

## From New York City to the Wild Atlantic Way

***After moving to New York, fitness coaches Eoghan O’Kelly and Séamus Keane started their own company which brings New Yorkers to Ireland on health retreats.***

Eoghan O’Kelly and Séamus Keane, originally from Kilkee, Co Clare and Louisburg, Co Mayo, now reside in Manhattan, New York, where they run Hanuman Health Club, a gym focusing on “movement quality” and holistic health.

They now take retreat visitors on wellness vacations from New York City to Ireland’s Wild Atlantic Way. Here Eoghan and Séamus discuss their business and why they drew inspiration from where they grew up.

### How did the journey to New York come about?

Eoghan: I graduated from NUI Galway in 2009 and it wasn’t a great time to be entering the work force. Like a lot of graduates during that period, I left for America partly to get something on my CV but mainly for fun and new experiences.

Seamus: After finishing final year in college I came to New York with three of my closest friends. I actually graduated from finance in NUI Galway and worked on Wall Street for over a year before leaving to become a full time fitness coach and start working with Eoghan full time.

### Tell us about your work in New York?

Eoghan: Initially I came to New York and worked in law but I knew it wasn’t for me so I made the decision to leave the profession and follow my passion of movement and training. This has allowed me to open and run a successful personal training business in Manhattan.

Seamus: When I arrived to New York first I worked in finance but found myself procrastinating on a daily basis. Two months into my new job, I had made an exercise program and meal plan for almost every person in the office, so I decided to leave the job not long after that and set the ball rolling to be a fitness coach by attaining certifications and training people in Central Park to get started.

Eoghan: The idea originated when myself and a friend toured the Wild Atlantic Way spending time doing outdoor activities and incorporating the natural beauty and outdoor terrain of the Connemara region.

Seamus: Now we have expanded the idea and set up the Wild Atlantic Vacations tour company in

Ireland to work alongside American Gym partners and bring more visitors to the West of Ireland.

### **Are New Yorkers passionate about fitness and health?**

Eoghan: Yes definitely. The unique style of training we offer focuses on movement quality and holistic health over aesthetics and appearances and this has helped us to work with a diverse group of people, clients range from a 90 year old lady to an Olympic athlete ranked number five in the world. I have also worked with professional and division one college level athletes, as well as sports companies and teams from Nike and Adidas to the New York City Cosmos.

Seamus: At Hanuman, we run very active adults, youths and kids programs and regularly take part in team adventure races raising thousands of dollars for charities.

### **What events does Hanuman run in Ireland?**

Eoghan: We currently offer wellness retreats to the West of Ireland which gives our members in New York the opportunity to visit Ireland and put the natural movement we learn at the gym into practice in the rugged Wild Atlantic Way.

### **Why the West of Ireland?**

Eoghan: It's an opportunity to experience another way of life, a more relaxed existence that isn't always about going somewhere. In the mornings, in a beautiful cottage looking over the tidal River Shannon estuary, visitors start with a movement session or workout. After breakfast the guests have a little down time before setting off for a local excursion. Hikes, trail runs in the Burren or around the wild and rugged Loop Head, private boat trips to monastic settlements, water based activities on the estuary or under the jagged cliffs.

### **Have you plans to run more retreats here?**

Seamus: The aim is to bring more people to the West of Ireland as we both have an immense pride and passion for the place we call home. The retreats bring together fitness, adventure, good food and Irish culture to connect people and create life lasting memories and experiences, while learning how to incorporate activity and recovery into everyday life.

Eoghan: After the first three retreats to west Clare were a massive success, we have now decided to expand the concept and are working hard on adding a Mayo base to the itinerary. Following this, the next step will be to expand our offerings to more of the West of Ireland along the Wild Atlantic Way. We also want to open our reach to visitors from all over the world who share an interest in health and wellness so it's not limited to members from the gym space in Manhattan.

### **How successful have the retreats been so far?**

Eoghan: Originally the plan was to incorporate Ireland into my life more and that is where the idea for the retreats came from. The customers we have on our retreats are sophisticated who value health, good food and exploring new experiences.

Seamus: The feedback has been great so far. So many American's have a natural love of Ireland and a desire to visit. It's a chance for the members in New York to come to Ireland and put the natural movement learned at the gym into practice. Now we have set up the Wild Atlantic Vacations Tour Company in Ireland to work with our American Gym partners and bring more tourists to the West of Ireland.

### **Being Irish entrepreneurs in NY, does it open more doors for you as many successful Irish-Americans are there?**

Seamus: From my experience the Irish community really go out of their way and look out for each other abroad. For example when I was starting out as a trainer, it was Eoghan who helped me out a huge amount. Now as we aim to develop the Wild Atlantic Vacations tour company we are getting assistance from Local Enterprise Offices based in the West along with Failte Ireland and Tourism Ireland abroad.

### **What were the biggest challenges you faced in starting the business?**

Eoghan: Thus far we have based the retreats in West Clare which is where my home is and a place we have an exceptional bond to. The challenges are that it doesn't get as much love or notoriety as other parts of the Wild Atlantic Way but it is still breathtakingly beautiful.

### **Who are you inspired by?**

Seamus: My Dad has been a massive influence and inspiration. He worked exceptionally hard all his life to get to where he is. He taught me to take action and if you fail it's no big deal, just fail better the next time!

*Interview by Stephen Larkin*

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