



grassroots
young entrepreneurs in eco-health tourism

Wandering Eire

"Wild Atlantic Immersion A Bespoke Coastal Encounter"

Grace Finan, Sligo, Ireland (2024)

*"A three-hour
excursion to
discover and
enjoy the
wildness of the
Wild Atlantic Way"*

FACT SHEET

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1. Wandering Eire, Ireland



A Grassroots Eco-Health Tourism Experience

Wandering Eire embodies the principles of a grassroots eco-health business, integrating wellness, sustainability, and cultural immersion. Its foundation lies in promoting the rugged and wild landscape of the Irish Atlantic seaboard. The plethora of outdoors activities coupled with the savage waves, mountains and sea sets it apart as the ideal location for budding eco-health entrepreneurs.

About the Owner: Grace Finan is thirty years old. Born in New York and raised by an Irish-American mother and an Irish immigrant Father. Grace grew up spending a lot of time in Sligo, Ireland, with her family which set her love affair with the Irish landscape and the home of her ancestors. Grace has a degree in Tourism and Hospitality from Excelsior College in NY State.

About the Mentor: Catriona Bergin is an Eco Health Tourism professional as well as a Business Mentor. Catriona owns her own self-catering business which includes many outdoor add ons such as sauna, hot tub, natural swimming pool and outdoor kitchen. Catriona also has two horses, hens, 4 dogs, ducks and a goat which guests can visit and say hello to. Catriona is a Business Mentor for the Local Enterprise Offices, assisting new starts with their business plans, ideas and marketing.

Wandering Eire Aligned with GRASSROOTS

The Wandering Eire Tour fully complies with the values of Grassroots Eco-Health Tourism as it reflects:

- **wellness**
- **cultural immersion**
- **local empowerment**
- **Sustainability**

Eco-Health Focus

The eco-health philosophy of Wandering Éire ensures that every bespoke experience along the Wild Atlantic Way nurtures both the environment and personal well-being. This approach blends sustainable tourism, mental wellness, and local ecological preservation to create a holistic, regenerative travel experience.

2.

Some context



What is 'Wandering Eire'?

'Wandering Eire' is a new tourism experience in County Sligo and the West of Ireland, in the Northwest region of the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland. It was born from the idea of Grace Finan, a young tourism entrepreneur who graduated in Tourism from Excelsior College in New York, USA, and who had in mind to return to Ireland and start a business that told the story of the Irish through visceral experiences of the landscape, the ocean, the literature and food.

How did the idea sprout and evolve?

Grace's idea was based, on her affection for slow tourism. Grace was always assigned the coordinator role when vacationing with friends which provided lots of opportunities to choose activities off the beaten track, interesting accommodations and focus on cultivating experiences.

"It was always something I loved to do, and I was good at"

In creating Wandering Eire, Grace wanted to fuse her love for planning special trips and the island of Ireland together. Wandering Eire is a travel design business focusing on **experience based adventures** and stays based on a client's specific wants, needs and preferences. Grace also works with local suppliers and businesses in creating her itineraries, ensuring sustainability and locally sourced experiences and products are the foundation stone of Wandering Eire.

3.

The call. Matera opportunity

July 2023: Call for young tourism entrepreneurs

On July 27, 2023, Grace was approached by a friend who worked around of Entrepreneurship education. Grace was informed about the call for participants by W8 Manorhamilton for the project Grassroots to select participants for the hackathon in Matera in October 2023. The Irish call received a lot of interest and Grace's application was deemed successful.



4.

The hackathon in Matera

October 2023: Hackathon, Matera, Italy

3rd, 4th and 5th October: 3 days of learning, exchange and inspiration.

The Grassroots Eco-Health Tourism partnership has gathered young tourism entrepreneurs, project managers and mentors in Matera for a *hackathon*, a format borrowed from the IT sector and applied to the tourism sector by keeping the must-have ingredients:

- challenge-based approach
- fast-paced environment
- fair competition
- final rewards

"I think that the other entrepreneurs in Matera really did inspire me in creating Wandering Eire."



4.

The hackathon in Matera

Inspiring speakers and activities

Three speakers led during the hackathon:

Vania Cauzillo, a dynamic stage director, emphasized the potential connections between tourism and cultural and creative industries.

Elvira De Giacomo, a tourism specialist, provided key insights and statistics related to the Matera-Basilicata2019 foundation.

Sara Simeone, an expert in sustainable tourism and a member of the Materahub team, played a key role in organizing the entire hackathon.

The hackathon included a range of group activities, city explorations and much more. Read the full article [here](#).



4.

The hackathon in Matera

How the hackathon helped Grace?

Inspiration & Clarity

The Matera hackathon was a game-changer for Grace, offering a fresh perspective on her eco-health tourism business idea. Engaging with experts and peers helped her realize that the first idea is just the beginning—refinement and iteration are key. The experience gave her confidence that her vision is not just a concept but a viable, impactful initiative.

"I was not really keen on my initial idea in Matera and didn't have much passion behind it. Hearing the others share their stories and experiences within the tourism industry in their respective countries, helped me to begin thinking about what I'm passionate about"



4.

The hackathon in Matera

Next Steps & Research

Through discussions and mentorship, Grace gained a clear understanding of the next steps needed to bring her project to life. She identified crucial areas for further research, from market demand to sustainable resource management. The hackathon also introduced her to valuable networks and tools, equipping her with the right support system to move forward.

"As I reflect on my time in Matera, I am filled with optimism about the potential of sustainable tourism to create positive change"



Energy & Motivation

More than anything, Matera fuelled Grace's determination to make her eco-health tourism business a reality. The event showed her that sustainable entrepreneurship is within reach, and she left with a renewed sense of purpose.

5.

Further development



October 2023 to May 2024: Turning challenges into opportunities

Grace's journey took an unexpected turn when she lost her job shortly after returning from Matera. Instead of seeing it as a setback, she embraced the opportunity to focus on building a business she truly believed in. With a passion for sustainable tourism, she dedicated her time to developing meaningful travel experiences. She began forming partnerships in the Sligo region, connecting with local artists, farmers, and conservationists to create unique, immersive itineraries that showcase the hidden gems of the area.



5.

Further development



Building a Business with Purpose

Grace's approach to tourism is deeply personal and client-centered. She believes in working closely with travelers to design itineraries that align with their specific interests while also supporting local businesses. She spent countless hours researching and exploring Sligo, ensuring that visitors experience the region in a way that is both authentic and responsible. Accessibility is also a key consideration in her work, as she strives to create experiences that cater to a wide range of needs and preferences.



6.

Sustainable Sligo Tour & Partnerships

Grace has built a strong network of partners who share her vision for responsible tourism, ensuring that Sligo's beauty, heritage, and local businesses continue to thrive. She collaborates with experts in four key areas:

- **trekking**, working with local guides to promote responsible outdoor exploration;
- **food**, partnering with farmers and chefs to highlight sustainable, farm-to-table experiences;
- **heritage**, connecting with historians and artisans to preserve and share Sligo's cultural traditions;
- **sustainable hospitality**, offering eco-friendly accommodations and wellness experiences for slow tourism.



6.

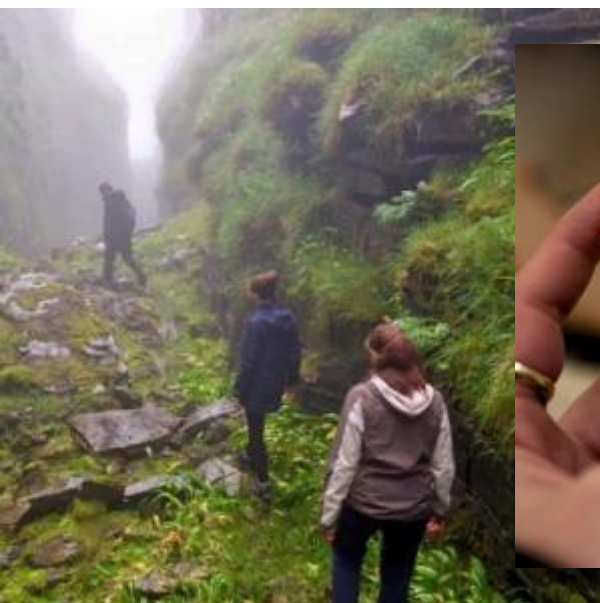
Sustainable Sligo Tour & Partnerships

"Trek-Food-Treasure" – A Three-Day Sustainable Tour

Drawing from these partnerships, Grace has developed a three-day tour package designed to offer visitors an authentic and sustainable experience in Sligo.

- **Day 1: Trek** – A guided hike through some of Sligo's most breathtaking trails, with insights from local conservationists on the region's flora, fauna, and environmental preservation efforts.
- **Day 2: Food** – A deep dive into Sligo's culinary scene, featuring farm visits, food tastings, and interactive cooking sessions with local chefs who champion sustainable and ethical food practices.
- **Day 3: Treasure** – Exploring Sligo's cultural and historical treasures, from ancient sites to artisan workshops, where visitors can engage with the traditions that shape the region's identity.

This thoughtful approach showcases the dedication Grace has invested in developing *Wandering Eire*. By integrating sustainable principles and cultivating meaningful partnerships, she creates enriching experiences that benefit both visitors and the local community.



7.

Brussels Training: A new Perspective

An inspiring training

By the time the Brussels conference took place, Grace had officially established her business, *Wandering Eire*, and had begun working with her first clients. The training provided valuable insights into the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, inspiring her to think more creatively about how to integrate sustainability into her travel experiences. She gained a deeper understanding of how to balance guest expectations with eco-friendly options that support the local environment and economy.

[Here](#) is the article about Brusells training.



7.

Brussels Training: A new Perspective

One of the most impactful aspects of the Brussels training was the opportunity to engage with other tourism entrepreneurs. Grace found great value in exchanging ideas and learning from her peers, many of whom were also developing their own businesses. The feedback and discussions helped her refine her approach, reinforcing her commitment to sustainable tourism. She left Brussels with fresh ideas, a stronger network, and a renewed sense of purpose for growing *Wandering Eire*.

- ***"Learning about the Sustainable Development Goals outlined by the UN was really helpful and inspiring to me. It helped me to think more outside of the box when working with clients to build their dream holiday to Ireland."***



8.

Next Steps and Future Goals

- **Build further partnerships** with local artisans, accommodation providers, and other businesses to create more diverse packages and experiences.
- **Connect tourists** with accessible and sustainable transportation options, such as recumbent and hand-cycle rentals.
- **Collaborate with the Love Sligo initiative** to promote local businesses and stimulate the local economy.
- **Design experiences for neurodivergent travelers**, including quiet hours, smaller group settings, and other tailored elements to enhance accessibility and comfort.

Stay tuned on Grassroots channels to keep updated on future developments of Living Histories, **one of the incubated experiences** of this Erasmus+ project!

