

## 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 begin with a guided visit to one of Ireland's most famous graveyards, the hauntingly beautiful Glasnevin Cemetery. En route, our guide will provide an introduction to Ireland and Dublin as we drive through the city, passing the River Liffey, government buildings, traditional pubs, and the Botanical Gardens. 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 stories of these rogues and rebels, the famous and the infamous!

We stop at the O'Connell Tower, the tombstone of the great Irish liberator, Daniel O'Connell, where you can climb the steps to the top for breathtaking views over Dublin and the Irish Sea.

After our cemetery visit, we continue with a panoramic bus tour of Dublin's main highlights, including Merrion Square with the Oscar Wilde memorial statue and Georgian-style homes, St. Patrick's Cathedral, the President's House, and Phoenix Park.

We'll visit the exterior of Trinity College, Ireland's most prestigious university, and make stops to explore Dublin Castle's courtyard, see the Molly Malone statue, walk along Grafton Street, and experience the atmosphere of Temple Bar.

This evening we include a night of fun and merriment at the Merry Ploughboy, a 200-year-old pub in south Dublin. Here we enjoy a three-course dinner as we experience an evening of traditional Irish music and dance performance from champion Irish dancers.

\* 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: [www.visittrinity.ie/book-of-kells-experience/](http://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 and travel south to County Tipperary for a visit to the Rock of Cashel. 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.

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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.

We continue to 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.

\* For guests who may be combining our Ireland and Scotland programs into one trip, you'll have the unique opportunity to experience both Irish and Scottish whisky-making traditions firsthand. You'll be able to compare the distinct characteristics, production methods, and flavours of both countries' national spirits. Irish whiskey is typically triple-distilled for smoothness, while Scotch whisky often features the distinctive smokiness of peat. After experiencing both, you'll be well-equipped to enter the age-old friendly debate: Irish or Scottish - who makes the world's finest whisky/whiskey?

Overnight in Cork.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

#### Day 4 Cork - The Ring of Kerry - Killarney

We begin our day with a panoramic bus tour of Cork, exploring Ireland's second-largest city and its Victorian architecture and vibrant culture.

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. Next we visit Killorglin, known for the Puck Fair Celtic festival, where a goat is crowned king of the village!

Our Ring of Kerry adventure includes visits to traditional Irish experiences: we'll visit a recreated bog village with thatched houses showcasing bygone Irish life, and enjoy a fascinating sheep dog herding demonstration where skilled Border Collies work with their master to round up and separate sheep - a true highlight of Irish rural culture.

Continuing on our scenic drive, we'll stop at Waterville, often frequented by Charlie Chaplin and known for its early Christian monasteries and views of the Skellig Rocks (featured in recent Star Wars films). We stop at the colourful village of Sneem with its brightly painted houses before visiting scenic viewpoints including Ladies' View and Moll's Gap, offering spectacular photo opportunities of the Gap of Dunloe valley.

We visit Killarney National Park, which offers stunning views of the Lakes of Killarney and the Black Valley, before returning to Killarney town for the evening.

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 Meeting 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

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This morning we enjoy a spectacular excursion along the Causeway Coastal Route. We begin at 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 from the sea to the cliff. Some of the approximately 40,000 columns reach up to over 12 m (40 feet) in height.

From the Giant's Causeway, we continue to the picturesque seaside town of Ballycastle, where we'll have free time for lunch and to explore this charming coastal destination. After lunch, we'll enjoy a scenic drive to Glenariff Forest Park, the Queen of the Glens. We enjoy free time here to explore at your own pace, taking in the natural beauty of this magnificent glen.

Our final stop takes us to Whitehead, a colourful seaside village on the Antrim Coast. At Whitehead, enjoy a stroll through the village with our guide, seeing Castle Chichester, a 17th-century ruined tower. Throughout the day, we'll be treated to spectacular scenic drives along the coast.

We plan to arrive in Belfast in the late afternoon.

Overnight in Belfast.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 9 Belfast Discovery

This morning we begin with a comprehensive coach tour of Belfast, exploring the main sights of this vibrant Victorian city. Our guided tour takes us through the city's most important districts: the elegant Queen's Quarter around Queen's University, the Cathedral Quarter with its cobbled streets and cultural venues, and the Titanic Quarter where the famous ship was built. We'll see the imposing Belfast City Hall, built in the grand Classical Renaissance style, and drive through different neighborhoods to understand Belfast's complex history, including areas with famous political murals that tell the story of the city's past.

Our guide will explain Belfast's transformation from a small settlement in the 1600s to one of the UK's most important ports and industrial centers. We'll see key buildings like the Grand Opera House, the Albert Clock (Belfast's leaning tower), and the beautiful Botanic Gardens area.

After our city overview, we delve deeper into Belfast's maritime heritage along the Maritime Mile. 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 with remaining infrastructure, including Titanic's Slipway and Dry Dock. Our walking tour includes the Harland & Wolff Administration Building and Drawing Offices, plus historic vessels such as the SS Nomadic.

Next, we visit the award-winning Titanic Belfast, which tells the story of the Titanic 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.

Overnight in Belfast.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 10 Departure

Departure from Belfast.

SLAN ABHAILE!!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast