

SCOTLAND & IRELAND EXPLORER

19 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Edinburgh

Today we arrive in Edinburgh, where the buzz of Scotland's capital city sits in perfect contrast to the peaceful tranquility of the surrounding Lothians region. Edinburgh has one of the most beautiful cityscapes in the world, making it the ideal city break destination. With Scotland's most famous castle dominating the city skyline, there is plenty to see and do with the perfect balance between all things traditional and contemporary.

Overnight in Edinburgh.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Edinburgh: City Touring

Today we have a half-day guided tour of this most beautiful of cities.

We'll begin with a walk through Edinburgh's Old Town with our local guide, ready to learn about the history of Edinburgh. We start at Holyrood Abbey, before passing by the Scottish Parliament building. We continue to St Giles' Cathedral, Greyfriars Kirkyard, and the vibrant area of Grassmarket before exploring the National Museum of Scotland.

Our sojourn proceeds with a tour of one of Europe's foremost attractions; the dramatic Edinburgh Castle. Standing aloof and massive on its hill, Edinburgh Castle both dominates and adds majesty to the historical ambiance of the city. Within the castle itself we view the Honours of Scotland Exhibition and display of Scottish crown jewels; visit St. Margaret's Chapel, see the famous 500-year-old cannon "Mons Meg", then stroll through the Great Hall.

The rest of the day is yours to explore Edinburgh independently (your Tour Leader can help you plan your afternoon). Museum lovers might consider the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and/or The National Museum of Scotland. Johnnie Walker Princes Street is spread across eight floors and offers an experience perfect for whisky lovers and novices alike, along with incredible views of the Edinburgh skyline from the 1820 rooftop bar.

Overnight in Edinburgh.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Edinburgh - Falkirk Wheel - Stirling Castle - Stirling

Today we travel to Stirling via the Falkirk Wheel and Stirling Castle.

The Falkirk Wheel boat lift is an exceptional feat of modern engineering that connects the Forth & Clyde and Union Canals. This unique and elegant mechanical marvel lifts boats by a height of 35 metres to bridge the gap that was originally linked by a flight of 11 locks. At the end of the 20th century, it was decided to reconnect the 2 canals with the innovative wheel as an inspiring symbol for the new Millennium.

We'll enjoy the full experience of the Falkirk Wheel as we sail through the sky to join the Union Canal 35m above. After moving smoothly through the aqueduct and through the Roughcastle tunnel to the beginning of the Union Canawe then descend to the start point returning to the visitor centre.

We then head to the city of Stirling where we visit Stirling Castle, the largest in Scotland. The castle is well defended by cliffs on 3 sides, and became a military stronghold and seat of royalty and government. Stirling Castle rock has been used as a fortress for centuries, probably since Roman times. The earliest buildings upon it mentioned in surviving records are the castle and the chapel dedicated by Alexander I in 1120. From the 12th Century it became one of the principal royal strongholds in Scotland. Destroyed or rebuilt several times in the 13th and 14th centuries, it was close to great battles against the English during the Wars of Independence.

Overnight in Stirling.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Stirling - St Andrews - Aberdeen

Today we leave Stirling and head for St Andrews, a quaint town located on the east coast of Fife. St Andrews is home to the oldest university in Scotland, University of St Andrews, one of the best universities in the United Kingdom. St Andrews is also known globally as the "home of golf" mainly due to it being home to the iconic The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews, dating back to the mid-18th century.

We enjoy a guided walking tour of St Andrews, seeing some of the town's most iconic sights. We start with a visit to St Andrews Cathedral, Scotland's largest and most magnificent medieval church. Here, we visit the museum and the visitor centre (please note that St Rule's tower is currently closed). Next, we see the outside of St Andrews Castle, a ruined fort which sits overlooking Castle Sands Beach. There has been a castle of some type here since the 12th century.

Next we see The Old Course, home of the Open Championship golf tournament, before seeing University of St Andrews, where the future heir to the British throne, William Prince of Wales, first met Katherine, Princess of Wales. We end our visit at St Salvator's Chapel, a beautiful example of late gothic architecture dating back to the mid-15th century.

Later we travel to the city of Dundee, the City of Discovery, where we have free time for lunch and a walk along the beautiful waterfront before continuing our journey to Aberdeen.

Aberdeen's architecture is known for its principal use of granite during the Victorian era, which has led to its local nickname of the Granite City, or more romantically, the less commonly used "Silver City," since the quartz in the stone sparkles in the sun. The city's architecture is a reminder of its heritage and rich history, but Aberdeen also has a cosmopolitan buzz and is very much a city on the rise.

Overnight in Aberdeen.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Aberdeen - Highland Cattle - Whisky Distillery - Grantown-on-Spey

Today in Aberdeenshire we meet a herd of Pedigree Highland Cattle up close and learn about the history of the native breed and how they are farmed. Following our tour we'll have an included lunch featuring traditional Scottish Highland beef stovies, oatcakes, and beetroot (vegetarian options available).

Later we'll have a private tour of Royal Lochnagar Distillery, located near Balmoral Castle in Royal Deeside dating back to 1845. The distillery holds a Royal Warrant after a visit from Prince Albert in 1848. Today, we will be led through the distillery to learn about the distilling process. The tour will end with a tasting of two drams of Royal Lochnagar whisky.

We end our day in Grantown-on-Spey, near to Aveimore in the heart of Scotland's Highlands. The town's traditional Highland hospitality and ideal location as a gateway to exploring the stunning Scottish Highlands, make it an attractive base for two days of touring in the region.

Overnight in Grantown-on-Spey.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 6 Loch Ness Folklore & Nature

Today we have a full-day tour to discover the folklore, nature, and history surrounding the famous Loch Ness.

We head first to Loch Ness itself and enjoying a drive along the famous shoreline to visit Urquhart Castle, one of Scotland's most popular attractions. Situated on the north-western shore of Loch Ness, it offers visitors fascinating insights into its dramatic history and spectacular views over the world famous Loch.

Next we travel to Fort Augustus, a lovely village situated at the south end of Loch Ness and the start of the Caledonian Canal. We have free time here to explore and have lunch (at own expense).

In the afternoon we will travel to the Dundreggan Rewilding Centre, north of Loch Ness. The centre celebrates rewilding and the region's rich Gaelic culture and offers a gateway for visitors to explore the 10,000-acre Dundreggan estate. Conservation charity, Trees for Life, has been rewilding Dundreggan since 2008 to restore the Caledonian forest and its wildlife. The estate is now home to more than 4,000 species of plants and animals, including many rare and protected species, and the charity's tree nursery where around 90,000 trees are grown every year.

We explore Dundreggan with a knowledgeable member of staff and find out more about this fascinating place, and why and how Trees for Life are rewilding the estate. We return to our hotel via the lesser-travelled south shores of Loch Ness, stopping at the beautiful Falls of Foyers on the way.

Overnight in Grantown-on-Spey.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Highland Safari

Today we'll embark on an exciting and scenic Land Rover "safari" experience! This exclusive, tailored safari with our very own safari ranger, will provide a personalised adventure in the Scottish Highlands.

Along the way we may be lucky enough to see majestic red deer, grouse, mountain hare, or the soaring golden eagle as we travel through forests, mountains, and moors on private hill tracks, exploring the magnificent natural wilderness.

Included in our excursion -- tea, coffee, local Kenmore shortbread, and a dram of Dewars Whisky (of course). This will be served to you in a traditional mountain bothy surrounded by the inspiring mountain views.

We return to our hotel with the balance of the day to enjoy some well-deserved down-time.

Overnight in Grantown-on-Spey (dinner on your own this evening).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 8 Grantown-on-Spey - Scone Palace - Loch Lomond - Glasgow

Today we head for Glasgow with a stop at Scone Palace, offering a captivating journey through Scottish history and set against the stunning backdrop of its picturesque grounds. Here we explore the regal rooms that once hosted Scottish kings and queens, immersing themselves in the opulence of the palace's architecture and décor. The surrounding gardens, with their vibrant flora and serene landscapes, provide a tranquil escape.

Next we'll venture out beyond stately homes and the magnificent Ben Lomond, Scotland's most southerly Munro, to Inchmurrin Island, the largest inland island in Great Britain and home to the ruins of the 12th century Lennox Castle.

Our final destination is Glasgow, a city famous for its contributions to architectural styles, with the Glasgow School of Art being the most notable example. The wealth of the city's merchants in the 18th century saw a shift towards neoclassical architecture with simple lines and grand imposing stately buildings. Glasgow's friendly residents, diverse culinary experiences, and abundance of green spaces, make it a welcoming and unforgettable destination for experiencing Scotland's unique charm.

Overnight in Glasgow.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Discovering Glasgow

Glasgow is home to an array of remarkable museums, visitor attractions, and galleries, and today we'll have the chance to discover some of the best Glasgow has to offer.

We start the day at Glasgow Cathedral, a Medieval cathedral thought to have been built on the site of St Kentigern's tomb, the birthplace of the city of Glasgow. One of Scotland's most magnificent medieval buildings, Glasgow Cathedral is the only one on the Scottish mainland to survive the Reformation of 1560 intact. After a tour of the interior we will step outside to visit the Glasgow Necropolis.

The Necropolis is a Victorian garden cemetery of of wonderful architecture, sculpture, and fascinating stories. Adjacent to Glasgow Cathedral, the Necropolis was modeled on Père-Lachaise in Paris; it is estimated that something in the order of 50,000 burials have taken place here, with around 3,500 tombs. Today we will be treated to a special guided tour of the cemetery by a friendly local volunteer whose passion for the cemetery shines through.

We will then enjoy a panoramic tour of the city, with a stop at St George's Square, the iconic central square of the city which showcases an important collection of statues and monuments, including those dedicated to famous Scots such as Robert Burns, James Watt, Sir Robert Peel, and Sir Walter Scott. We stop in the centre and enjoy some free time for lunch before continuing to explore the city.

Finally we cross the river to reach the world-renowned Burrell Collection. Here we have a VIP tour of the museum for a rare opportunity to go behind the scenes and see some of the thousands of objects not on display to the general public. Finally, take some time to explore the main galleries and visit the shop before our visit ends and we prepare for our farewell dinner.

Overnight in Glasgow.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Glasgow, Scotland - Fly to Dublin, Ireland

Today we fly to 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): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 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 12 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 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 Midleton 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 13 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 it's 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 14 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 15 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 16 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.

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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 17 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 18 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 19 Departure

Departure from Belfast.

SLAN ABHAILE!!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast