



A Wee Bit of Blarney and a Whole Lot of Beadmaking Fun at Beadventures Ireland

by Susan Parry

Photography by Art Parry



Beads from Michael Barley class

Something wonderful happens when creative, like-minded individuals get together. Positive energy flows rampant, great ideas and friendships either form or intensify, and everyone involved has an unforgettable adventure. I was recently fortunate enough to experience this “special kind of wonderful” at a Beadventures workshop.

The Mission of Beadventures

For those of you who are not familiar with Beadventures, they’re cultural and creative workshops that take place in various countries around the world such as China, the Czech Republic, Ecuador, England, Egypt, Germany, Ghana, Holland, Iceland, India, Ireland, Italy, Scotland, South Africa, Spain, Thailand, Turkey, and the United States, to name just a few. Cheryl Cobern Browne started Beadventures in 1994 with weekend bead retreats in the mountains of Northern Arizona and by 1998 was taking groups to Europe to quaint villages in Cornwall, England, and the west of Ireland. Today there are over twelve Beadventure workshops a year from which to choose, and they span the globe in Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America.

Cheryl shares that, “For the workshop portion of the trip, I prefer settling in small villages where we can meet the local people and even work together where possible. From there, we take side trips and tour the local area without a lot of moving in and out of hotels, although a visit to the capital city is always included. There are trips where beadwork is accomplished with a talented teacher or beadmaking where there is access to a suitable studio setup (such as in the west of Ireland and on Murano). Some of the Beadventures are just for travel to the factories where beads are made (such as in India and the Czech Republic), or we explore a country together and shop for beads, crafts, and much more (as in Italy and South Africa). I keep the groups small with eight to twelve people, so there is time to get to know each other and enjoy the company of the group as a whole. Being like-minded, creative people, there is usually a lot of laughter and fun on these trips.”



Getting to Know Ireland

I signed up for a Beadventures experience in Ireland after hearing that Tink Martin would teach us how to make her lovely miniature, blown, soft-glass vessels with and without the ever elusive, at least for me, handles. Shortly after arrival in Dublin, Cheryl treated our entire group to a fabulous three-course meal complete with two desserts—one for each hip. For Celtic inspiration, we visited various sites of interest such as the National Museum of Ireland to see archaeological objects and the National Art Gallery where we not only ate the best scones ever but were also given a personal, guided tour by art historian and watercolorist, Giles Baily. There was also a visit to Trinity College to see the world-renowned *Book of Kells* and to the Chester Beatty Library to see rare manuscripts and artifacts from different regions of the world. Then, of course, we did a bit of shopping.

Our group later took a relaxing, scenic train ride to Mullac Fraoig (Heather Rise), Cheryl’s home base and beadworking studio in County Mayo. I didn’t quite know what to expect until we got there. For some reason, I had imagined a rustic lodge where everyone shared the same bathroom. Wrong!!! Instead, we stayed in an elegant, artsy, extremely comfortable two-story house (within walking distance of the beach) with private bedrooms, multiple bathrooms, and an elegant dining room complete with beaded napkin rings. Best of all, there was fabulous scenery. Our private sitting rooms faced Crough Patrick where St. Patrick’s ever-changing mist kissed Holy Mountain. Grazing sheep dotted the green hills. Imagine waking up to that every morning.

Ever the extreme hostess, Cheryl made sure we were well-fed and entertained. After a day spent making art, we looked forward to the delicious gourmet meals prepared by Marcus, the fabulous chef whom Cheryl had hired especially for us. (I won’t tell you how many pounds I gained.) She also hired Michael Joe, a playwright and extremely entertaining tour bus driver, to take us to several more locations of interest. Although Michael Joe said that

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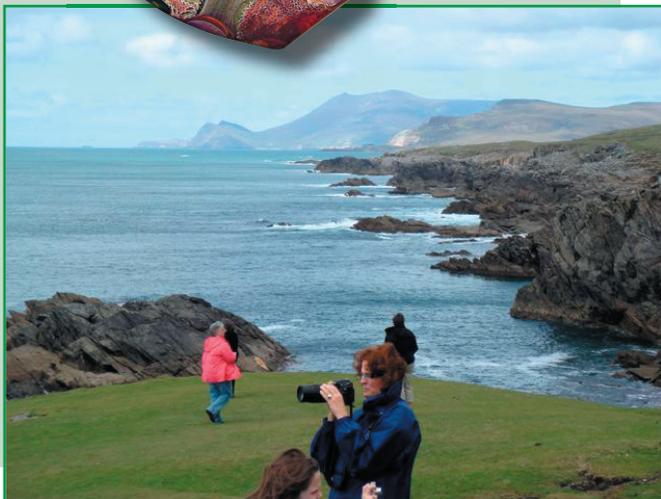
his stories were 95 percent true and 5 percent blarney, we sometimes thought he had his numbers turned around. Nonetheless, we had a sensational time visiting the Country Life Museum to learn about life in western Ireland and how the handicrafts there have heavily influenced the survival of the inhabitants for hundreds of years. In addition, we visited Foxford Woolen Mills, the coastline of Achill Island, and the ruins of Burrishoole Abbey, a site that contains old gravesites and beautiful ornamented Celtic crosses. We also climbed the four-story castle that once belonged to Granuaile (Grace) O'Malley, an infamous pirate queen, and visited Westport as well as the studio of Suzi Sullivan, a popular fiber artist. The rest of the day was devoted to more shopping, seeing the famous stained glass windows created by Harry Clarke, and viewing several bogs and ruins, all the while listening to Michael Joe's clever banter. All of the day trips really inspired us to create some of the best art we had ever made, and our group bonded and formed permanent friendships.



Bonnie Winders and Ruzica Ruane examining beads in Ireland



Red Trapezoid Bead by Nancy Tobey



Achill Island, Ireland (Bonnie Winders, Brielle Winders, and Terry Hale)

The Lady behind the Adventure

The best part of Beadventures is Cheryl herself. She's the heart of the whole experience, because she really cares if her visitors are happy and pays attention to the small things that make such a difference. Cheryl makes sure that her "mother hen" assistants in other countries uphold her standards and provide similar care when she cannot be there in person. When my Beadventures experience ended, I couldn't stop the tears that involuntarily escaped. I made a promise to the land as my plane took off that I'd be back. That's a promise I intend to keep.

Anyone interested in having a Beadventures experience may consider signing up for one or more of the upcoming classes that Cheryl has posted on her website. In fact, you can travel with me, Susan Parry, on a trip to Ireland in September 2009 (not yet posted). My class will include any combination of wire wrapping, fusing, needle felting, lampworking, and writing.

Cheryl sends out a quarterly newsletter listing what is on the horizon for Beadventures. You can sign up on the website at www.beadventures.com. You can also contact Cheryl by e-mail at cheryl@beadventures.com.



Susan Parry is a freelance writer and artist. She won a silver medal from Fire Mountain Gems, has been featured in their catalog and on their website, and was most recently featured in Step by Step Wire Jewelry. You can contact her at suparry@comcast.net or through her website, www.susanparrydesigns.com.



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Wings bead by Kim Miles

