

Inishturk: A haven of peace where you can see the stars and doors really are left open

Island series
No 2: Inishturk



Rosita Boland
in Inishturk

The island is an hour's ferry ride and one of the most sparsely populated of all our islands

The rain is down as the Pirate Queen draws out of Roonagh Pier in Co Mayo. At this time of year, there are three return sailings a day between Roonagh, a half-hour or so from Westport, and Inishturk.

I am out on deck, in the misty rain, peering into a horizon where Inishturk is invisible. But instead of an island, I briefly see two frolicking dolphins, and that's worth being soaked for.

Inishturk – or Turk, as the locals call it – is an hour's ferry ride from Roonagh and 14.5 kilometres distance. The little harbour the ferry docks at is ridiculously beautiful, with the clearest of teal-coloured water. I am one of only three tourists disembarking; the handful of other passengers are locals, or summer residents. The last census had Inishturk's residents as 56, which makes it one of the most sparsely populated of all our islands.

There is no hotel on Turk, just two B&Bs, Ocean View and Tranaun House. Recently, two new modular houses, Craggy Cottages, became available to rent, with a minimum stay of three nights. I'm staying in Tranaun House, where my lavender purple-themed room overlooks the ocean and distant mainland beyond. Pretty much everywhere you go in Inishturk has a spectacular view, because it is so small.

During the summer months, a restaurant operates in the island's Community Club, a large building with a triangular gable that's visible from the harbour. The club is where everything happens, because it's the only real indoor communal space on the island. The restaurant space can be used for meetings outside of season, and it's where local people can gather all year round. There is also an atmospheric little bar attached, where every seat has a view. It's the kind of local bar you dream about finding, but so rarely do.

Joe Salam is the club's community social programme manager, and his job includes driving the island's community bus. Originally from Dublin, he took the job earlier this year without ever having visited the island. "Housing is a real problem, as there are so few houses," he explains. "I heard a house was coming up and I came out at Easter to secure it."

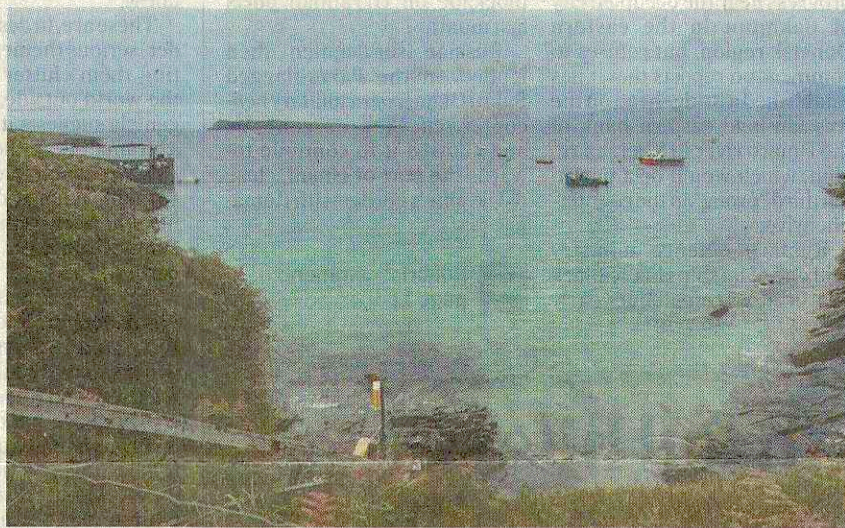
Salam's house is close to the harbour, an area he tells me is locally known as "the city", as it's where the ferries dock, and thus is the centre of any action. He loves island life, and his curious friends have been visiting him most weekends ever since he arrived. "There's a joke that the Loop Walk is the island's number one attraction, but at this point, my house might be number two."

Crab claws
The club employs three people full time, and three part-time, which makes it the island's single biggest employer. I order crab claws, which have been landed that very day, and which arrive plump and fresh, with a dipping sauce of hot melted butter. They are unquestionably the best crab claws I have had in a very long time. A generous starter portion with a salad is €12.95. I discover that you can order lobster a day in advance, and feel like keeping, as I did not know this before arriving. Seán Taaffe from Coolock is working in the bar for the season. He too had never been to the island before he got the job in April. "My mam saw it advertised on Instagram and sent off my CV without me knowing," he says, explaining how the hiring process began. Taaffe loves Turk so much he is now planning on



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■ Clockwise from main photograph: The ferry docked at Inishturk Island, off the coast of Mayo. Part of a picture gallery of residents past and present on the wall of Inishturk Community Club. Steps down to a swimming spot and the view leaving the island. PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRIS MADDALONI/ROSITA BOLAND



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What makes it so special here are the people,' he says. 'I was made so welcome here from the get go. The island is beautiful, but everything comes back to the people. It's still not touristy here. You can see the Milky Way and the stars at night, and there is peace and quiet

delaying a move to Boston, and instead spending a year on the island. "What makes it so special here are the people," he says. "I was made so welcome here from the get go. The island is beautiful, but everything comes back to the people. It's still not touristy here. You can see the Milky Way and the stars at night, and there is peace and quiet." Deborah Bennett from Louisburgh is also working in the bar for the season. "There's something very special about this island. It's authentic. Peaceful. Unspoiled." Bennett went to school with students from Turk; there is no secondary school on the island. This autumn, there will be four children in primary school. Only a couple of years ago, there was just one child in primary.

Astonishing views
There might be only four children of primary school age on the island, but these children have the amenity of a fabulous playground located near the health centre, again with astonishing views. There is a zipline, a see-saw, swings, and a slide set into a hilly mound. Any village anywhere would be lucky to have a playground of this quality.
The island also got a helipad on a designated site this year, which will be an all-weather link with the mainland in case of medical emergencies. The day before I arrived, a tourist who hit their head while on the ferry from Roonagh had been helicoptered off soon after arriving.
In a field near the club, there is a sign that says the area is a "Comcrake Breeding Site". Cornercrakes are an endangered species in Ireland; a once-large population is now mostly found only in remote parts of the west. Down at the harbour, the



Harbour View Tea Room is open to cater for summer tourists. Pauline O'Toole, who grew up on the island, opens the tea room during July and August. There are home-made apple and rhubarb tarts and large scones on offer. It's €2.50 for a coffee and €2.50 for a scone and butter;

cash and Revolut only. She has 13 hens for her fresh egg baking supplies and two roosters; while we chat, hens keep trying to come in and join us. The previous day, she had just nine customers all day, composed of two families. "I had to go away to secondary school," O'Toole says.

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O'Toole came back to live on Turk and raised nine children. She has seen the decades pass on the island, and is clear about what she believes it needs to continue to survive and thrive. "The island needs more people, and more families to come and live here." When asked what she most values about her island home, she doesn't have to think. "Peace. Tranquillity. Safety. I can go for a walk at any time of the day or night and feel safe."

Doors really are left open on Inishturk. I have to return to Tranaun House to pick up my bag before the afternoon ferry leaves. The front door is wide open, my bag waiting for collection in the hall. How many other places in 2023 in Ireland can you leave your door open all day without fear of theft, or intrusion? It's a rare privilege to be able to do so.

I leave Inishturk feeling I haven't spent enough time there. I'll be back.

Island series online
A day in the life of the islands.
Running every day this week on irishtimes.com

Tomorrow: Seanín Graham visits Rathlin Island

Priest sees light as solar panels slash church bills

Parish committee took action after electricity bills spiralled by 300%

LOUISE WALSH

A parish priest has seen his church electricity bill drop by almost €150 in just a month after he installed solar panels to save on soaring energy costs.

Fr Paul Byrne and the parish finance committee in Termonfeckin, Co Louth, decided to install ground solar panels to heat both the Church of the Immaculate Conception and its neighbouring parochial house after seeing their electricity bills spiral by 300 per cent.

The 20 panels were installed in the grounds of the parochial house last month and Fr Byrne has already noticed savings,

"This parish had been talking about solar panels for a long number of years but we really began looking into it when electricity prices just kept getting higher," Fr Byrne said. "It's only since July last year that homeowners became eligible to sell their surplus solar electricity to the grid which made the concept more valid, considering the high initial cost outlay.

"Many grant schemes that we looked into were only for community halls or premises, which ruled us out as this parish has a limited amount of parochial properties and land. Churches are listed as commercial

buildings so the tariffs for energy are three times higher than residential properties which makes energy bills even more costly." The parish first considered alternatives including low consumption lights in the church, but this would have worked out more costly than installing solar panels as the parish would still have been left with huge heating bills.

'Before Mass'

"This time of year, we use very little electricity. We only need to turn on the heating about a half an hour before Mass so we are already generating about one-eighth of our energy straight back to the grid, which we may get a few euro for," Fr Byrne said. "When we started investigating the process, we discovered that we didn't need planning permission if we installed the panels on the



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ground and the meters are installed at the back of the house so there was very little need for ground excavations. We just read the meters, submit them to the electricity company and we are already in surplus." The energy bill for July was

€100, in comparison to €243 for the same month last year.

"I like the heat. I don't think people pray very well if they have to huddle together to keep warm. In the depths of winter, we have to turn on the heat at 4.30am so that the temperature in the church would be comfortable by 9.30am Mass. So we are hoping to see a big difference in the bills this winter."

The solar panels cost the standard €8,000 and there was a €2,500 grant available for the parochial house as a residential building. There were no grants available for the church. "It is a lot for an initial cost outlay but when you see the bills rising constantly each month, even in summer, when we use very little heating and lighting, it was [a] necessary cost which we are already seeing a return on and it has the extra bonus of helping the environment."

Part 8

Comhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council

FÓGRA

COMHAIRLE CATHRACH BHAILE ÁTHA CLIATH

An tAcht um Pleanáil agus Forbairt 2000 (Leasú) Na Rialacháin Phleanála agus Forbartha 2001 (Leasú) – Cuid 8

Iarratasóir: Comhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath (Oifig Cheantar an Iarthuaiscirt)

Suíomh: Sráid na Mí, Baile Átha Cliath 8

Togra: De bhun na riachtanas a bhaineann leis an méid thuasluaite, tugtar fógra leis seo faoin togra chun feabhsúcháin a dhéanamh ar an bhfearrán poiblí ar Shráid na Mí agus an ceantar máguaird. Déanann an plean foráil d'athruithe ar an bhfearrán poiblí lena n-áirítear cosáin, colbháil, carbhéalach, troscán sráide agus daingneáin, solais sráide agus leithdháileadh bána páircéala agus lódaí feadh na sráide. Déanann an plean foráil freisin do chrainn sráide, tírdhreachú agus suíocháin poiblí a chur leis

Tá Sráid na Mí suite i Limistéar Caomhantais Ailtireachta Shráid Thomáis agus an ceantar máguaird. Tá na hoibreacha molta taobh le struchtúir atá faoi chosaint ar Shráid na Mí.

Féadfar Pleananna agus Mionsonraí na forbartha atá molta a iniúchadh, nó a cheannach ar tháille nach mó ná an costas réasúnach a bhaineann le cóip a dhéanamh ar feadh tréimhse 4 seachtaine ón 15ú Lúnasa 2023, le linn uaireanta oscailte poiblí ag oifigí Chomhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath, an Cuntar Poiblí, an Roinn Pleanála, Bloc 4, Uirlár na Talún, Oifigí na Cathrach, an Ché Adhmaid, Baile Átha Cliath 8, Luan – Aoine 09.00 go dtí 16.30. Tá na pleananna agus na sonraí ar fáil chun breathnú orthu ar líne ar Citizen Space, <https://consultation.dublincity.ie>

Is féidir aighneacht nó tuairim maidir leis an bhforbairt a bheartaítear, a bhaineann le pleanáil cheart agus forbairt inbhuanaíthe a cheantair ina bmeach an fhorbairt suite, a dhéanamh i scríbhinn leis an mBainisteoir Feidhmúcháin, an Rannóg Pleanála, Comhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath, Oifigí na Cathrach, an Ché Adhmaid, Baile Átha Cliath 8, roimh 16.30 tráthóna an 25ú Meán Fómhair 2023.

Is féidir aighneacht nó tuairim a dhéanamh ar líne freisin ar Citizen Space <https://consultation.dublincity.ie> roimh 23.59 a chlog an 25ú Meán Fómhair 2023.

NOTICE

DUBLIN CITY COUNCIL

Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 (as amended) – Part 8

Applicant: Dublin City Council (South Central Area Office)

Location: Meath Street, Dublin 8

Proposal: Pursuant to the requirements of the above, notice is hereby given of the proposal to undertake public realm improvements to Meath Street and its immediate environs. The plan provides for changes to the public realm including footpaths, kerbs, carriageway, street furniture and fixtures, street lighting and the allocation of parking and loading bays along the street. The plan also provides for the addition of street trees, landscaping and public seating.

Meath Street is located within the Thomas Street & Environs Architectural Conservation Area. The proposed works are adjacent to protected structures on Meath Street.

Plans and Particulars of the proposed development may be inspected or purchased at a fee not exceeding the reasonable cost of making a copy for a period of 4 weeks from 15th August 2023, during public opening hours at the offices of Dublin City Council, Public Counter, Planning Department, Block 4, Ground Floor, Civic Offices, Wood Quay, Dublin 8, Monday – Friday 09.00hrs to 16.30hrs. The plans and particulars are available to view online on Citizen Space <https://consultation.dublincity.ie>

A submission or observation in relation to the proposed development, dealing with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area in which the development would be situated may be made, in writing, to the Executive Manager, Planning Department, Dublin City Council, Civic Offices, Wood Quay, Dublin 8, before 16.30hrs on 25th September 2023.

Submissions or observations may also be made online on Citizen Space <https://consultation.dublincity.ie> before 23.59hrs on 25th September 2023.

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