

The Back of Beyond



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James Charles Roy leads a group of jaded American tourists on a historical tour of the Emerald Isle they only thought they knew. In *The Back of Beyond*, James Charles Roy, a noted authority on Irish history and travel, escorts a disparate group of Americans through the lonely backwaters of ancient Ireland. Visions of a glorious enterprise evaporate as he sees a dejected and weary handful of aged tourists disembark at Shannon Airport. Fortified by Guinness, Roy hurls himself into sharing with them the joys and wonders of Ireland's twisted byways. Determined to avoid cliché, Roy leads his group to obscure Celtic coronation sites, monasteries, and remote abbeys as he spins a narrative that pulls Ireland's chaotic story into coherence. His unsuspecting charges begin to shed their hesitations, relishing in their guide's idiosyncratic approach to Ireland. Black comedy aside, Roy touches an emotional chord: how the economic phenomenon known as the Celtic Tiger has transformed Old Ireland into a high-tech power. At the tour's end, Roy embarks alone for the inaccessible Ardoilean, a seventh-century Celtic hermitage in County Galway. His vision is one of an Ireland lost forever.

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