

## ARK &amp; TENT



Uniting people &amp; animals...through travel

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**A MATCH MADE ON HORSEBACK*****Saddle Up for Some Romance on the Rural Roads of Ireland*****By Katey Pfeil**

Even in a world filled with social networks that promise community and romance at the click of a mouse, finding true love is still no easy task. To help bridge the gap between the *desire* to find that someone special and actually *accomplishing* it, there's Willie Daly - a self-described traditional matchmaker who (according to his website)



offers those looking for love "the ideal location, atmosphere and disposition to fall in love."

For the past several decades, Daly has been answering thousands of requests from the legions of lonely hearts around the world having difficulty finding love on their own. But what is it that leads them to a 66-year-old Irish man with a graying beard and a pension for refuting the modern "dating game"?

Daley doesn't resemble the typical matchmaker stereotype. Far from being a well-dressed, well-manicured professional catering to middle-aged yuppies, this "farmer-by-morning" is more likely to log a client's information in a 100-year-old ledger than on a Mac. In fact, Daly is a third-generation matchmaker, as both his father and grandfather were responsible for several matches in their day.

A quick perusal of his website will introduce you to the various activities Daly (and his daughters Claire and Marie) have devised in order to get the romantic wheel rolling - or, in this case, galloping along - as one of the more unique options the Daly clan has in store for potential clients is what they call "The Love Trail": a six-day horseback riding adventure that allows animal- and nature-lovers a chance to explore the landscape of Clare County, Ireland, while simultaneously introducing them to a potential significant other.

Considered to be the only remaining authentic matchmaker in Western Ireland, Daly grew up witnessing the lonely lives of the many small-town Irish farmers who surrounded him. The old-fashioned bachelor lifestyle many of these farmers lived is still common in some of the scattered, quaint Irish towns where modernity's volume



is muted; here, haunting limestone cliffs and the wild Atlantic Ocean provide the backdrop to a place where life happens at a slower pace, and not much changes even as the decades rush past.

Although rural Irish culture has changed in some ways, the expertise of old-fashioned matchmakers like Daly is still highly respected, and (even in an age of online dating) is making a bit of a comeback. In fact, Daly's matchmaking business is more than steady; it's booming. And The Love Trail is a route many are choosing to take.

As the threesome states on their website, "Some riders are searching for romance, others lightheartedly pursue it, while others just want to get back to nature, relax, and enjoy the magic of the wonderful West Coast of Ireland." And to make sure everyone feels included, riders of all levels (including those with little equestrian experience) are welcome to take part.

Over the course of the trip, Love Trail participants can enjoy the best of what the region has to offer: riding alongside stunning "Narnia" rock formations, viewing the famous cliffs of Moher in the region known as the Burren, visiting a 15th century castle, picnicking in the lush, verdant landscape, experiencing Irish culture in the old market town of Ennistymon, and a chance to enjoy the lively nightlife in a few of Ireland's more renowned pubs and restaurants that cater to singles.



With nearly seven-billion people inhabiting Planet Earth today, it's hard to imagine that in this digital age finding true love can still prove to be so illusive. But with traditional matchmakers like Willie Daly providing the opportunity to truly ride off into the sunset together, all hope isn't lost.



The Love Trail packages are all-inclusive and priced at approximately \$1,000 USD. Included are airport transfers, accommodations, riding equipment, trail guides and evening entertainment.

## FAST FACTS

***Willie Daly***

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[www.williedaly.net/love\\_trail.htm](http://www.williedaly.net/love_trail.htm)

*Photos courtesy of: [www.discoverireland.com](http://www.discoverireland.com)*

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