Complete Ireland Experience

Ireland has more myths and legends than you'd dare to believe. It has more gorgeous coastlines and majestic mountains than your camera could capture. And there's enough lively bars with traditional music to satisfy even the most dedicated of fun seekers.

YOUR ADVENTURE AWAITS

11 days/10 nights

ITINERARY

Day 1: Dublin – Belfast – Portrush
Departing Dublin, you head north to the border of Northern Ireland. A short journey from the divide lies Belfast, a city famed for its industrial heritage and turbulent past. A historical feast, you take a short city tour which covers the capital's triumphs, tragedies and soul. Discover the Titanic Quarter, a regenerated hub where the famous liner was built and launched in 1911. Exiting its excellent museums and attractions by the afternoon, you can choose to board the SS Nomadic, the final surviving White Star Line steamship or explore the fascinating Titanic Dock and Pump house.

Leaving bustling Belfast behind, you move through the phenomenal scenery of the Antrim Coast and Glens, an official Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Moving along the winding roads of Ballycastle, you enter the awe inspiring setting of the Giant's Causeway, where history and myth collide spectacularly with raw geological power. Waving farewell to the giant's steps, you head to Portrush, a charming fishing village that will be your home for the night.

Places You'll Explore on this Tour:
The City of Belfast – A city steeped in the history and heartaches of Ireland.
The Titanic Quarter – See the regenerated waterfront where the Titanic was constructed and explore the tragic histories of the people who built it.
Giant's Causeway – Feel the power of Irish giants in the unique and breathtaking coastal formations of the Causeway.
Portrush – Relax in this small but charming coastal resort town.
Derry – Enter the only completely walled city in Ireland and the British Isles where markets, spires and museums await within.
Donegal – Venture into this land of castles, rugged coasts and thick forest, where Gaelic culture is writ large and proud.
County Mayo – Explore the typical Irish scenery and magnificent wildlife of this land with a tragic past.
Westport – Sweep past Atlantic views and across verdant soil around this pretty bay front village.
Cong – This scenic town in the heart of Connemara has the beauty of its ancient abbey, as well as more modern strains of culture within the "Quiet Man" Museum.
Kylemore Abbey – A refuge for Benedictine nuns fleeing World War 1, this incredible neo-gothic building is steeped in the scars and bravery of world history.
Connemara National Park – Stunning vistas and superb wildlife abound within this famously serene park.

Clifden – The "Capital of Connemara", this historically significant site is where the first transatlantic flight landed.
The Sky Road – 11km of heaven, you'll see the Ireland only usually glimpsed on postcards and travel blogs. Visually arresting landscapes offer views that will fill your senses.
The Twelve Bens – The towering peaks of twelve mountains above a rare bog habitat and pristine lakes, this is a dramatic area that always teems with wildlife.
Galway Town – Stone clad buildings line the winding lanes and medieval walls of this ancient harbour city, all accompanied by the strains of traditional music pouring from cosy pubs.
Cliffs of Moher – Behold an awe-inspiring 700ft drop to the crashing waves of the Atlantic Ocean.
The Burren – A true treasure of Ireland: beautiful and mysterious in equal measure. This national park is home to some of the nation's most profound spiritual and natural culture.
Dingle Peninsula – Glorious beaches merge with traditional Irish scenery in this land of Gaelic mystery and towering forts.
Ring of Kerry – Travel over 100 miles of beauty and intrigue, with something for all the senses along this classic tour route.
Torc Waterfall – Learn of the ancient curse that formed this waterfall and its inimitable cascade.
Blarney Castle – Kiss the famed Blarney Stone amidst the walls of this impressive medieval stronghold.
Kilkenny – Survey the dominant and unmistakable three walled castle whilst roaming its splendid grounds and market town

This tour is a combination tour consisting of three shorter tours: Northern Ireland and the Atlantic Coast; Escape to the West; Kilkenny, West Cork and Kinsale. You will have a different driver/guide for each segment of the trip.

These tours are basic and a bit more casual than many of the large-coach tours. They offer you the opportunity to only visit the attractions you are interested in and to have some free time in the evenings. You can decide whether you want to go out for dinner to a cafe or restaurant of your choosing with the group or on your own; buy some food at a supermarket or local take-out and eat at your accommodation; or hang out with other people from your tour. The choice is yours!

Day 2: Portrush – Derry – Donegal
You make your way to Derry in the morning, the fabulous 17th century walled city that boasts seven ornate gates. Designated as UK City of Culture for 2013, it offers museums, galleries and excellent markets for the curious traveller. Explore the old city before returning south to the Republic of Ireland. From here, you head to one of the most remote and unspoilt areas in the country, County Donegal, which offers stunning scenery and inimitable Gaelic culture. Passing through the romantically haunting Glenveagh National Park and the soaring peak of Mount Errigal, you come to the traditional fishing villages of the area. These offer plenty of opportunities for good food, sights and to soak up the local atmosphere before stopping in Donegal for the night.

Day 3: Donegal – Westport
In the morning, you pass south along the coast near Donegal and into County Sligo. Home to the burial site of famed poet WB Yeats, the land here offers dramatic views of the mountainous Ben Bulben, ideal for photos. Outside Sligo Town lies Carrowmore and the largest collection of megalithic tombs in Ireland, some of which date back over 6000 years. Moving westwards, you enter County Mayo, an area ravaged in the past by the Great Potato Famine. Winding roads curve through the picturesque farmlands, bogs and open moors, offering views of distant hills and the Atlantic coast, where you'll visit the dramatic Achill Island. Right on the edge of Europe, the steeply rugged sea cliffs give way to the peaceful beauty of the interior of the island. After this, you head to Westport, your home for the next two days.

Day 4: Explore Connemara
Galway lies on the edge of Connemara, the area you are exploring today. Alternatively, you can visit the magnificently restored 12th century Cong Abbey. From here, you continue through the heart of Connemara for a visit to the beautiful house and grounds at Kylemore Abbey, where the grand structures and magnificent man-made gardens are a treat for the eye and soul.

Your journey then continues to Connemara National Park, where abundant wildlife resides amongst the ancient tombs and intimate woodland paths. You will view the truly magnificent Diamond Hill, a 500m peak that rivals any summit in Europe, and then on to Clifden, famous home of the first transatlantic flight landing. Here you enjoy the unbroken and infinite majesty of the Sky Road, as well as the sharp peaks of the Twelve Bens of Connemara. This distinctive mountain range offers an excellent photo opportunity, before you head down and back for the night to your cosy residence in Westport.

Day 5: Westport – Galway
Travelling inland through the Maam Valley to the village of Cong, you come upon the shore of Lough Corrib. Famously the setting for the film classic "The Quiet man", you are free to tread the halls of the excellent local museum devoted to the movie.

You will be dropped off at your accommodation in Galway before the first tour returns to Dublin. The afternoon and

evening are free to explore this lively university city. You will be collected from your accommodation the following morning by your new tour driver-guide.

Day 6: Galway – Cliffs of Moher and the Burren – Killarney
A short drive along the coast from Galway City lies the Burren, one of Ireland's national treasures. A region of broad limestone pavements, rare flora and ancient stone monuments, this elemental reserve is home to one of the earliest Christian settlements in Ireland. After a thorough exploration, you travel to Kilfenora, the "town of the crosses" and it's fabulous ancient cathedral and superb collection of religious artifacts. After lunch in a charming village, you head to the incredible Cliffs of Moher, which drop nearly 700ft into the fierce Atlantic Ocean. Walk the stunning cliff trails as seabirds swoop through the clear air above you. Learn more about the unique ecosystem here in the award-winning environmental exhibition nearby. The tour then moves south through County Clare, passing its famous golf course on the way to the picturesque beach at Lahinch. From here, you board a pretty ferry across the Shannon Estuary to the lakeside town of Killarney. This energetic and charming town will be your base for the next three nights, so take your time sampling the fine collection of traditional pubs and music.

Day 7: Dingle Peninsula
The tour navigates the fabulous Dingle Peninsula today, the scenic heartland of Gaelic culture and tradition. Your first stop is Inch Beach, a vast expanse of sand stretching out into the Atlantic that's popular with extreme sports fans. Venturing down the narrow roads away from the beach leads you through the town of Dingle, popular for its dolphin tours. You pass on towards Slea Head, a promontory loaded with ancient forts and millennia-old dwellings. Captivating views of the nearby Blasket Islands rising dramatically from the sea make this an excellent space for photos. If the weather stays pleasant, you can ramble along the beaches and cliff tops to fully appreciate the incredible vistas. A landscape steeped in Gaelic literature, you have the chance to learn about its influence on Irish literary culture.

Arriving back amidst the brightly coloured houses and jolly harbour of Dingle, you spend the remainder of the afternoon enjoying delicious seafood in this idyllic setting. In the evening, you head back to Killarney, with time for an evening stroll in the National Park that borders the town.

Day 8: Ring of Kerry
Today you tour the Ring of Kerry, a spectacular route through some of Ireland's most historically and visually incredible areas. You head out in the morning for over 100 miles of unbeatable scenery, stopping first at Ireland's highest mountain Carrauntoohil. After snapping some shots of its imposing size, you join the scenic coast road through Glenbeigh and Kells on the way to Cahersiveen. Possible stops include the site of "The Liberator of Ireland" Daniel O'Connell's birthplace and an impressive ring fort outside Portmagee, your stop for lunch. This quaint fishing village offers a chance to relax whilst indulging in the local seafood. Alternatively, you can head to the island of Valentia for a visit to the Skelling Experience, where you learn about the ancient community of monks who made the outcrop of rocky islands their home.

In the afternoon, there's a photo stop in Charlie Chaplin's favourite holiday "home away from home" of Waterville before a trip to the very top of Coonmakista pass and the divine views it offers. Winding down from the peaks, you head to sea level on the way to Derrynane House, home of the family O'Driscoll, whose most famous son Daniel O'Driscoll holds a special place in Irish hearts as an emancipating force from colonial rule. Stroll in the scenic gardens here, as well as exploring the main house where so much Irish history was forged. Continuing along the Ring, you stop at Moll's Gap and the Ladies View, offering two stunning sights perfect for memorable pictures. Stroll a short way to the Torc Waterfall before heading back to Killarney. (On some tours, Days 7 and 8 are switched).

Day 9: Blarney Castle – Cork – Kinsale
Heading east through the mountains of West Cork, you weave along the Lee Valley until you reach Blarney Castle, the impressive medieval fortress that lies on the outskirts of Cork. You have time to take in the castle grounds and wander its woodland trails. Visiting the nearby village, you may even get the chance to kiss the famous Blarney Stone and receive the "gift of the gab"! In the afternoon, you change driver-guide and pass along the beautiful coastline south of Cork before arriving in Kinsale. This charming little fishing village is your overnight stop, so you can take in the delights of the "gourmet capital of Ireland", with its first rate local restaurants and lively pubs. Savour your free evening whilst exploring the narrow streets and brightly coloured houses around your accommodation.

Day 10: Kinsale – Cobh – Waterford – Kilkenny
Leaving Kinsale in the morning, you make your way to the historic port town of Cobh. The major departure point for Irish emigration for the 19th and 20th centuries, this was the last port of call for the Titanic on its infamous maiden voyage. After unearthing the stories from Ireland's past, you head east along the Copper Coast, a Unesco Geopark famed for its beauty and intricate histories. You continue until you reach Waterford, Ireland's oldest city, founded by Vikings in the 9th century. Survey the wondrous craftsmanship at the Waterford Crystal factory, explore the selection of fine museums or wander the 'Viking Triangle' on foot.

In the late afternoon, you travel north away from Waterford and over to Kilkenny, a vibrant city with an impressive castle and parklands where you stay for the evening. WIth riverside trails, the National Craft Centre and a thriving pub

and restaurant culture, you are certain to see why it was voted Ireland's friendliest city!

Day 11: Kilkenny – Dublin
In the morning, you have free time in Kilkenny and its superb castle. Match the calm pace of life in the charming town centre and its fine craft centres. You then head north into the Wicklow Mountains, where the National Park will impress you with its steep granite mountains and captivating green paths. The famous valleys open up before you, carved by ancient glaciers. You follow winding paths that lead to Glendalough, site of an awe-inspiring 6th century monastery at the heart of the park's woodland trails. This offers a perfect opportunity for photography, from the verdant natural setting to the much admired round tower of the monastery. After this, you head through the centre of the National Park to cross the famous Sally Gap, before descending the short distance to Dublin.

We can arrange for accommodation in Dublin before and after this tour, to allow you time to explore this lively and historic city. Accommodation ranges from hostels, B&B/guesthouses, all categories of hotels up to castle stays. Please inquire.

Details

Group Size: 16

Trip Code:

002334 - W20

INCLUDED

- 10 nights of accommodation in category chosen
- Breakfast daily at accommodation
- Transportation by Mercedes mini-coach for 11 days of touring
- The services of an experienced and knowledgeable driver and guide
- Attractions as outlined in itinerary above unless specified as optional

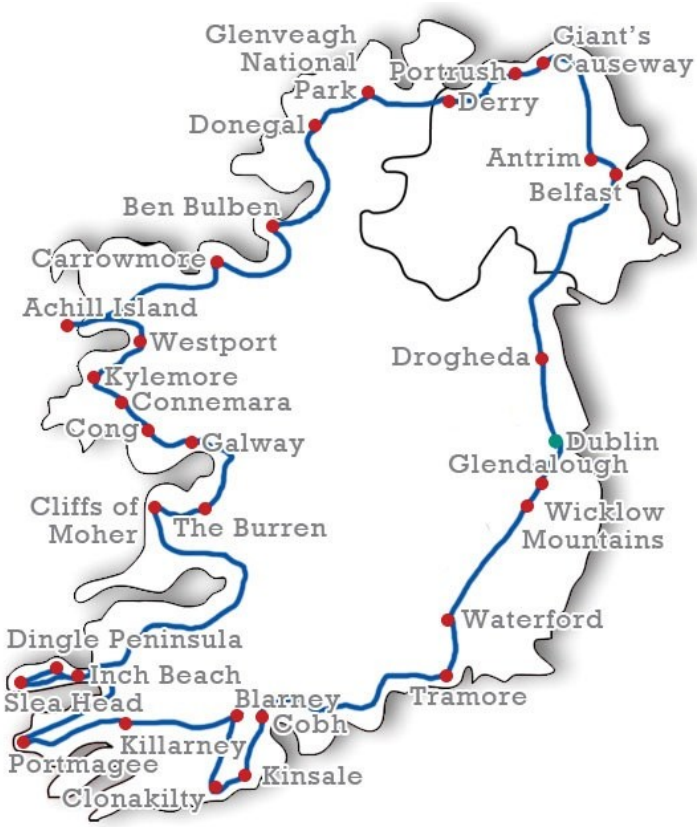
NOT INCLUDED

- Airfare to/from Dublin
- Accommodation in Dublin
- Meals not specified
- Admissions to attractions unless specifically specified
- Optional Tours
- Gratuities to driver and guide
- Travel Insurance
- Items of a personal nature

TOUR NOTES

Disclaimer: We do our utmost to ensure that information posted on our website is correct at the time of publication, however trip details are subject to change without notice by the suppliers and operators involved. We update the information as soon as possible when changes are advised to us, however, we cannot assume responsibility for such changes made by the suppliers and operators.

ROUTE MAP



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