

# A BILLIONAIRE'S COURSE

Golf travel writer and photographer David J Whyte gives us his first-hand account of his latest Irish love.

BY DAVID J WHYTE

As we pulled in by the gatehouse, with its top-hatted, coat-tailed gatemen welcoming us like long-lost relatives who had, at last, arrived safely home, we began to get the picture of what Adare Manor is.

Once ensconced in our suite overlooking the boxed garden with the 9th and 18th holes billowing behind in the late afternoon light, it didn't take long to shake off the road dust and settle into this latest rendition of 'Heaven on Earth'.

"Leave Adare Manor to the end of your trip," Barry, my coach-driving collaborator told me. Barry's company is responsible for transferring our clients for our new golf tour company and Barry knows Ireland. "You'll want to finish on a real high and this place is as high as it gets," and he was right. Adare Manor might be one of the finest luxury golf resorts in all of Great Britain and Ireland.

Adare Manor is a tiny flutter, you might say, by a man who seems to enjoy having a flutter. Following a reported €70 million refurbishment, Adare Manor reopened in 2017 having added a brand new 42-bedroom block along with an entirely new spa, boardroom and even a cinema.

350 people are now employed directly by the resort and the monetary repercussions rippling through the local economy must be substantial and equally appreciated. And all this is the passion of one soft-spoken Irishman, JP McManus.

Born in nearby Limerick and although he now has property interests all around the world, JP has always kept close to his family roots. He started in business with his father's plant hire company and by the age of 21, had caught the gambling bug as a bookmaker at a greyhound track. Then came horseracing. The Irish know a thing or two about horses and JP now owns around 550 thoroughbreds.

At the same time, the enterprising JP made good as a private foreign exchange trader whilst building a wide portfolio of investments from leisure centres and betting shops to pubs and nursing homes. It is a dizzying prospect trying to figure out how one man can achieve so much. Let's summarise by saying JP's net worth is now figured to be around €2 billion.

**LOCATION:**  
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**www.**  
[adaremanor.com](http://adaremanor.com)

**OPENING IMAGE:**  
Adare Manor on a  
beautiful day.



Besides making money, sport is another of JP's enduring passions and he has interests in soccer and hurling teams as well as a bucketful of golf-related hotel properties around the world. He is himself a very keen golfer and a two-time winner of the Alfred Dunhill Links Championship (pro-am pairs competition) on the east coast of Scotland partnering with Pádraig Harrington on both occasions.

As I stood on Adare Manor's driving range getting warmed up ahead of my round on the recently overhauled golf course, up strode Harrington himself with his inimitable road-builder's bounce.

"Oh, you didn't have to go to the bother, Pádraig," I blurted thinking he was coming to play with me. He laughed and carried on by to team up with his brothers for their pre-round routine. That meant I was probably going out in front of them. No pressure then.

I was actually playing the Adare course with



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**LEFT PAGE - TOP TO BOTTOM:**  
 The 2nd hole; The 15th hole; The 18th hole.

**RIGHT PAGE:**  
 The fairways of 'The Golf Course' are wide and expansive, situated amid serenity..

an old acquaintance, Andy McMahon, who now holds the lofty post of director of golf operations here. I knew Andy from The Grove just north of London where he was the head pro and a leading part of a team I was greatly impressed with.

Andy informed me Pádraig was a close friend of JP McManus and had significant input into the reestablishment of Adare Manor's new golf course. There had been a golf course fronting the original Adare Manor, and apparently not a bad layout. But even if you knew it well, it would be barely discernable now.

"They shipped in 300,000 tons of sand," Andy told me as we stood on the first tee. "If you put all the dumper trucks nose-to-tail, they'd stretch from here to Ballybunion."

All that sand has been moulded into one amazing golf course, the likes of which I have rarely seen. And this is McManus's main adventure. You see, JP has his gambler's eye firmly fixed on the 2026 Ryder

Cup and it seems, he has gotten his wish.

On July 25, Adare Manor has been awarded as the host venue for the 2026 Ryder Cup.

"I am confident that the people of Ireland will get behind The Ryder Cup and take the opportunity to showcase Ireland on the world stage and ensure that the 2026 Ryder Cup will be an outstanding success. I hope the many tourist, golfing and business organisations will work together to identify all the opportunities for the benefit of The Ryder Cup tournament, the Irish economy and across the south west community," said the proud owner during the announcement.

This news, coupled with the victory of fellow Irishman, Shane Lowry, at Royal Portrush, makes for a delightful hat-trick of good news in the month of July for the Irish Isles.

Andy and I teed up just before Pádraig and his pals caught up with us. It was ironic to be thinking about the Ryder Cup coming to Adare



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Beautifully Restored Adare Manor; The Carriage House; The Terrace, elegant casual dining with magnificent view; The Great Hall at Adare Manor.



Manor and having Harrington, the European Captain for The 2020 Ryder Cup at Whistling Straits playing behind me.

Adare's course, simply referred to as 'The Golf Course', with capitals in place, is very playable from the outset. The fairways are extra wide and if you need a stronger challenge, it is 7,500 yards off the tips and there is no restriction where you play from.

It is by and large a very open course and you can see the holes ahead until around the 12th, 13th and 14th, where an area of older, thicker woods emerges. There's a great sense of space and silence here and you get the feeling that there is only golf going on; no roads or distant planes, no house-building or horns blaring, just groups of golfers and their caddies going about their business.

But the overriding impression is how meticulous everything is, wall-to-wall billiard baize with no real rough to talk of. Andy asked me to take a look at one of the back tees. "You could practice putting on this," he told me.

On the front nine, the 6th is a fascinating Par 3 - long and tight with water to the left and behind. "The best bet is to take a club less and lay up in front." I tried that but pulled it left although it didn't quite bounce into the water and I recovered well. That's the key to success here. Don't get sucker-punched by those raised, bold greens. Pick a spot to lay-up and take the flag on from there.

Andy was telling me the course had been future-proofed, which I believe was code for saying, 'it'll still be good in 2026 when the Ryder Cup (maybe) comes to town'. Let's face it, that is only six and a half years away.

I couldn't help thinking there might be other logistical issues facing this tiny, out-of-the-way corner of Ireland for an event of such international stature but we'd driven cross-country on a wonderful European-funded motorway, Dublin being only 3-hours away and Shannon Airport, which takes flights from the USA and other parts of Europe, only 40-mins to the north of the property.

Also, the southwest of Ireland is long-experienced in welcoming golfers from all

over the world. There is a host of golf-oriented communities nearby with plenty of excellent accommodation on hand so it is certainly possible.

I could see Pádraig teeing up behind us on the 9th, the longest hole on the course, a Par 5 of 633 yards. His game seems to have come back of late after a long, agonising slump - the lesson being to leave a good swing alone.

As we progressed, it was further emphasised that it was the greens that provide the toughest test here. Fourteen of them are upturned saucers with tightly-mown, low-cut A4 bentgrass surrounds almost as smooth as the greens themselves. Hitting and holding the ball on is key here.

With all this laying up to be done, you need an arsenal of short game shots to keep a score and they have a wonderful short-game practice area to aid that cause.

"What's that noise," I asked Andy as we stepped off green number 10 by the river. "We have a full SubAir system to keep the greens dry," he told me. SubAir is basically a big vacuum that has the ability to pull air through the putting surface to keep any excess moisture at bay. This ensures the greens are firm, fast and dry irrespective of weather conditions.

I finished the round relatively unscathed and hugely impressed. For an inland course, this is something unprecedented, so utterly plush and seamlessly precise in every single aspect. Hats off to JP McManus and the Tom Fazio team to have the vision and technical ability to create a course that is above and beyond any new build I have ever seen.

I get it that most international golfers are coming to Ireland to play the ancient, rustic links and that's fair enough. But, consider this ultra-manicured marvel first, with the impending hosting of a Ryder Cup and an incredible experience in its own right.

Then, take on the likes of Ballybunion, Lahinch and Tralee. It would be like licking the lemon and salt with Tequila shots or jumping into the snow after a Swedish sauna. Those hoary seaside sites will look even more rugged after playing The Golf Course. Adare Manor will rise quickly into the list of the world's greatest golf resorts. It will become the gateway of choice to the southwest and soon, the golfers will come. ☺