



(Top) Derby on the Ballydavid Beach; (Left) Colour coded doors so that Irish men walk into the arms of the right woman after long hours at the pub

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THE inside of Kelly's Bar was a kaleidoscope of cultures and so jam packed with people that it felt like a corner of Kalbadevi during rush hour.

The Norwegian Jade cruise liner had docked in Cobh, near Cork in Ireland spilling out its passengers into the little village. Since Kelly's was playing live Irish music being belted out by part time musicians who were actually full time farmers, all the passengers made a beeline to this pub.

The waitresses and the octogenarian owner of the pub were pulling at draught tap handles like they were slot machine levers as pint after pint of Guinness and Murphy's were dispersed into the crowd. It was too crowded for me and since I was staying in Cobh, I returned after the cruise liner, with its passengers, had sailed away in the evening.

The landlord of the inn was perched on a high stool and recovering from a hard day's work. He told me that's the day cruise ships left, his limbs were weary.

"But me pocket's heavy," he said in a gravelly voice, "so I'm not complaining, laddie".

Cobh was a popular stop for cruise ships; in fact their most infamous visitor had been the Titanic, for whom this was the last port of call before she sailed west into the sunset and eventually



(Left) Fishing boats ready to leave; (Top) Locals enjoy the derby

straight down into the Atlantic.

They say Guinness gives you strength and by his second pint, he'd regained his vigour and voice. His story sent me on the following trail the next morning.

On the road along the south coast of Ireland, where you get the islands best seafood, is a place called Old Head of Kinsale. R604, the road to the old head is scenic and sinuous where sheep think they have priority. As I neared the Old Head, I came upon a homestead called Ballmackean House. It is privately owned but outside it, as Mr Kelly had mentioned, was a little stone plaque that said Ireland's most famous woman pirate, Anne Bonney was born here in 1697.

Anne Bonney's name had rung a bell and I knew I'd heard the name before, but the thought kept buzzing in my brain like an insistent fly which I couldn't pin down. And, suddenly standing by that house in front of the blue Atlantic I slammed

it down. I had heard Anne Bonney's name in Negril, Jamaica, last October. She had been born here in

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Ireland, but had then moved with her father to America where she fell in with Jack Rackham, a notorious pirate. Along with Jack, she became a full fledged pirate — fighting and looting. Finally when they were captured in Jamaica, Jack went to the gallows, but her death sentence

was changed to life when it was discovered that she was pregnant. But Anne Bonney disappeared from jail. In Ireland they say that her father paid a huge bribe to spirit her back to America, in Jamaica, they say that her pirate friends attacked the jail and set her free. But in both places, it is widely believed that she escaped to America and gave birth to a son who grew up to be Billy the Kid — the outlaw!

That evening I parked my Volkswagen Passat outside the Heron's Cove, a very charming Bed and Breakfast in the tiny village of Goleen on the Mizzen Head Peninsula right in the south of Ireland. The village had one convenience store and four pubs — the Irish have their priorities right!

Sue Hill, the owner of Heron's Cove is a fine chef and her crab cakes and rack of Irish Lamb at dinner were pure indulgence. And the breakfast which featured Clonakilty Black Pudding was over

indulgence. Sue, seeing that I was from India, told me that I should make it a point to visit Ahakista.

"Drive the R591 from Goleen and turn left onto the Sheep's Head Peninsula at Durrus. Drive a few kilometres and you'll know why I asked you to go there" she told me quite solemnly.

I realised the reason for her solemnity when I got there. By the deep blue Atlantic, amongst a colourful flower garden stands a sundial — a poignant memorial to Kanishka — the ill-fate Air India Jumbo Jet, flight AI 182, that was bombed out of the sky on its way from Canada to India June 23rd, 1985. The Boeing 747 fell into the sea off Ahakista and the some of the wreckage was washed ashore here. Behind the sundial on a wall are listed the names of all the 329 people who perished in this tragedy.

Beyond Ahakista, the peninsula is a windswept bluff of land with craggy shores and narrow roads that are a lot of fun to drive as are most of the roads on the west coast of Ireland

My next landlord was Jimmy Brick at a B & B called Coill an Rois, at Ballyganeen, Feothanach about 10 km from Dingle on the Dingle Peninsula. I just loved the aloof and rural location of this place, totally

off the tourist trail.

Jimmy, who epitomises Irish friendliness and hospitality, didn't have any stories to tell me; rather he had places to take me.

We headed to Ballydavid Beach where the locals were celebrating the coming of summer by having an impromptu derby on the beach.

The bookies had set up their umbrellas, were standing on upturned boxes and the youngest one was 75 years old. They were shouting out horse names and odds at the top of their voices and their collective decibel level rivalled that of Milan subway when the Rajdhani Express thunders above it. It was like a country carnival, no fine hats, high tea nor hoity toity titbits of food here. This was all about tweed caps, gallons of Guinness and plate sized Irish meat pies thick as a breadboard.

The Dingle was the last of the three popular Irish peninsulas I drove. Each are very popular with tourists, but because I dined and stayed at inns and B & B's run by charming and simple Irish folk. I was privy to secrets and stories. These took me off the beaten track and enhanced my experiences on this island.

LANDLORD LORE

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