

Ireland:

The Cliffs of Moher

Where the Breakers Swallow Up the Earth

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Approaching the Cliffs of Moher one passes through an area consisting of caves and chasms, one in which rivers suddenly disappear only to reappear somewhere else. And then suddenly one is standing at a precipice with a steeply falling surface which disappears into a wind-blown sea spray. It appears as though the breakers have swallowed the ground beneath. This must have appeared to the Celts as the end of the world.

The Cliffs of Moher are Ireland's top tourist attraction. Every year almost a million visitors make the pilgrimage to the edges of the cliffs which have been eaten away by strong breakers over time. From

Hang's Head to the headland at Doolin, the cliffs stretch eight kilometers into the sea from a height of 200 meters.

Seen from a distance, the never-ending queue of tourists appears as an army of ants proceeding along the edge of the cliffs. The warning signs stating that the ground you are walking on might break away and plunge into the sea do not seem to bother anyone, nor does the fact that each year up to six people die in accidents. Some of the more courageous inch forward to the brink on their stomachs. For those trepid persons, a view of the breaking waves crashing

against the cliffs is the reward, transforming the area into a mist.

This is exactly how this bizarre coastline came into being. It has not been a complicated geological process that formed the cliffs but simply water. For millions of years, the breakers of the Atlantic have been eating away at the softer layers of the land causing large parts of the harder bulwarks above to break off and plunge into the sea. The sequence of basalt granite and shale mirror the predominant layering of the region, which has been vertically capped. ▶



Tourist boat
قارب سياحي



Warning sign

علامة تحذير

at this point. The remainders of the cliffs are a paradise for bird lovers. On the cliffs there are 29 different rare endemic species of birds and more than 30,000 fauna.

Were it not for the little boats in the bay, it would not be possible to estimate just how majestic the cliffs are. In contrast to the gigantic walls of the cliffs, O'Brian's Tower seems like a doll's house. The 200-hundred-year-old tower is a landmark. Sir Cornelius O'Brien, a descendent of the legendary Irish King Brian Boru, built the tower in 1835 to impress female visitors. The tower and several over-sized stone tables were the settings for the groups of guests to whom he extended his hospitality.

It can be assumed that the cliffs were a magical place for the Celts. The name derives from the Gaelic word Aillte An Mhothair which means Cliffs of the Ruins. Near the cliffs, 25 grave sites, which include grave furnishings from the Stone Age, have been found.

Since March of 2007 a postmodern Visitors' Centre has been in operation. The new construction has been placed within the interior of the cusps of the cliffs. Through a large window, the visitor has a splendid view of the Atlantic Ocean. The complex consists of a restaurant and an exhibition and documentation centre. After 17 years of planning, the 31.5 million euro project was completed, nesting in a hill. The singular view of the cliffs was not to be restricted. The centre is equipped with state of the art technology, offering tourists – even in periods of bad weather –

a virtual view of the cliffs. The project was greeted with skepticism by both the Irish and visitors in view of the fact that thousands of earthmoving machines appeared to be destroying one of the most magnificent natural sites in the world. An enormous hole appeared just a few hundred meters from the edge of the cliffs and it seemed as though O'Brian's Tower would lose the ground it was standing on. Along the edge of the cliffs, a paved path was erected. High above the Atlantic, a maritime information path has been established. Whoever wants to learn about the geological background of the cliffs will find within the walls of the centre models which fully explain the development. The trails of crabs, worms, and other prehistoric sea creatures reveal the story of the creation of the Cliffs of Moher.

Whether such modern architecture is suitable for the cliffs depends on the individual's opinion. Nevertheless, it is not as disturbing as the opponents and pessimists feared. Today one can say that the restaurant, café, exhibition rooms and souvenir shop have been elegantly placed within the interior of the cliffs. The grass covering of the hills has been replaced. From the outside, it is only possible to see the panorama window with its breathtaking view of the Atlantic. The reinforcement of the cliffs with concrete and stone tiles is certainly a serious undertaking, but in the end one can see that the natural environment is in some way protected against the onslaught of tourists. ■



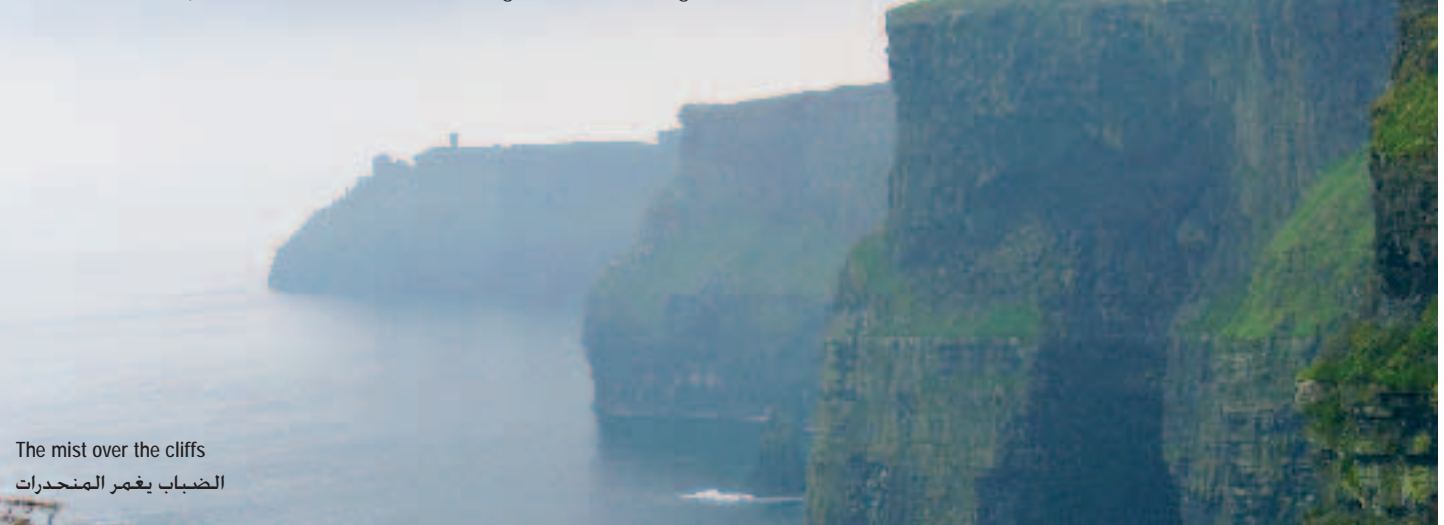
Sharp drop

إنحدار حاد



Warning sign

علامة تحذير



The mist over the cliffs
الضباب يغمر المنحدرات