TOUR CODE

IE1

ADVENTURESABROAD

IRELAND

The Republic & Ulster (Northern Ireland)

14 days

Updated 06/01/2013

Day 1 *Arrive 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. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Dublin: City Tour*

Today we have a guided tour of Dublin. To expedite our transit around the city in which there is usually thick traffic and no where to park, we will employ the excellent services of Dublin's "Hop On - Hop Off" tourist bus. This double-decker describes a convenient and circuitous route which covers all the highlights we want to include, and allows us to alight and reboard at our leisure.

Our tour will likely begin with a visit to Trinity College and the Book of Kells. Founded by Queen Elizabeth I to "civilize" Dublin, Trinity College is Ireland's oldest and most famous college. You can walk in the footsteps of some of the college's noted alumni -- among them Jonathan Swift, Oscar Wilde, Bram Stoker, and Samuel Beckett.

The Book of Kells is an illuminated manuscript that is a masterwork of Western calligraphy and is widely regarded as Ireland's finest national treasure. Transcribed by Celtic monks ca. 800, it contains the four Gospels of the New Testament in Latin. The decorations are all high quality and often highly complex. Some decorations can only be fully seen with magnifying glasses, although lenses of the required power are not known to have been available until hundreds of years after the book's completion!

Merrion Square warrants a stop in order to learn about Dublin's Georgian past. The square was laid out after 1762 and was largely complete by the beginning of the 19th century. It is considered one of the city's finest surviving squares and the best-preserved Georgian era residential architecture. It also contains a statue of Oscar Wilde, who resided in No. 1, Merrion Square from 1855 to 1876. Also nearby are several government buildings and cultural institutions.

Our tour continues to St Stephens Green, a leafy and peaceful oasis located at the top of Grafton St, the main street and commercial heart of Dublin, popular for shopping and people watching. We will stroll down Grafton and enter the area of Temple Bar, located on the south bank of the River Liffey, with it well-preserved medieval street pattern and narrow cobbled streets. It is promoted as "Dublin's cultural quarter" with many pubs and a lively nightlife.

Onto St. Patrick's Cathedral, the largest church in Ireland. Unusually, Dublin has two cathedrals belonging to the Church of Ireland, which act effectively as co-cathedrals. The site of St. Patrick's Cathedral is said to be the earliest Christian site in Ireland, where St. Patrick baptized converts. The present building was built between 1191 and 1270.

For friends of world literature this is a pilgrimage and a must -- Jonathan Swift of "Gulliver" fame was Dean and is buried in the cathedral.

The formal part of our guided tour ends at this point. Your bus ticket is good for the day, and includes stops at the Guiness Storehouse, the National Museum, and Writer's Museum, among others. Alternatively you can wander the charming, winding streets and perhaps enjoy a pub lunch and pint of Guiness! Your Tour Leader / guide can help plan your afternoon.

Overnight in Dublin. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Dublin - Glendalough - Waterford*

This morning we depart for Waterford.

Travelling south we pass through the Wicklow Mountains and arrive in the beautiful valley of Glendalough. The monastic ruins of Glendalough create an atmosphere of romance and sanctity. After a visit of Glendalough, we continue on through the wooded river valley and the Vale of Avoca, famous for its handweavers. The poetic beauty of this region once inspired the writings of Thomas Moore.

At the end of our day we arrive in Waterford, the largest town of the southeast. Situated on the bank of the River Suir, Waterford is best known for its glassworks whose production dates back to 1783. On arrival we will have a brief orientation tour of Waterford. (NOTE: We no longer include a tour of the Glassworks as most past travellers have told us that they would have preferred more time at Glendalough and Avoca which are more in line with the cultural / historical nature of our tour).

Overnight in Waterford. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Waterford - Cobh - Killarney*

This morning we continue to Killarney via Cobh in County Cork.

Cobh was known as Queenstown for some decades before reverting to its old Irish name in 1922: the Cobh (cove) of Cork. There is nowhere in Ireland more full of poignant memories than this embarkation point for hundreds of thousands of mostly hungry and penniless Irish men and women who left for America left to build a new life, especially in the Famine years of 1844-48. Many thrived and prospered, but many died on the journey in the terrible travelling conditions of the time.

We visit the Cobh Heritage Centre in which the story of Cobh's unique origin are dramatically recalled through a multimedia exhibition. Visitors can explore the conditions on board the early emigrant vessels to America and a convict ship leaving Cobh to Australia in 1801, discover the connections between Queenstown and the Titanic, and learn about Annie Moore, the first emigrant ever to be processed at Ellis Island.

A pleasant drive west brings us to Killarney, nestled just off the northern tip of Killarney National Park. 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.

Overnight in Killarney. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Killarney - Ring of Kerry - Killarney*

As we circle around the Ring of Kerry today we are continuously presented with a succession of picturesque land and seascapes. This is some of Ireland's most spectacular scenery, including Dingle Bay, Ireland's highest mountain, Carrantuohill; Moll's Gap, Ladies' View and the world-famous Lakes of Killarney.

We return to Killarney. Before and / or after dinner you can explore colourful laneways, historic buildings dating back to the days of the landlord, and experience the ambience of busy streets in the town centre. Killarney is a lively hub of activity with many shops, restaurants, and pubs.

Overnight in Killarney. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Killarney - Dingle Peninsula - Killarney*

The Dingle Peninsula offers us more superb coastal scenery with a variety of beaches, mountains, and countryside. There is no other landscape in western Europe with the density and variety of archaeological monuments as the Dingle Peninsula. This mountainous finger of land which juts into the Atlantic Ocean has supported various tribes and populations for almost 6,000 years. Because of the peninsula's remote location, and lack of specialised agriculture, there is a remarkable preservation of over 2,000 monuments.

We visit the Blasket Centre in Dun Chaoin, at the western end of the Dingle Peninsula. The centre celebrates the Irish language and the distinctive character of the people who once lived on the Blasket Islands. A main focus of the centre is the unique literary achievements of this isolated community off the Kerry coast, which was evacuated in 1953.

We will also stop at the Gallarus Oratory, one of the finest examples of an early Christian church to be found in Ireland, dating from 800 AD. As early as the 6th century monastic settlements were built in remote areas of Ireland. This small oratory, built without mortar, uses corbel vaulting a technique developed by Neolithic tomb-makers.

We return to Killarney.

Overnight in Killarney. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Killarney - Cliffs of Moher - Galway*

Heading north we continue to Galway, via the car ferry across the Shannon from Tarbet to Killimer. The highlight of our day is a visit to the Cliffs of Moher. These great dark cliffs rise from the Atlantic to heights over 200 m (656 feet). The panorama of the Clare coast is breathtaking, and these remarkable cliffs are home to a great variety of seabirds, including a puffin colony. On a clear day you can see the Aran Islands off in the distance.

We also pass through an area called the Burren, a karst limestone region of approximately 300 sq km. It is composed of limestone pavements, which are eroded in a distinctive pattern known as 'karren.' This pavement is crisscrossed by cracks known as grykes and underneath the pavement there are huge caves and rivers that suddenly flood when it rains. It contains dozens of megalithic tombs and celtic crosses and a ruined Cistercian Abbey from the 12th century.

We continue to Galway, one of Europe's fastest-growing cities with a population of 61,000. 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. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Galway - Connemara - Galway*

Today we tour one of the most beautiful regions of this country, the Connemara. This has long been regarded as the true real essence of Ireland. As with most of County Galway, Connemara's history goes back thousands of years. A local archaeologist found a spearhead in Streamstown dating back 7,000 years. It was a rare and wonderful find as the people of that era were known to be nomadic hunter gatherers. Other sites found in the area suggest the change over from the nomadic lifestyle to that of farming communities.

Connemara's coast is very convoluted and it has a wealth of lovely beaches, little islands and harbours. The famous green/white Connemara marble was a trade item used by the inhabitants of the time and it continues to be of great value today. As part of today's tour we will visit Kylemore Abbey, a neo-Gothic mansion where Benedictine Nuns now house a convent school.

We return to Galway with the afternoon free to wander about on your own.

In the center of town, on Shop Street, is Lynch's 'Castle', dating from 1490 and renovated in the 19th century. It's the oldest Irish medieval town house used daily for commercial purposes (it's now a branch of the Allied Irish Bank). The exterior is full of carved gargoyles, impressive coats of arms, and other decorative stonework. Walk northwest 1 block to Market Street, and you'll see the Lynch Memorial Window embedded in a wall above a built-up Gothic doorway. It commemorates the 16th-century Mayor James Lynch FitzStephen, who condemned his son to death for the murder of a Spanish merchant. During the 170-year heyday of the tribes, Galway grew wealthy and cosmopolitan, with particularly strong trade links to Spain. Close to the city docks, you can still see the area where Spanish merchants unloaded cargo from their galleons. The Spanish Arch was one of four arches built in 1594, and the Spanish Parade is a small open square where visitors strolled in the evening. Local legend has it that Christopher Columbus attended mass at Galway's St. Nicholas Collegiate Church before setting sail for the New World in 1477. Originally built in 1320, the church has been enlarged, rebuilt, and embellished over the years. It has also changed denominations at least four times.

Overnight in Galway. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Galway, Ireland - Londonderry / Derry, Northern Ireland*

Our early morning departure enables us to make the most of our day. Northward from Galway, we find beauty in the landscape as we travel from the west coast to the northern tip of the island. We pass through the once quiet village of Knock, which has since been transformed into a place of pilgrimage. In 1879, two village women saw apparitions on the gable of the church, and today more than one million pilgrims travel to see the 'Apparition at Knock'.

The beautiful and varied scenery continues as we proceed on to Sligo. Nearby we visit the grave of poet/playwrite, William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), one of Ireland's most accomplished and renown literary figures. We will also pass through Donegal, once a Viking stronghold at the mouth of the River Eske. We spend about an hour in Donegal town to visit Donegal Castle and Magee's, the home of Irish Tweed, arriving in Londonderry / Derry*, Northern Ireland 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 Derry. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Londonderry / Derry: City Tour*

We will start our walking tour at the city's original 17th Century walls which have withstood several sieges over the ages. Four main streets radiate out from the Diamond in the town centre where the town hall used to stand. We will be able to visit St Columb's Cathedral, one of the most important historic buildings within the walls. The history of the city from prehistoric times to the present can be seen in the Tower Museum, located in the O'Doherty Tower. The Guildhall, erected in 1890, is remarkably well preserved despite having been severely damaged twice during Northern Ireland's more recent tumultuous past. Its stained glass windows illustrate almost every episode of note in the city's history. Also outside of the city walls we will see the Long Tower Church, the oldest Roman Catholic church in town.

Overnight in Derry. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Londonderry / Derry - Giant's Causeway - Belfast*

Leaving 'Derry we head northeast along the coast road. 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. Today 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.

En route we visit spectacular Dunluce Castle where the limestone cliffs of the White Rocks end abruptly against a dark basalt outcrop crowned by the castle and joined to the mainland by an arched walkway. It is believed that the castle was built or (possibly) rebuilt by Richard de Burgh or one of his chief followers during the Anglo Norman period in Ireland. The site was certainly occupied as a fort prior to this time. The castle which has seen many additions to its original structure over the centuries gradually fell into disuse from the late 1600s.

We travel further along the coastal route, eventually heading south with the North Channel to our left, arriving 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.

Overnight in Belfast. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Belfast: City Tour*

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 reburbishment), which dominates the main shopping area, was built in the grand Classical Renaissance style. We will visit St Anne's Cathedral, enlivened inside by mosaics and a floor made of stone from all parts of Ireland. Although the Cathedral was begun in 1899, it was not completed until 1981.

During part of our day we will drive by the historic Belfast Port and Harbour, once the UK's largest shipyard and the building site of such famous liners as the Titanic. You will also learn much about the city's more recent history and the challenges it has faced during the times of 'The Troubles'.

After our morning tour we return to our hotel for an afternoon at leisure.

Overnight in Belfast. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Belfast, Northern Ireland - Dublin, Ireland*

Today we depart Belfast and head south, stopping at Lisburn Linen to see the development of the linen industry of Northern Ireland. We also make a stop in Hillsborough, an exceptionally historic and picturesque village just outside of Lisburn.

We arrive in Dublin in time to allow for some last minute museum browsing or shopping.

Overnight in Dublin. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Departure*

Departure from Dublin.

SLAN ABHAILE!! Meal plan: Breakfast.