

IRELAND

Best of the Republic & Northern Ireland

10 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Dublin

Today we arrive in Dublin, Ireland's capital city.

Since its beginning around AD 988, Dublin has accommodated many diverse nationalities from the Vikings and English invaders, to sailors, traders and writers who settled and lived here over the centuries. Modern Dublin is being transformed by enormous changes brought about by the recent economic boom, though the city will always have a reputation as a great historical city, and its strong links with world literature and the arts are readily apparent.

Overnight in Dublin.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Discovering Dublin: City Touring

Dublin is a warm and welcoming city, known for the friendliness of its people and famous for its "craic" (fun vibe), that has attracted writers, intellectuals, and visitors for centuries.

Today we have a guided walking tour. We begin at the Spire, also known as the Monument of Light, located on O'Connell Street. Continuing southwards to the River Liffey, we cross over to the south side of Dublin where we visit the exterior of Trinity College, Ireland's most prestigious university, attended by some of Ireland's biggest names including Oscar Wilde, Jonathan Swift and Samuel Beckett.*

We continue west to Temple Bar, Dublin's central nightlife district, known for its pubs and souvenir shops. Next we visit the outside of Dublin Castle, the former seat of the British administration in Ireland which dates back originally to the 13th century. Next we see the Molly Malone statue en route to Grafton Street, one of Dublin's most prominent shopping areas, named after Henry FitzRoy, First Duke of Grafton -- an illegitimate son of King Charles II. We stroll the length of Grafton Street and look out for buskers who often frequent the area to entertain the crowds.

After a bit of a break, we experience Dublin tour with a difference, a guided visit of one of Ireland's most famous graveyards, the hauntingly beautiful Glasnevin Cemetery. This tour will give you an overview of the history of the cemetery, where you will visit the graves of some of Ireland's heroes, including Michael Collins, Roger Casement, Charles Stewart Parnell and Countess Markievicz. Our visit features just some of the stories of these rogues and the rebels, the famous and the infamous, the grave diggers and the grave robbers!

Finally we stop at the O'Connell Tower, the tombstone of the great Irish liberator, Daniel O'Connell. You can climb the 198 steps to the top for breathtaking views over Dublin, Meath, Wicklow. and the Irish Sea!

This evening we include a night of fun and merriment at the Merry Ploughboy, a 200-year-old pub (now part of the National Heritage List) in south Dublin. Here we enjoy a three-course dinner from a multi-dish menu as we experience an evening of traditional Irish music from the Merry Ploughboys traditional group and a dance performance from the champion Irish dancers and a true Irish welcome.

* We do not include a full visit of Trinity College and the Book of Kells, as it takes a considerable time investment, making it impractical for a busy city tour with many other things to see and do. A popular option for including this location in your itinerary is to add an extra hotel night/free day during which to accomplish this visit. For more info please visit <https://www.visittrinity.ie/book-of-kells-experience/>

Overnight in Dublin.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Dublin - Rock of Cashel - Distillery Experience - Cork

Today we depart Dublin by road and travel south to Kinsale via a stop at the Rock of Cashel in County Tipperary. The Rock of Cashel, located

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on a dramatic outcrop of limestone in the Golden Vale, is iconic in its historic significance and home to Ireland's most impressive cluster of medieval buildings. Originally the seat of Munster's kings, legend has it that St. Patrick himself came here to convert King Aenghus to Christianity. In 978, Brian Boru was crowned High King of Cashel and established it as his capital. Discover the round tower, Romanesque chapel, and Gothic cathedral that can be found here. While you explore, make sure not to miss the lesser visited Hore Abbey, Ireland's last medieval Cistercian monastery, which is a short walk away from the Rock.

Kinsale is one of Ireland's most picturesque towns. You'll have some free time to explore the colourful, winding lanes and charming restaurants where you can get some lunch before visiting the Middleton Distillery Experience, an Irish whiskey museum and visitor centre. During our tour, we'll learn about the history of Jameson Whiskey and the distillery that operated here between 1825 and 1975. We'll see a short film before taking a guided walking tour through the old distillery to see the old kilns, mills, maltings, water wheel, still house, cooperage and warehouse. And, of course, our visit will include a whisky tasting, trying a dram of Jameson, Scotch, and American whiskey to become a 'Qualified Whisky Taster'.

We end our day in Cork,

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Cork - The Ring of Kerry - Killarney

The Ring of Kerry is considered one of the finest drives in the world, with rugged cliffs and golden beaches, small villages, green pastures, peat bogs, and picturesque mountains. This peninsula illustrates all that is beautiful, wonderful, and wild in Ireland.

We begin with a visit to the town of Killarney, often voted the most beautiful town in Ireland and known as the gateway to the Ring of Kerry and the Dingle Coast. Sites of interest in the town reflect its strong religious and educational history. Killarney was a Church foundation from the 5th or 6th century, and settlement began here from around 1500. Today it's a lively, colourful place with lots of pleasant strolling, shopping and music.

Next we visit Killgorglin, known for the Puck Fair Celtic festival, where a goat is crowned king of the village! Continuing on a scenic drive along part of the beautiful Dingle Peninsula, we'll stop along the way for some perfect photo opportunities. Next we stop at Waterville, often frequented by Charlie Chaplin and known for its early Christian monasteries and Skellig Rocks. We stop at the colourful village of Sneem before visiting Killarney National Park, which offers stunning views of the Lakes of Killarney and the Black Valley.

Our drive circles back around the to Killarney, where we spend the night. Before and/or after dinner you can explore colourful laneways, historic buildings dating back to the days of the landlord, and experience the ambiance of busy streets in the town centre. Killarney is a lively hub of activity with many shops, restaurants, and pubs.

Overnight in Killarney.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 The Gap of Dunloe & Lakes of Killarney Adventure

This morning we'll meet our local guide at Ross Castle before transferring to the Gap of Dunloe, where our adventure will begin at the foothills of Ireland's highest mountain range. From there, we board a traditional "Pony and Trap" cart for a seven-mile journey through the Gap of Dunloe's dramatic glaciated valleys and breathtaking views. We'll gain a unique perspective on rural Ireland as we travel through the Black Valley's unspoiled beauty and isolation. Before embarking on a fourteen-mile voyage through all three of Killarney's Lakes aboard a traditional Open Top Boat, we stop for a break for lunch at Lord Brandon's Cottage.

Our boat trip then guides us through the Lakes of Killarney, passing Innisfallen Island, Bricin Bridge, Colleen Bawn Rock, Torc Mountain, Old Weir Bridge, and the Meetings of the Waters, to name a few, before arriving at the magnificently-restored 15th Century Ross Castle for a visit.

We return to Killarney for dinner and overnight.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Killarney - the Cliffs of Moher - Galway

Today we depart Killarney and head to Galway by way of the world-famous Cliffs of Moher (Aillte an Mhothair), formed over 300 million years ago. The cliffs are one of the most famous sights in Ireland; however, until you see them from the water, you haven't really seen them at all! These amazing sea cliffs are named from the ancient Gaelic word 'Mhothair' (Moher) which means ruined fort. They rise to a jaw dropping height of over 214 metres (700ft) at their highest point.

From Doolin we depart on a one-hour boat journey of exploration under the towering cliffs, a one-of-a-kind opportunity to experience the wide vista of these renowned cliffs from the water, with fresh air and open space all around you. Our vessel will sail south beyond the highest point, near to the great sea stack, An Bhreannan Mor. The crew will show you the many points of interest, including puffins and other marine birds, O'Brien's tower at the highest point, and the famed sea cave featured in the Harry Potter film The Half Blood Prince. Sit back, relax, and enjoy the scenery as we cruise back to Doolin.

We continue to Galway, one of Europe's fastest-growing cities. Galway is a major city by Irish standards, yet it still manages to retain much of the accessibility and congeniality of a small town. Galway is perhaps the most prosperous city in Ireland and arguably one of the most appealing.

Overnight in Galway.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Galway Food Trail - Slieve League Cliffs, Ireland - Londonderry/Derry, Northern Ireland

This morning we'll meet up with a local expert foodie guide tour of some of Galway's best gastronomy haunts. We'll visit the now famous Galway Market and a number of award-winning restaurants and cafes. We'll be able to try 7-8 products ranging from oysters to cheese, sushi to crab, doughnuts to strawberry tarts, local beers and more (there are also plenty of options for vegetarians). After our culinary tour, there will be a goodie bag to take with you.

Leaving Galway behind, we travel to the Slieve League Cliffs (Sliabh Liag), nearly three times the height of the Cliffs of Moher, offering incredible views from their peaks and some of Europe's highest sea cliffs - the views are dramatic: the wild Atlantic Ocean, rugged landscapes, and the racing skies, which can change from wispy white clouds to dramatic greys in an instant. We'll be walking in the footsteps of pilgrims and monks as we explore the wilds of Slieve League: the mountains contain the ruins of an early Christian monastic site, including a chapel and beehive huts. Slieve League is also thought to have been a pilgrimage site prior to the arrival of Christianity in Ireland, with ancient stone remains dotted around the area.

We continue to Londonderry / Derry*, Northern Ireland, arriving in the late afternoon.

* The true name of the city of Derry or Londonderry is a subject of dispute between Nationalists (mostly Catholic) and Unionists (most of whom are Protestant), with nationalists calling it Derry, and Unionists, Londonderry. Although many Unionists will call it Derry in casual conversation, they generally insist on calling it Londonderry during political discourse; the reverse is not true of Nationalists. The most visible sign of this dispute to the visitor is in the road signage; those pointing to the town from within the Republic refer to it as "Derry", while across the border it is written as "Londonderry".

Overnight in London/Derry (dinner on your own this evening).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 8 Derry - The Giant's Causeway - Belfast

Today we'll drive out of Belfast early and enjoy a spectacular guided tour along the Causeway Coastal Route. We start with a visit to Whitehead, a colourful seaside village nestled on the Antrim Coast north of Belfast. At Whitehead, enjoy a stroll through the village with our guide, seeing first Castle Chichester, a 17th-century ruined tower built to protect plantation settlers from marauders.

Then comes a spectacular scenic drive along the coast looking out for wildlife, and arriving at Glenariff Forest Park. Glenariff, the Queen of the Glens, is one of the nine Antrim Glens in Northern Ireland. Glenariff Forest Park covers over 1,000 hectares with planted woodland, lakes, outdoor recreation spaces and conservation areas. We enjoy free time here to explore at your own pace before another gorgeous

scenic drive ending in the picturesque seaside town of Ballycastle, where we'll have free time for lunch.

Our journey to Belfast not only takes us along one of the most scenic routes in all of Ireland, but it also passes Northern Ireland's most famous landmark, the Giant's Causeway, once believed to be the work of giants. We will visit these masses of basalt columns that form stepping stones climbing out from the sea up to the cliff. Some of the approximately 40,000 columns reach up to over 12 m (40 feet) in height.

We plan to arrive in Belfast in the late afternoon. Much of this city has been pleasantly pedestrianized, and in the early evening you may like to go for a stroll and explore this lively, cultural metropolis. Belfast is essentially a Victorian city, and no matter where you go you can see Edwardian and Victorian buildings with elaborate sculptures over the windows and doors. The City Hall (possibly closed for refurbishment), which dominates the main shopping area, was built in the grand Classical Renaissance style.

Overnight in Belfast.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Maritime Belfast

Today we'll delve into the story of how Belfast grew from a small settlement in the 1600s to one of the UK's most important ports just a few centuries later. We'll hear firsthand accounts of what it was like to work in the world-famous shipyard during Titanic's construction and get up close and personal with some of the remaining infrastructure, including Titanic's Slipway and Dry Dock. We have a walking tour along the Maritime Mile, which includes the Harland & Wolff Administration Building and Drawing Offices, as well as historic vessels such as the SS Nomadic. Next, we visit the award-winning Titanic Belfast, which tells the story of the Titanic, beginning with her conception in Belfast in the early 1900s, continuing through her construction and launch, to her maiden voyage, and subsequent place in history. The Titanic Experience is a self-guided tour that takes you through nine interpretive and interactive galleries that explore the sights, sounds, smells, and stories of RMS Titanic, as well as the city and people who built her.

After our tour we return to our hotel for the balance of the afternoon at leisure.

Overnight in Belfast.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Departure

Departure from Belfast.

SLAN ABHAILE!!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast