

TRAVEL

For Those Searching for Their Roots, Ireland's 'The Gathering' Beckons

NewsUSA

(NU) - Don't be surprised if you get an unexpected e-mail or postcard from someone you know – or possibly don't know – in Ireland in the coming months asking you to “come home to visit.”

It's part of the unique outreach tied to the year-long extravaganza called “The Gathering: Ireland 2013,” and the timing couldn't be more perfect. So intense is Americans' interest in exploring their roots – beginning, often, with immigrant grandparents who passed through Ellis Island – that the National Archives' website recently crashed after getting 37 million hits on its newly released 1940 census.

“What we're all looking for is the story of the family – what made my grandparents the way they were, which made my parents the way they were, which made me what I am,” an expert in genealogy said of the crash.

The Gathering taps into that yearning in ways generations of the huge Irish Diaspora here in the U.S. should find irresistible. Yes, big and boisterous events like the All-Ireland Hurling Championships, the Great Limerick Run and the Street Performance World Championships abound. But with the emphasis on grassroots participation – hence the e-mails from long-lost relatives and even sports clubs – odds are you'll find something of interest wherever you go.

Among the highlights:

- **National Heritage Week.** Medieval fairs. Historical re-enactments. Maritime fun. And, yes, “night-time bat walks.” What's not to like, especially since many of the 1,000-plus events are free?
- **The Dublin Theatre Festival.** As befitting a country that gave



Celebrate your Irish roots at “The Gathering: Ireland 2013” festivities.

us the playwright George Bernard Shaw, actors ranging from Vanessa Redgrave to Neve Campbell have routinely appeared in classic and cutting-edge productions.

- **The Galway Oyster Festival.** For those hoping to learn if they're descended from Irish gentry, coastal Galway – a.k.a. “the City of the Tribes” in honor of the 14 merchant families who held sway long ago – is a starting point. And you can watch a celebrity cook-off while downing the world-famous Galway Bay oysters.
- **St. Patrick's Parades and Festivals.** Forget anything you've ever seen, even in New York. These showcase everything good about Ireland – pageantry, music, dance, comedy – and the one in Limerick (Dublin City's is another biggie) also includes horseracing.

If You Go: The respected CIE Tours International has escorted millions of Americans to Ireland over the past 80 years, and offers many fully inclusive vacation options. Its “\$550+ Advantage” protection guarantees that travelers are never charged for special features. For information, contact 1-800-243-8687 or www.cietours.com/gathering.