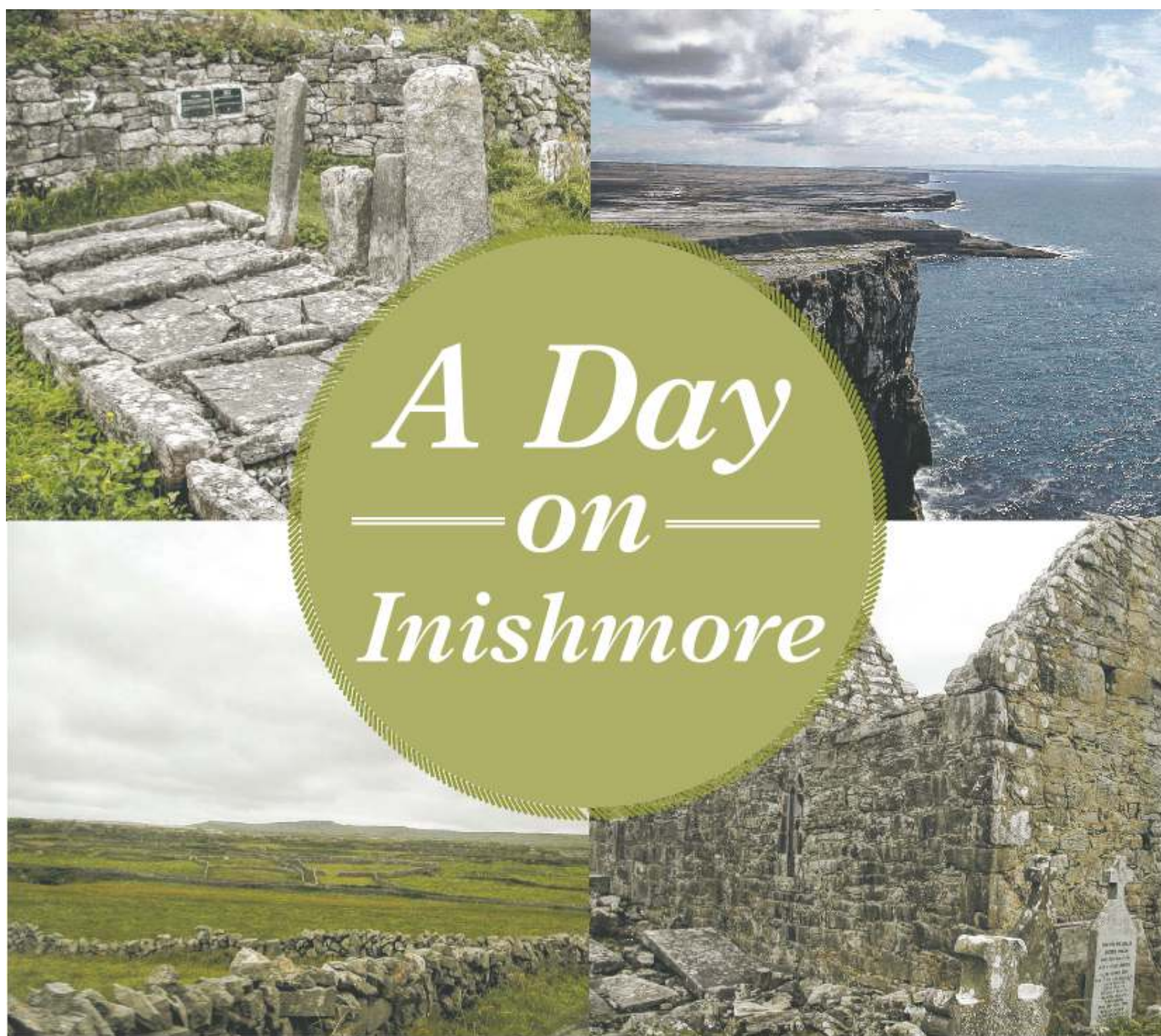


## IRELAND



*A Day  
— on —  
Inishmore*

Scenes from Inishmore. MIRIAM DAVIS/SPECIAL TO THE ADVERTISER

## Ireland's Aran isle steeped in Irish history

By Miriam Davis  
Special to the Advertiser

The waves are choppy and the ferry lurches up one wave and over another. Almost everyone hides in the cabin from the rain. On a clear day, the island can easily be seen from the mainland, but today we strain to catch a glimpse of it emerging through the mist on the western horizon.

We are on our way to Inishmore, the largest of the Aran Islands. It sits in Galway Bay, a 40 minute ferry ride off the western coast of Ireland. Our visit to Inis Mhór (as it is called in Gaelic) encapsulates much of Irish history — the prehistoric period, early Christianity and modern Gaelic nationalism.

When we dock in the harbor at Kilronan, I wobble off the ferry to find two vans ready to transport our group for the day's sightseeing. The island is only 9 miles long and 2 miles across, easy enough to see in a day.

As we drive through the island, on both sides of the narrow road I see patchworks of fields separated by stone walls. Few trees grow on Inishmore. The stony ground isn't naturally fertile. Long ago, islanders found a way to solve this problem: They layer sand and seaweed, which rots to produce a thin layer of topsoil, enough to grow potatoes and cabbage.

### Monastic ruins

Our first stop is the misnamed site of Seven Churches. In fact, we find the remains of only two

“These Roman pilgrims came to Inishmore to study, such was the reputation of Aran's schools in the early middle ages. Students flocked here from all over Western Europe.”

churches; this was a monastic site and the other ruins were probably dormitories for the monks. The oldest church, Teampall Bhreacáin (Brecan's Church), originated in the 8th century and was dedicated to one of the early missionaries to the Aran isles.

The Seven Churches is just one of numerous Christian remains on Inishmore. Christianity arrived in the 5th century, and by the 6th century the island was an important monastic center. And the importance of Irish monasteries went beyond their religious mission. In the early middle ages, when illiterate Germanic tribes had taken over the Roman Empire, much of classical literature was preserved only because Irish monks — like the ones on Inishmore, living on a windswept island on the edge of Europe — copied manuscripts as part of their religious duties.

Gravestones, as well as ruined buildings, litter the Seven Churches. Some are clearly new, with commemorations of the dead written in modern Gaelic. Others are much older. I scramble over the ruins to reach the most interesting set of graves,

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### MORE THINGS TO DO ON INISHMORE

The island is small enough that anyone can give you directions to any of the sights below:

- » Rent a bike and cycle around the island. Burke Bicycle Hire (in Kilronan), (<http://www.bikehirearanislands.com/index.html>)
- » Take a tour of the island the old-fashioned way — in a pony cart — and chat with a local guide.
- » See the seal colony sunning itself near Portmurry beach on the northern coast of Inishmore.
- » Swim at Kilmurvey, a gorgeous, white, sandy beach near Dún Aengus.
- » Dance at a Saturday night ceilidh at the Halla Ronain Community Center.
- » See the “Man of Aran” in Kilronan. This 1934 film about traditional life in the islands is shown daily in the Internet café near the Aran Sweater Market.
- » Visit St. Benin's Church, an extraordinarily small (12 feet by 6 feet) 10th century church on the eastern end of the island. It's perched on the top of a hill that gives a spectacular view of the surrounding countryside.
- » Visit Black Fort ruins (Dún Dúchathair), another ancient stone fortress on the edge of a cliff on the south side of the island. It's harder to get to than Dún Aengus but has arguably more impressive ruins.
- » Shop at the Aran Sweater Market in Kilronan near the harbor. (<http://www.aransweatermarket.com/knitting?gclid=CM3hz97H471CFQTNnAodNRoAqvw>)
- » Eat fresh seafood and listen to traditional Irish music at Joe Watty's Pub in Kilronan. (<http://www.joewattys.com/>)



Adoptable dogs and volunteers from the Montgomery Humane Society will parade through downtown Thursday. AMANDA SOWARDS/ADVERTISER

## Downtown goes to the dogs

Commerce for Canines aims to find homes for adoptable pooches after Thursday parade

By Teri Greene  
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Here is a sight that may catch your attention.

At 4 p.m. Thursday, a pack of leashed, polite but excited dogs sporting bright bandanas will march down the streets of downtown Montgomery, holding their own parade.

This is the third year for the Montgomery Humane Society's

Commerce for Canines dog parade, which kicks off at the corner of Coosa and Tallapoosa Streets and culminates with a gathering in The Alley, where onlookers can meet the dogs one-on-one.

The parade raises awareness of just how many friendly, adoptable dogs are waiting for forever homes at the shelter, said Lea Turbert, marketing and development manager for the humane society.

Leading the parade this year is “Top Dog” — Mayor Todd Strange.

Turbert said all these dogs have met the criteria for adoption — they are well-behaved, have received all the required shots for their age, have been tested for heartworms, microchipped in case they become lost, and have been spayed or neutered.

“There are approximately 22 dogs coming into the parade, and they are all different ages and breeds,” Turbert said.

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