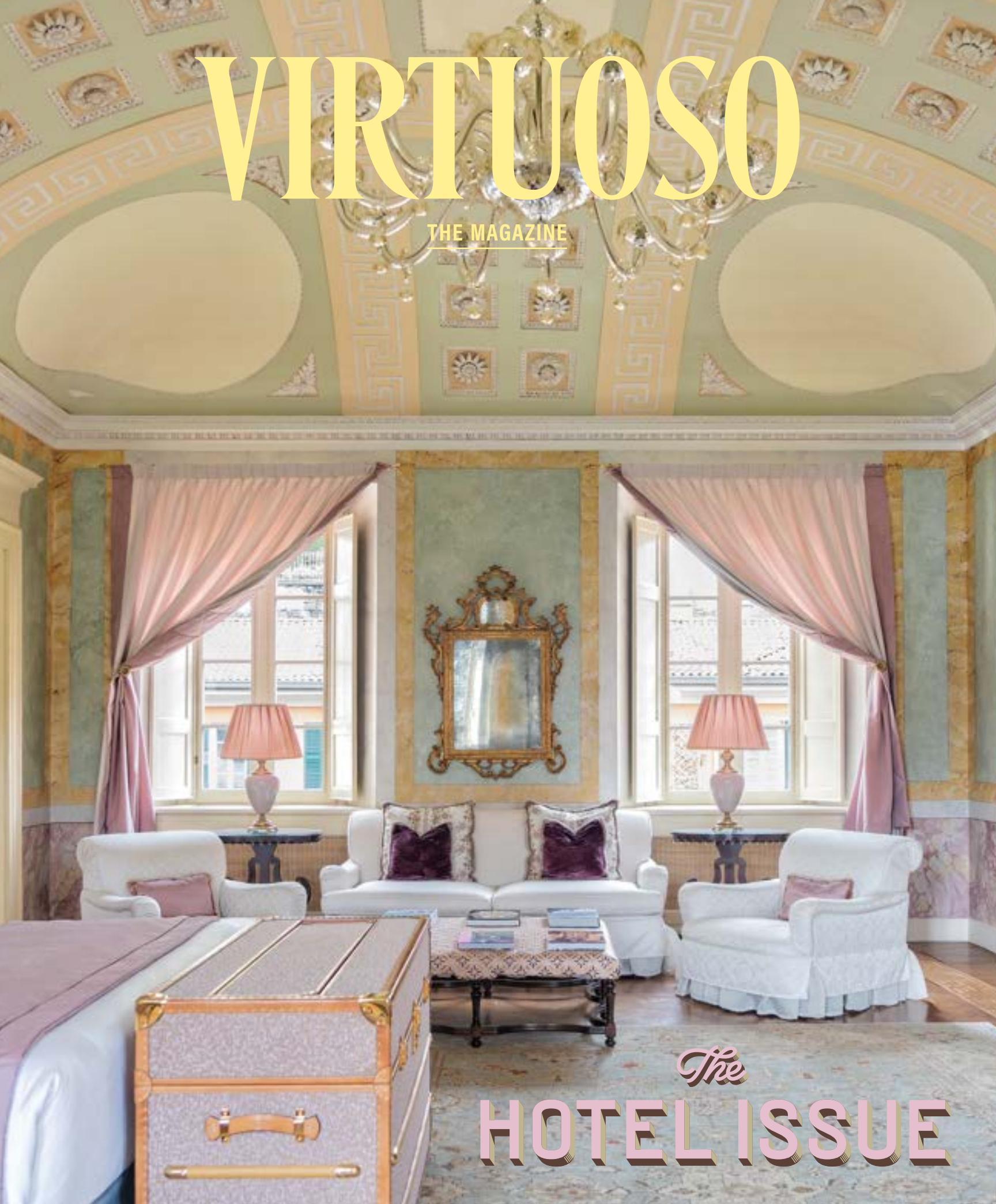


VIRTUOSO

THE MAGAZINE



The
HOTEL ISSUE



greener

A Scottish Blackface sheep and
lamb and (opposite) winding up
on the Beara Peninsula.

pastures

*Theatrical
weather,
stunning walks,
and raptors
stir the
heart
on Ireland's
wild
west coast.*

By Kim Brown Seely

Photography by Richard James Taylor

***Unlike us,
the
roads
were
bendy,
with no
shoulders,***

and took their sweet time threading between stone walls and thorn trees. All morning we'd been driving on the left of these narrow, winding roads, as one does in Ireland, muttering (or worse) at occasional oncoming traffic.

We'd come to Ireland because my idea of heaven is a drive or a walk, any kind of ramble really, in a wild, expansive landscape – but with an exquisite place to stay each night. The places don't need to be overly luxurious, truly. They simply need to be lovely. And have a candlelit dining room. Also, a small bar with aperitifs and whiskeys for warming up. A library is nice.

Ireland, of course, has all of this. But somehow, my husband and I had put off visiting. I'd been reporting from the far edges of places: the Arctic and Antarctica, Namibia and Patagonia. Could we enjoy a country where the attractions were quieter?

And then there was the weather. What if it rained every day? Yet here we were, leaning into a weeklong road trip in early March – the rainy off-season – hedgerows and bright-green fields suddenly giving way to open expanses of bog and rock lit up by yellow gorse beneath moody gray skies. We were crossing the stunning and remote Beara Peninsula, just south of the better-known (and much busier) Ring of Kerry, both fingers of southwest Ireland jutting ruggedly into the Atlantic.

"Oh!" I said as we crested the Beara's spine and could see a patchwork of rock and pasture rolling all the way to the sea.

"*Beautiful country,*" my husband said.

That's when I began to feel it, the *real* reason people come to Ireland, even if they tell you they're going to play golf or drink Guinness or stay in castles or walk ten miles a day.

The real reason to come to Ireland is to have your heart caught by surprise.

I thought I knew what I was in for, but by taking a risk on iffy weather in March, got something better: There weren't many other travelers, so we had these heart-stopping views to ourselves, and although it was brisk, it only rained once.

As Spotify served up U2 and The Pogues, and our rental car rounded curve after curve while snow-white birds, fat sheep, and ruins of old stone cottages swept past, I understood why Ireland's west coast in particular has inspired so many writers, poets, artists, and travelers. I couldn't believe we'd waited so long.

In "Postscript," one of his finest poems, Ireland's Seamus Heaney urged, "And some time make the time to drive out west / Into County Clare, along the Flaggy Shore, / In September or October, when the wind / And the light are working off each other."

We weren't in County Clare yet. It wasn't even close to September. But we were absolutely "neither here nor there," as the poem goes. It was perfect.

The day before, we'd driven an hour from Cork to Kenmare, turning onto a 250-year-old, one-lane bridge over the River Sheen – "We'd better not bump into anyone coming the other way," my husband said – and checked into Sheen Falls Lodge, a seventeenth-century fishing lodge turned manor house. It was here, stepping into our room overlooking the river's tumbling waterfall, that I realized you can also come to Ireland seeking respite from a world moving too fast. Our arrival felt like a giant exhale – or entering a slower kind of time I didn't even realize we'd craved.



Row houses line the
River Lee in Cork.

After perusing the hotel library with its wood-burning fireplace and more than 2,000 titles, we settled into The Falls Restaurant for dinner. At our hushed, white-linen-draped table set for lingering, my husband chose a starter of local scallops. When I asked our French waiter if it might be possible to order a very simple green salad instead of the rich first courses, he was so gracious I half wondered if he'd stepped outside to pick the lettuces himself. My wild venison loin arrived topped with colorful curls of smoked beets and endive.

Our first ramble from Kenmare was a 3.7-mile walk we'd found on the Beara Peninsula website. The site lists 15 loop trails in the region, which is dense with Bronze Age remains. I could have happily spent days wandering in search of ancient standing stones and stone circles, but we only had one, so we drove to the village of Eyeries, where we'd chosen a loop along the edge of the sea. Blue signposts pointed the way, and soon we were traversing one of Ireland's most southwesterly points. Impossibly fresh air ripped off the water. The sun dazzled. There wasn't a trail, per se, so we put our trust in the signposts and followed them past more fat, woolly sheep and dappled horses grazing.

The route descended to a beach covered with tumbled pink, gray, and lavender rocks as oblong as ostrich eggs. Then it climbed to a low headland where the bog was so wet and soft my boots sank into the grass. The wind nipped at my fingers, my shoes were covered in muck, the ocean gleamed, and we didn't see another soul.

Chilled and exhilarated, we turned our attention to more earthly matters,

such as scraping the mud off our boots. We drove to the nearby fishing town of Castletownbere and settled in for a hot lunch at MacCarthy's Bar, famously portrayed in the hilarious No. 1 Irish bestseller of the same name but easy to walk into this time of year.

"Welcome! This is Herbie," a ruddy-cheeked woman at the counter said, smiling, when I asked about the cute dog working tables. "Herbie the famous pug."

"We Do Not Have Wifi – Talk to Each Other!" read a sign over the bar. So we did, parking our phones and warming up with the local scene. Travelers always talk about how friendly the Irish are. It's a cliché, but it's true. Whether you're sitting in a pub or a taxi, you'll have some of the most rollicking conversations ever.

Ireland is about chatting with people in pubs. It's about gray weather and flashes of sunlight, Irish music and language, the church, hundreds of years of heavy history – not to mention the bread and the butter. The butter is unbelievable. It's the creamiest butter, made of milk from grass-fed cows, who, the Irish will tell you, are happier because they graze freely most of the year.

From Kenmare, it's a winding two-hour drive north to Adare Manor, an architectural wonder now meticulously restored as a luxe castle hotel. "It's hard to convey the grandeur," my son had said, having saved up points to honeymoon there one night. He wasn't kidding. As we pulled up at the limestone gatehouse, a guard in top hat and tails checked his clipboard and welcomed us warmly by name. Then we were off, motoring like Lord



and Lady Grantham along a sweeping drive surrounded by 840 manicured acres.

When the Gothic Revival nineteenth-century castle with its towers, spires, and crenellated roof came into view, I couldn't help giggling, it was so over the top. Our room, in a fifth-floor turret of the new West Wing, had a fabulous brown-and-white marble bathroom with a window from which I could spy, Rapunzel-style, on the castle's comings and goings – bellmen playing ball in the courtyard with a small boy, couples wheeling classic bicycles from a row parked just so.

Adare Manor is the kind of place that's hard to leave once you've arrived, so our rambles remained on-property. Some guests stay busy bouncing between

MACCARTHY'S



Herbie the pug and Adrienne MacCarthy greet patrons at MacCarthy's Bar. Opposite: Local scallops at Sheen Falls Lodge.



A peregrine falcon
prepares to take
flight at Adare Manor.

***Our arrival
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the resort's spa, gym, padel courts (a cross between tennis and squash), and Tom Fazio-designed golf course. But we settled into an unabashedly decadent manor-house state of mind, pedaling our handcrafted bicycles on perfectly flat rides and even, surprisingly, dressing up for breakfast.

The morning meal here (think soft jazz, robin's-egg-blue porcelain teacups, and muted elegance) is not to be missed, whether you choose to dine in the oak-paneled drawing room with its crystal chandeliers or the cavernous, medieval-inspired gallery. Afterward, you can sink into the lobby's velvet sofas and enjoy the towering fireplace's welcoming blaze, as we did, before drifting past the concierge desk and spontaneously signing up for falconry lessons.

"We don't want them eating each other," one of the falconers, Angela, explained with a grin an hour later while introducing us to eight magnificent raptors tethered to separate perches under the oaks. We met Tiny, an adorably small scops owl; Oscar, a terribly grouchy female Eurasian eagle owl; Marley, a hefty African fish eagle; Esther, a plain old falcon; Carl, a peregrine falcon; and Phoenix, a Harris's hawk. During the private session, in addition to admiring the raptors' striking feathers up close, we learned all about falcons. Angela reminded us that the peregrine is not only the fastest bird, but the world's fastest *animal* – with maximum speeds reaching close to an unearthly 250 miles per hour.



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It's funny how inspiration can strike. I'd always wanted to try falconry, but I could barely breathe when Angela placed a morsel of meat on my gloved wrist. Phoenix the hawk (freed from his tether), dove for it like a fighter jet, launching himself from a nearby tree, four-foot wingspan and all. Before I could even open my eyes to see what had hit me, *shebang!* He'd stuck a perfect landing on my forearm. I was so thrilled, I mused later over cocktails that maybe, with enough practice, I too could become a falconer.

Driving away from Adare on our way to hike the Cliffs of Moher the next morning, I'd turned back into a middle-aged mom. But in Ireland, even a hawk can make your heart leap.

Clockwise from top left: Colorful Eyeries and trail markers near the village, the Cliffs of Moher, and the library at Sheen Falls Lodge.

Step Out in Style

STAY At the 77-room **Sheen Falls Lodge**, on 300 acres edged by Kenmare Bay, guests settle into elegantly understated, spacious rooms and suites with abundant natural light and views of Sheen Falls. Drinks are downstairs in the vintage Sheen Bar, which stocks 90 whiskeys. Chef Mark Treacy's menu at The Falls Restaurant is not to be missed; book an earlier seating for a view of the falls. *Virtuoso travelers receive breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.*

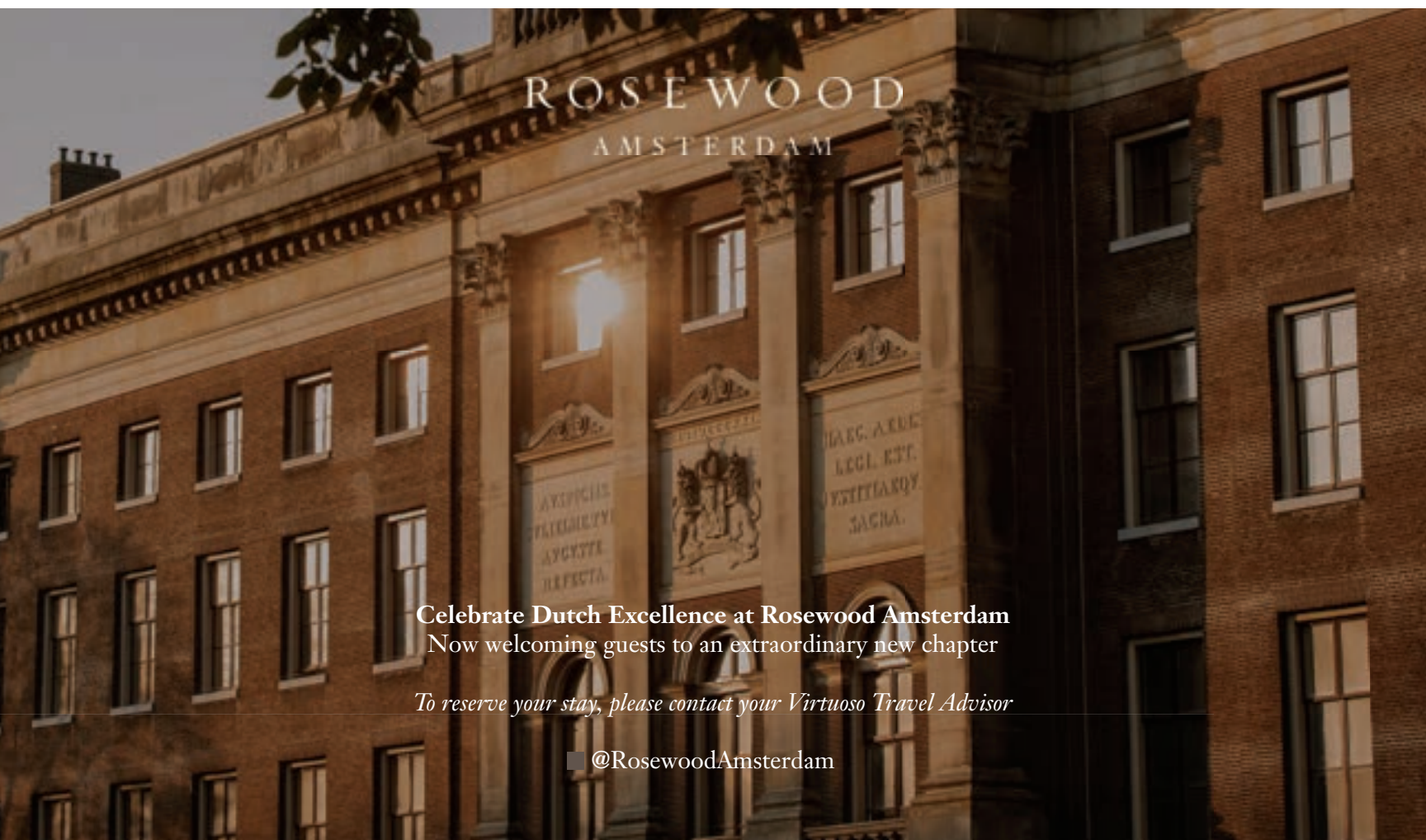
In County Limerick, **Adare Manor** feels like an opulent castle warmed by genuinely friendly and welcoming staff. Surrounded by 840 manicured acres (including a

Tom Fazio-designed golf course that will host the 2027 Ryder Cup), the hotel's 103 rooms are polished and plush, with classic mahogany furnishings. *Virtuoso travelers receive breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.*

GO Bike the Dingle Peninsula and coast the Ring of Kerry into Kenmare on **DuVine Cycling + Adventure Co's** six-day spin across the Emerald Isle. The route heads west past ancient Iron Age and historic sites; passes through Sleah Head, Europe's westernmost point, on the way to the Ring of Kerry and the Beara Peninsula; and includes two nights at Sheen Falls Lodge. *Departures: Multiple dates through September 7.*

CIE Tours' ten-day, self-drive itinerary follows a round-trip route from Dublin that loops up to Donegal, then continues south to all the west coast highlights: Galway, Dingle, the Ring of Kerry, Killarney, and Blarney. *Departures: Any day through 2025.*

Virtuoso on-site tour connection **Adams & Butler** works with travel advisors to customize trips throughout Ireland and Scotland. Chauffeured trips can include stays at the story's hotels, exclusive experiences (ferry to the Aran Islands and fly back; take tea in the home of the Jameson sisters, ninth-generation descendants of the man who founded Jameson Irish Whiskey), guided hikes, and more. *Departures: Any day through 2025.* ♡



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