jaw-dropping scenes at the Cliffs of Moher and Mullaghmore had put Ireland on the international map), but the marketing, growing visitor numbers, and more affordable wetsuits and boards brought it to another level. In summer, it can sometimes feel like there's a surf school on every second beach. Back in 2019, those surfers in Co Sligo had to go and get changed back in their cars and vans. Today, a new €3m National Surf Centre is just one addition to the route, and it includes changing rooms and showers. At the nearby Strand pub, the Guinness toucan has an adapted slogan: 'Surfing is good for you'. — *PÓC*

V ...is for Voya

Anyone living on the coast has long been attuned to the healing power of a seaweed bath. But the last decade has seen a huge surge in places where you can soak in the stuff. Co Sligo's Voya is one of the OGs, and the launch of its lifestyle brand has been a monumental success. It has recently added new bathing suites with outdoor balconies and views of the sea. As well as bathing, the past 10 years have seen us consuming more and more seaweed as a food stuff, with native varieties popping up in booze (An Dúlamán Irish Maritime Gin), chocolate (Bean and Goose) and biscuits (Lismore Food Company). Eating sustainably has never been as delicious. *voyaseaweedbaths.com* — *NB*

X ...marks the spot

Part of the Wild Atlantic Way's success is its stunning simplicity — basically, it rebranded a coastline. Mapping the 2,500km route was more complicated, but by now we're used to the blue, chevron-emblazoned signs pointing north and south and the rusty "photo-point markers" framing 188 Discovery Points along the way. Some see them as gorgeous; others as gallows-like. The stops are divided into 15 Signature Discovery Points from Dursey Island to Derrigimlagh, and 173 Discovery Points, with interpretive panels and storytelling bringing the locations to life. Ten new and updated viewing points were unveiled in 2022 along Mulroy Drive, a 38km driving route connecting Fanad Lighthouse, Ballymastocker Bay and Rosguill Peninsula in Co Donegal. "It will encourage people to stay longer and spend more," says Paddy Logue of the Mulroy Drive Tourism Group at its launch. *govistdonegal.com*

Y ...is for Young

"Ten years is nothing," says Miriam Kennedy, Fáilte Ireland's Head of Wild Atlantic Way. "The Great Ocean road [in Australia] is going for over 80 years." Lots has been achieved in its first, daring decade, but the route remains young and faces challenges as it moves forward. State accommodation contracts have taken over 30pc of tourism beds in some counties, for example, and a lack of facilities and peak-season crowds put hotspots like Keem Bay under pressure. There's work to be done to disperse visitors and their cash evenly along the route (particularly its northern half), and to stretch the off-season. But there's lots of positivity to look forward to as well — from a game-changing reboot of Westport Estate to a €12m investment in Co Donegal's Fort Dunree. In its second decade, the hope is to turn the Wild Atlantic Way into one of the world's "top five touring routes". — *PÓC*

Z ...is for Zzz

Falling asleep to the sound of the ocean is pure joy. And one of the biggest benefits of the Wild Atlantic Way has been the increase of amazing places to stay along the coast, like the luxury cottage at Lissadell House, right on the sand in Co Sligo, or the evolving Armada Hotel at Spanish Point in Co Clare. "It created a destination of the entire coast, something we hadn't the benefit of before in a place like Spanish Point," says managing director John Burke. "The Wild Atlantic Way celebrated the wild winters even more than the sun in summers, which is exactly what we needed. We need to celebrate the glorious experience of a well-wrapped-up breezy walk, or the power of a jump in a chilly Atlantic. There is so much energy and goodness for the soul in these experiences." *lissadellhouse.com*; *armadahotel.com* — *NB*