

Longtime readers will not be surprised to find I have a love affair with Ireland and Irish golf. In my opinion there is no type of golf course better than the original style, links golf, and no collections of links golf better than those found in Ireland and Scotland. The very best of Scotland may have a slight edge, but the overall links portfolios are too close to call. That being said, with both Scotland and Ireland offering a lot of great golf choices, the Emerald Isle has it hands down in terms of weather, value, charm, beauty, food, lodging and friendliness.

I am just back from two glorious weeks in Ireland, and for naysayers who associate ringear with the British Isles (don't bother writing in - Ireland is not British, but geographically it is part of the British Isles): I enjoyed 13 straight days of mid 70s sunny weather! I actually got burned my first day.

I did too much to recount in one column, so expect more. I'll start with the main reason for going over, to revisit the "landing zone" that greets so many American golfers arriving in Ireland. Tourists flock to Dublin, but since the main attraction for golfers is the Southwest with its epic array of links, many golfers land at Shannon, and there are but three options that cry out for as first stop, two links and a surprisingly stunning parkland course.

If you are headed due south of Shannon, towards Tralee and Waterville, then by all means do not miss **Adare Manor**, 45 minutes form the airport and a great place to shake off jet lag. While I generally shun American business undertakings on the old sod, this one is a labor of love, a stunning old castle revamped by Irish-American owners into a very deluxe luxury hotel that happens to sit walking distance from the main street of one of the most picturesque villages in Ireland. There are just too many good things to say about the hotel, so I will move onto golf. Adare is the Augusta of Ireland, and the view from my window could be confused with the Masters home: absolutely pristine conditions, carpets of green grass, immaculate flowerbeds and most of all perfect stonework framing greens set behind ponds and creeks. I never thought there was a good reason to play parkland golf in Ireland till I visited Adare. And in June, and for most of the summer, it is light until well after 10 p.m.! I pulled into the hotel for a late dinner at nearly nine and was shocked to see the course still busy.

By Larry Olmsted, who stayed in the Manor on the 5th of June