

Trip to Ireland & Northern Ireland – May 2018 – Carey & Donna Beamesderfer

The “Emerald Isle” – *The greenest place we’ve ever been to.*



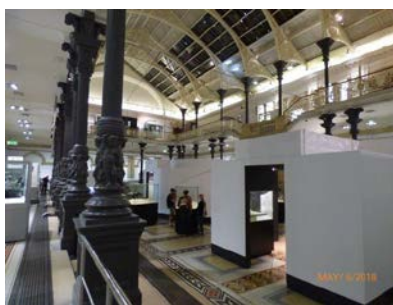
Map of the bus tour route – starting in Dublin

Ireland is an island in north-western Europe which has been divided politically since 1920. Most of the island is made up of the Republic of Ireland. The remainder is Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom. We traveled to Ireland with Gate 1 Tours. This was what they called a ‘Signature Tour,’ their highest level tour package. We flew from El Paso to New York, then to Dublin where we met our tour manager – Anne Maxwell, and 16 traveling companions.

Our journey began in Dublin on Sunday, May 6, when we arrived at the Dublin Airport around 6:30am. We were then bussed to The Marker Hotel in downtown Dublin, where we, unfortunately, had to sit in the lobby until our room was ready around 11:00am. After resting a few hours, we walked to the Museum of Archeology where we viewed gold, bog bodies, ceramics, glass, Viking artefacts as well as many other archaeological objects found in Ireland and from other places around the world. That evening we had a “welcome dinner” at the hotel.



The Marker Hotel



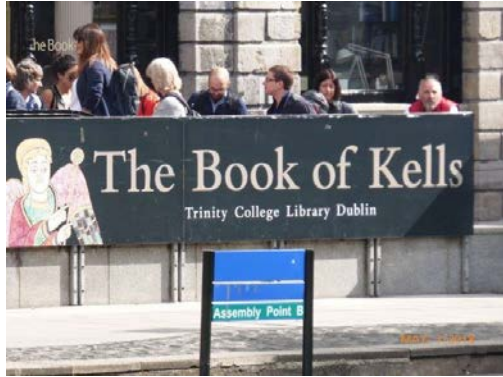
National Museum of Archeology



Welcome Dinner at hotel

The 16 people in our group were all Americans from various parts of the country, including a couple from Santa Teresa, who we met for the first time here in Dublin (Jeff & Marty). Two other couples in the group were originally from Taiwan, and are now residents of the US. One couple has a Rotary friend by the name of Medicare, who we happen to travel with on our ITHF trip to Japan & South Korea. Small world !!

Day 2 (Mon 05/07) began with a bus tour of Dublin, including stops at Phoenix Park, a tour of Trinity College, and the Book of Kells & Long Library within the college. We also had an opportunity to walk in St. Stephens Green Park before lunch.



The Book of Kells contains lavishly decorated copy, in Latin, of the four gospels, and it was written over 1000 years ago. It is located at the Trinity College library which is one of the world's great research libraries, holding the largest collection of manuscripts and printed books in Ireland. The "Long Room" houses around 200,000 of the libraries oldest books, and a harp dating from the 15th century.



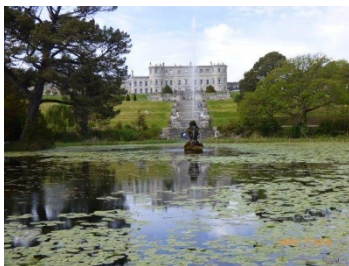
The "Long Room" in the Trinity College library



15th Century Harp

In the afternoon we visited Powerscourt Gardens, recently voted No.3 in the World's Top Ten Gardens by National Geographic. The Gardens stretch over 47 acres and offer visitors a blend of formal gardens, sweeping terraces, statues, ornamental lakes, secret hollows and scenic walks. Powerscourt Gardens includes The Walled Gardens, The Italian Garden, The Dolphin Pond, The Japanese Gardens, Pets Cemetery and Pepperpot Tower, among other features and attractions.

Later we drove to Ballyknocken Cookery School; one of Donna's highlights. There we met Irish Celebrity Chef Catherine Fulvio, who taught us how to make Irish scones. (I ate 6 of them)



Powerscourt Gardens



One of the garden areas



Ballyknocken Cookery School

On day 3 (Tue 05/08) we had an early tour of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin Castle & State Apts followed by a 2-hour tour of the famous Guinness Brewery at St. James Gate.



Since Saint Patrick baptized Christian converts over 1500 years ago, this holy site has been a place of spiritual encounter for countless generations. <- ->



St. Patrick's Cathedral is the National Cathedral of the (Anglican) Church of Ireland.

The Dublin Castle & State Apts. – Not much is left to view in the Dublin Castle, other than the main tower, however, below the Castle, excavations have uncovered parts of the structure of the medieval castle alongside the remains of some of Viking Dublin's original defenses. These defenses take the form of a stone covered embankment, a section of which has been preserved within the massive circular walls of the thirteenth-century Powder Tower. The State Apartments dominate the south range of the Upper Courtyard. They were built as the residential and public quarters of the vice regal court and were the seat of the executive and focus of fashionable and extravagant social life. Today the Apartments are the venue for Ireland's presidential inaugurations and prestigious functions.



Walls of the Viking Defenses



Extravagant rooms in the State Apts next to Dublin Castle



We spent the balance of the afternoon exploring the home of Guinness beer, followed by a great dinner at The Fire Restaurant in Dublin. Guinness is a really dark beer which is popular all over the world. Its an acquired taste! We were all given samples to try.



On day 4 (Wed 05/09) we were on our way to Killarney. On the way we stopped at the Irish National Stud Farm & Japanese Gardens. The Stud Farm is a champion thoroughbred horse breeding facility in Tully, Kildare, County, Kildare, Ireland. Part of the facility includes a world renown Japanese Garden. Devised by Colonel William Hall Walker, a wealthy Scotsman from a famous brewing family, the gardens were laid out by Japanese master horticulturist Tassa Eida and his son Minoru. Their aim was, through trees, plants, flowers, lawns, rocks and water, to symbolize the 'Life of Man'.



Champion Thoroughbred Horses



Donna touring the Japanese Gardens

Later we enjoyed a photo stop at Cahir Castle before having lunch at Molanna Dairy Farm. One of the incredible experiences included in this trip, was getting to go into this home to sit and talk & listen to the family who owns it. We arrived at the farm and were greeted by Paddy, his wife, and their daughter-in-law. After lunch we went with Paddy as he took us to the lower end of the Dairy Farm, into one of the rooms in the house where he shared with us photos of his ancestors and stories from the past. He recited a poem that he made up and he described the stories of how his grandfather's grandfather lived through several plagues and earthquakes and wars. He described the role that church has played in his life. The family was very simple but there was much complexity to their lifestyle. We could tell that he was very proud of his heritage, his home and the farm, The lunch was delicious.



Photo Stop at Cahir Castle



Lunch at Molanna Dairy Farm



Paddy telling us stories

On day 5 (Thur 05/10) we found ourselves at the Great Southern Killarney Hotel getting ready for a horse-drawn carriage ride into Killarney National Park and a tour of the Muckross house.



Horse drawn carriage ride

Renowned for their wit and charming storytelling, a local “jarvey” guided us through the park on a horse drawn cart telling us about the park, as well as tales of local history and old Irish legends.



Killarney National Park

Killarney is Ireland’s oldest National Park, formed in 1932 when Senator Arthur Vincent and his family entrusted Muckross House & Estate into the care of the Irish State. The park is 26,000 acres within the McGillicuddy Reeks Mountain Range.



Muckross House

Muckross House, now a fully accredited museum, is an elegant 19th century Victorian Mansion on the shores of Muckross Lake, the second of Killarney’s three lakes, famed for their beauty and inspiration.

Later that morning our bus took us on scenic drive through the Ring of Kerry, part of the Wild Atlantic Way. The Ring of Kerry is a looping road on the west coast of Ireland. It meanders along the coast a pristine area famous for its awe-inspiring natural beauty.



The **Wild Atlantic Way** is the world's longest defined coastal touring route. The diversity and uniqueness of this route has not gone unnoticed with its unearthly chasms and cathedral-shaped islands setting the scene for one of the most iconic and much-loved film universes — Star Wars - was & is filmed here.



Upon returning to Killarney we had dinner at Quinlan’s Seafood Bar before attending the Celtic Steps performance at the Killarney Racecourse.



Quinlan’s Seafood Bar



Dancers in the Celtic Steps performance

Celtic Steps, The Show, brings together the raw talent of popular Irish dance with the authenticity of traditional Irish music. The show aims to provide a magical evening for its guests, taking them on a journey through the nation’s colorful past and history to present day Ireland through the language of music, song and of course, dance. We bought a CD of the show for our 14 year old granddaughter, Avery, who is a talented, award winning Irish dancer.

Day 6 (Fri 05/11) began with a river crossing on the “Shannon Breeze” ferry and then an extended stop at the most visited attraction in Ireland - the Cliffs of Moher. The cliffs rise 400 ft above the Atlantic Ocean at Hag's Head, and reach their maximum height of 702 ft just north of O'Brien's Tower, several miles away. The cliffs are one of Ireland's most spectacular views.



The Cliffs of Moher - The cliffs consist mainly of beds of Namurian shale and sandstone, with the oldest rocks being found at the bottom of the cliffs. From the top you can see 300 million year old river channels cutting through the base of the cliffs. Colonies of Atlantic Puffin live at the base of the cliffs. This is a UNESCO Global Geo Park. The height of the cliffs is staggering and hard to imagine unless you are there.

We returned to the hotel following a city tour of Galway. After dinner at the hotel we went to visit Tommy & Jacquelyn at their house. Who are **they** – you say? **They** are an Irish couple who played Irish music for us on some very unique instruments - the Uilleann Pipes & Concertina.



Tommy & Jacquelyn's Home



Playing the Uilleann Pipes & Concertina

Day 7 (Sat 05/12) had us visiting the Connemara Heritage & History Center where we were taken on a guided tour in a tractor drawn carriage to a hilltop which overlooks the Roundstone Bog Complex. It is one of the largest tracts of blanket bog in Ireland. The bog began to form in Ireland approximately 7000 years ago. Prior to the formation of the bog the land was covered in forest. Today remains of the trees are found underneath the bog by turf cutters. Most of them are preserved due to the fact that there is no oxygen in the bog. Turf has been used as a fuel throughout Ireland for hundreds of years. Today the Roundstone Bog is protected by the European Union and is a Natural Heritage Area. We visited the Dan O'hara homestead and witnessed a bog turf cutting demonstration.



Bog – Turf cutting demonstration



Dan O'Hara House – Exterior



Dan O'Hara House - Interior

Dan O'Hara, famous Irish singer and song-writer, was indeed a real person who lived in the years leading up to the famine of 1846/47 with his wife & eight children. He had a homestead in Connemara, but when he increased the size of the windows in his cottage, this "improvement" led the landlord to increase his rent. When he could not pay he was evicted. He emigrated to New York but during the passage over his wife and three of his children died. He

arrived in New York a sad and broken man and made a meager living by selling matches on the street corners of the city. He went on to write and sing of this story which became the Irish emigrant song(s) for all the Irish who were forced out of their homes and had to flee to America to survive.

After lunch at the Abbeyglen Castle hotel we toured Connemara National Park and had a grand tour of the magnificent Kylemore Abbey & Victorian Walled garden.



Kylemore Abbey



Victorian Walled Garden

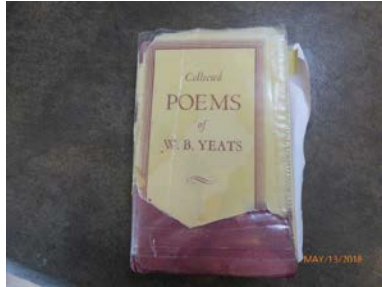
The story of Kylemore Abbey is a truly remarkable one that spans over 150 years of tragedy, romance, innovation, education and spirituality. Built as a breathtaking Castle in 1868, it is now the Abbey and home of the Benedictine community of nuns. Inspired by his love for his wife Margaret, and his hopes for his beloved Ireland, Henry created an estate boasting ‘all the innovations of the modern age’. An enlightened landlord and vocal advocate of the Irish people, Henry poured his life’s energy into creating an estate that would showcase what could be achieved in the remote wilds of Connemara. Today Kylemore Abbey is owned and run by the Benedictine community who have been in residence here since 1920.

We capped off our day with a dinner on the Orient Express. That’s right – the Orient Express, or at least the transferred sections of several of the cars from that train. The dining cars are part of the experience at the Glenlo Hotel. They are physically located on the grounds and serve as a restaurant for the hotel. This was a very unique dining experience.



Dinner on the Orient Express.
←

Day 8 (Sun 05/13) – We left Galway and headed to Sligo to have lunch at the home of Damien Brennan, an author and poetry reading specialist. His specialty is reading poetry from the famous Irish poet, William Butler Yeats, and this lunch and reading is called the “Yeats Experience.”



William Butler Yeats was an Irish poet and one of the foremost figures of 20th-century literature. A pillar of both the Irish and British literary establishments, he helped found the Abbey Theatre, and in his later years served as an Irish Senator for two terms. We didn't know what to expect at this event, but it proved to be both interesting and educational. The food was very good also. We got to meet Damien's wife and two dogs. They live in a beautiful home with an outstanding view of a lake and mountains. After the lunch the bus driver took us to the gravesite of Yeats for a photo stop.

Our next stop was at the Belleek Pottery museum, our first crossover into Northern Ireland. Although this was not one of our favorite stops; established in 1857 Belleek Pottery holds a very special place in the cultural and commercial heritage of County Fermanagh. Its an impressive building, but more of a retail, high priced tourist trap than anything else.

We arrived at our hotel, in Donegal, Ireland around 5:15pm. The hotel, the Lough Eske Castle Hotel & Spa, a restored castle sits within 43 acres of forest woodland, surrounded by the shores of Lough Eske on one side and the Blue Stack Mountains on the other. It was named as one of the top three 5-star hotels in all of Ireland. This made our Super 8 motel in New York look pretty shabby :>)



Day 9 (Mon 05/14) found us at Glenveagh National Park where we stopped to visit the Glenveagh Castle & Gardens. This turned out to be a great day for hiking to the view point, which we did, after touring the castle and gardens. The hike was a bit of a challenge because we are certainly not as young and energetic as we used to be. Anyway, it was fun.



Glenveagh Castle



Glenveagh Gardens



Glenveagh Castle from the viewpoint

Glenveagh Castle is a 19th century mansion built between 1867 and 1873. Its construction in a remote mountain setting was inspired by the Victorian view of a romantic highland retreat. The Castle Gardens are regarded as one of Ireland's outstanding horticultural masterpieces. Their mission is to conserve and enhance the garden as an inspirational environment that cherishes and protects the biodiversity of the plant world. They grow many rare plants unique to Irish Gardens.

We made a brief stop at the Donegal Tweed visitor center before proceeding to the highlight of the day – the Slieve League Cliffs. Standing at the top of the magnificent Slieve League Cliffs, it feels like you're at the very edge of the world. Swooping down from the mountain these cliffs are among the highest sea cliffs in Europe. From the highest point on the cliffs, it's a staggering 2,000 foot drop into the swirling Atlantic Ocean below.



On Day 10 (Tue 05/15) we officially entered Northern Ireland in the town of Derry, around 10:30am. This town was the ignition point of the IRA & British war in the late 1960's, early 1970's. The **Irish Republican Army (IRA)** is any of several paramilitary movements in Ireland in the 20th and 21st centuries dedicated to Irish republicanism, the belief that all of Ireland should be an independent republic from the United Kingdom. It was also characterized by the belief that political violence was necessary to achieve that goal. We were introduced to the story behind the violence in the 60's/70's, by a local guide, as we toured the town of Derry by bus.



There are still political differences, but they are living in peace now. PEACE Bridge – over Foyle River

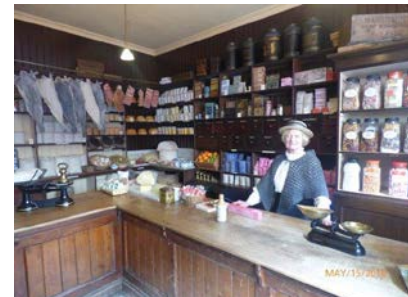
We toured the Walled City and St. Columb's Cathedral before departing for the Ulster American Folk Park.



The Walled City of Derry



St. Columbs Cathedral



Ulster American Folk Park

Not only is Derry the last walled city to be built in Europe, it is also the first planned city to be built in Ireland, the only walled city in Ireland & the walls are the largest monument in state care in Northern Ireland. The Walls were built between 1613-1618 for protection for the early 'planted' Protestant settlers from England and Scotland against the Catholic Irish.

Construction work began in 1628 and the stone which records completion is to be seen in the porch of the Cathedral. The Cathedral was built of stone from local quarries and skilled stone cutters and masons had to be procured. The old pillars and arches bear testimony to sound judgement and first-rate craftsmanship.

We followed the trail of thousands of emigrants from the thatched cottages of Ulster, on board a full-scale emigrant sailing ship to the log cabins of the American Frontier. This tourist park details the story of many Irish emigrants who fled starvation and death in Ireland during the great famine. Very interesting.

On day 11 (Wed 05/16) we arrived in Belfast, where we stayed at the Culloden Estate Hotel & Spa, the most prestigious luxury 5 star hotel in Northern Ireland. (Note: We don't usually travel in this kind of luxury, but why not – you only live once – right?) In any case the real highlights for the day were the Giant's Causeway, the city tour of Belfast and of course, no visit to Northern Ireland would be complete without seeing the Titanic Exhibition in Belfast. We did all three of the above.

First – the **Giant's Causeway**. The jewel in the crown of the fabulous coast of Antrim. A site of World Heritage and therefore ranked alongside Mount Everest and the Giant Redwoods of California for its importance to humankind. Volcanic activity helped the legendary Finn Mc Cool forge this wonder of the World some 60 Million years ago. Yes, this is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is the largest series of hexagonal basalt columns created by an ancient volcanic eruption on Earth, a geological wonder.



Entrance to Giant Causeway



Standing in front of the basalt columns



The Giants Causeway was included on the World Heritage site list in November 1986. It is on the list as both a cultural and natural site, one of only 25 in the world to achieve this status. This is because the Causeway meets two of UNESCO's criteria for this:

- (1) It is a prime example of earth's evolutionary history during the tertiary epoch.
- (2) It contains rare and superlative natural phenomena

The site also has outstanding cultural value in that it contains the wreck of the Girona.

The Giant's Causeway lies at the foot of the basalt cliffs along the sea coast on the edge of the Antrim plateau in Northern Ireland. It is made up of some 40,000 massive black basalt columns sticking out of the sea. The dramatic sight has inspired legends of giants (Finn McCool) striding over the sea to Scotland. Geological studies of these formations over the last 300 years have greatly contributed to the development of earth science, and show that this striking landscape was caused by volcanic activity during the Tertiary period, some 50-60 million years ago.

Second – a city tour of **Belfast** - meaning "rivermouth of the sandbanks," it is the capital city of Northern Ireland, located on the banks of the River Lagan on the east coast of Ireland. It is the largest city in the state of Northern Ireland and second largest city on the island. The city suffered greatly during the Troubles, and was once considered in the 1970s and 1980s as one of the world's most dangerous cities. But since the 21st century the city has undergone a sustained period of calm, free from the intense political violence of former years, & substantial economic and commercial growth. Today, Belfast remains a center for industry, as well as the arts, higher education, business, & law, & is the economic engine of Northern Ireland.

Third – the **Titanic Experience Exhibition** – This was listed as the top tourist attraction in the world in 2017. It tells the story of the ill-fated Titanic from the time and place it was built and sailed on its maiden voyage on April 10, 1912 from Belfast, until it hit an iceberg at 11:45pm on April 14, 1912, then sank on April 15, 1912 at 2:20am, with the loss of over 1000 lives.



The Titanic Exhibition & Museum



Model of the Titanic inside the museum

To honor the occasion of the visit to the Titanic Exhibition, we were treated to a special seven course meal – a meticulously recreated dinner inspired by the First Class menu on the Titanic, boasting gourmet delights from the Edwardian era.



Course #1



Course #2



Course #3



Course #4



Course #5



Course #6



Course #7 - Desert

Day 12 – (Thur 05/17) included a tour of the St. Patrick Center in Downpatrick. This is the only permanent exhibition in the world about Ireland’s Patron Saint. Everyone knows of St. Patrick’s Day – March 17 – the day our grandson Drew was born. So, who was St. Patrick and what religion does he represent? This tour tells all.



Entrance to St. Patrick’s Center



St. Patrick’s Grave Site

Saint Patrick was a fifth-century Romano-British Christian missionary and bishop in Ireland. Known as the "Apostle of Ireland", he is the primary patron saint of Ireland, along with saints Brigit of Kildare and Columba. He is venerated in the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Churches, Anglican Communion, the Old Catholic Church and in the Eastern Orthodox Church as equal-to-the-apostles and *Enlightener of Ireland*. The dates of Patrick's life cannot be fixed with certainty, but there is broad agreement that he was active as a missionary in Ireland during the second half of the 5th century.

After this we headed back to The Marker Hotel in Dublin to complete our tour of Ireland. We celebrated the tour with a fabulous farewell steak dinner at the Marco Pierre White restaurant in Dublin. The following day we were taken to the airport, where we flew from Dublin to Heathrow in London, then to New York. We stayed overnight in New York (at the Super 8 again), then flew to Phoenix and arrived in El Paso at midnight, where we took an Uber ride home.

In summary, it was a fantastic trip, filled with 5-star hotels, great food, incredible sights and new friends. As I said in the beginning, Ireland is the greenest country we’ve ever been to, and the weather was somehow magically transformed from perpetual rain before we came, to sunny days with clear skies and perfect temperatures. Perhaps it was the luck of the Irish that made all that happen, but in our case, it was one of the best trips we’ve ever taken. Go to Ireland, add it to your bucket list. It’s well worth your time and money and the Irish people are some of the friendliest in the world.

Keep Traveling – As St. Augustine said – “The world is a book and those who do not travel read only a page.”

Carey & Donna Beamesderfer