



TOUR OF IRELAND

Day One

Arrive into Dublin Airport, where you will be met by your **private taxi for the transfer into central Dublin**, to check-in at your hotel and this will be your base for the next **2 nights**. The remainder of the day is at leisure to relax after your overnight flight, or for some independent sightseeing.

Day Two

After breakfast, take an **Open Top Bus Tour of Dublin**, taking in the major sights and an opportunity to hop on and hop off and visit the various attractions along the way. This evening dinner will be served at the **Irish House Party**, which takes place in the private parlour room of a beautiful family owned Georgian building and you will be entertained by Irish musicians and dancers in an intimate and homely setting. **Overnight Dublin.**

Day Three

Depart for the drive to **Glendalough**, located in the Wicklow Mountains National Park, and it was founded by Saint Kevin in the 6th century and it is a spectacular monastic settlement, nestled in a majestic glacial valley. This will be followed by the drive to Waterford for a factory tour of **Waterford Crystal**, giving you first hand access to all areas of traditional crystal production and then an opportunity to shop in its retail store. Check-in at your **accommodation in Waterford for overnight.**

Day Four

Depart for a photo opportunity at the **Rock of Cashel**, more formally St. Patrick's Rock, it is also known as Cashel of the Kings. It is reputedly the site of the conversion of Aenghus the King of Munster by St. Patrick in the 5th century AD. Long before the Norman invasion, The Rock of Cashel was the seat of the High Kings of Munster, although there is little structural evidence of their time here. Most of the buildings on the current site date from the 12th and 13th centuries when the rock was gifted to the church. The buildings represent both Hiberno-Romanesque and Germanic influences in their architecture. This will be followed by a visit to **Blarney Castle**, built nearly six hundred years ago by one of Ireland's greatest chieftains, Cormac MacCarthy, and has been attracting attention beyond Munster ever since. Over the last few hundred years, millions have flocked to Blarney, making it a world landmark and one of Ireland's greatest treasures. There will be an opportunity to kiss the **Blarney Stone**, the legendary Stone of Eloquence, found at the top of the Tower. You will then take the journey to **Killarney**, to check-in at your accommodation and this will be your base for the next **3 nights**.

Day Five

Today you will take the **Ring of Kerry tour**, a journey through some of the country's most outstanding scenery around the Iveragh Peninsula. Stunning mountain and coastal scenery combined with colourful towns and villages will make this one of the highlights of your tour. Your journey will include the attractive village of **Sneem** and a pause at **Moll's Gap** for a panoramic view of the three Lakes of Killarney. Following the peninsula drive, you then arrive at **Muckross House** for a visit to this magnificent Victorian mansion, completed in 1843 for Henry Arthur Herbert. The location of the house is spectacular, close to the eastern shore of Muckross Lake and set beneath the impressive backdrop of Torc and Mangerton Mountains. Return to your accommodation in **Killarney for overnight.**

Day Six

Today you will visit the **Dingle Peninsula**, made famous as the location for the movie Ryan's Daughter. The Dingle Peninsula has the most rugged Atlantic coastline in Kerry and is scattered with forts and pre-historic huts such as the Gallarus Oratory. Much of Irish heritage is maintained in this Irish (Gaelic) speaking region including traditional music and art forms. Considered by many to have some of Europe's most spectacular scenery, the peninsula also supports both a rare and unique assortment of flora and fauna. Sleah Head is the most westerly point in Europe and standing there, looking towards America, instils a feeling of excitement and empathy with the millions of emigrants who took this route. There are splendid views around Sleah Head, especially of the Blasket Islands and the scattered rocks. Return to your accommodation in **Killarney for overnight**.

Day Seven

Depart Killarney for the journey to Limerick, stopping along the way in the village of **Adare**, renowned as being one of the most picturesque villages in Ireland. It has a unique mix of architecture ranging from traditional thatched roof cottages to the more English Tudor-style buildings which are a remnant of the old Dunraven Estate. On then for a visit to **King John's Castle**, a 13th century castle on 'King's Island' in the heart of medieval Limerick City. The Castle overlooks the majestic River Shannon, offering wonderful views of Limerick City. Discover history at its best, magnificent views and life in Norman times. Explore 800 years of history brought to life in the imaginative historical exhibition, excavated pre-Norman houses, fortifications, siege mines, and the battlement walks. You will then take the drive to **The Cliffs of Moher**, one of the most outstanding coastal features of Ireland and they ascend to over 700 feet (213 metres) stretching south for nearly five miles (8km) to Hags Head. On arrival enjoy a visit to the **Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience**, which is set into the hillside. The centre is a unique cave like structure which minimizes the visual impact on this fabulous scenic location and uses a range of energy saving and eco-friendly features including geo-thermal, solar energy and water recycling. Continue to **Doolin**, now renowned world-wide as the traditional music capital of Ireland and rumour has it, that it was Doolin that J.R.R. Tolkien got his inspiration for 'The Lord of the Rings'. Check-in at your accommodation and the evening is at leisure to spend time in one of the **music pubs**, which are McDermott's, McGann's and O'Connors. **Overnight in Doolin**.

Day Eight

Depart Doolin for the drive to **Galway**, known as the City of Tribes for some time to explore before driving along the coast road to Spiddal and to view the splendour of **Galway Bay**. You will then take a tour of the beautiful **Connemara region**, just west of Galway, situated on the most western seaboard of Europe and this unspoilt region boasts breath taking scenery. The characteristic features of Connemara include its rugged, unpolluted coastline, dramatic mountains, numerous lakes and rivers and woodlands and the renowned **Connemara National Park**. The drive will take you through **Maam Cross**, the Connemara "crossroads", there is a replica of the cottage used in the 1950's John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara film "The Quiet Man" filmed locally. On then to **Roundstone**, this Connemara village is beautifully set on one of the most spectacular coastal drives in Ireland overlooking the Atlantic at the foot of Errisbeg Mountain. On arrival visit the **Roundstone Music and Craft Shop**, which lies within the walls of an old Franciscan Monastery and is a fine Craftsman's shop. The shop is owned and managed by "Malachy Bodhran"- Ireland's only full time Bodhran maker. Malachy explains his craft amidst the smell of goatskin, glue, varnish and perspiration. The story of the Bodhran, its name, why it's playing style is the cleverest idea in the world of manual percussion. It beater or bone originated as the leg of a sheep or goat..! Malachy made the stage drums for 'Riverdance' here in Roundstone. Regular talks and demonstrations are given about this famous instrument. You will then take the scenic route through **Clifden**, set at the head of Clifden Bay and in front of the Twelve Bens, it afford some spectacular views. **Check-in at your hotel in the area for overnight**.

Day Nine

Today you will visit **Kylemore Abbey**, the oldest of the Irish Benedictine Abbeys. The community of nuns, who have resided here since 1920, have a long history stretching back almost three hundred and forty years. Founded in Ypres, Belgium, in 1665, the house was formally made over to the Irish nation in 1682. The purpose of the abbey at Ypres was to provide an education and religious community for Irish woman during times of persecution here in Ireland.

Continue for a stop in **Leenane**, which overlooks magnificent Killary Harbour, Ireland's only fjord. You will then take the scenic drive to **Westport**, and the route will take you past **Doo Lough**, a long sheet of water with mountains rising steeply on all sides, you will then experience a succession of magnificent landscapes as you pass by **Glencullin Lough**, before the drive through the **Mweelrea Mountains** and **Sheefry Hills** to **Louisburgh**, (the name in Irish, Cluain Cearban, means The Meadow of the Buttercups), and it was renamed after the uncle of the Marquis of Sligo who, in 1758, helped capture the French fortress of Louisburgh in Nova Scotia. Continue to **Murrisk**, before passing the National Famine Monument, unveiled by President Mary Robinson in 1997, which commemorates all those who died in the Great Famine of 1845 – 49. Finally enjoy the breath-taking views of **Clew Bay** with its numerous islands (tops of submerged drumlins) and the glory of **Croagh Patrick**, Ireland's "Holy Mountain" and one of Ireland's most famous landmarks, soaring to a height of 762 metres. St. Patrick is reputed to have spent forty days and nights praying and fasting on the reek in 441 A.D. as part of his efforts to convert pagan Ireland to Christianity. A recent archaeological survey has shown that the summit of Croagh Patrick was a Bronze Age hillfort, complete with stone ramparts and dwellings. On arrival in **Westport**, **check-in at your accommodation for overnight.**

Day Ten

Depart for the journey to the **Giant's Causeway**, pausing for a photo opportunity at **Dunluce Castle**. You will have the opportunity to view the enormous hexagonal columns formed by volcanic activity over 60 million years ago and experience wonderful scenery along the coastal "Nine Glens of Antrim" route. On arrival enjoy a visit to the **Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre**, rising and blending into the landscape, with walls of glass, basalt columns and a state of the art interior designed by award winning architects Heneghan-Peng, it is truly innovative. The energy efficient building boasts a number of exhibition areas and a grass roof with 360 degree views of the Causeway coastline. Explore the interactive spaces, watch Finn McCool on the big screen and unlock the secrets of this inspirational landscape. Check-in at your **accommodation in the area for overnight.**

Day Eleven

Drive to Belfast for a visit to the newly-opened **Titanic Belfast** to learn about the famous liner through state-of-the-art displays. You will then continue to **Downpatrick** for a visit to the **Down County Museum**, where the rich heritage of County Down is brought to life in fascinating exhibitions, lively events, hands-on activities and award winning education programmes. The museum is located in the historic buildings of the eighteenth century County Gaol of Down. In addition to walking through the restored complex complete with cells, visitors can learn more about 9000 years of human history in County Down. Take the drive towards to Dublin, to check-in at your **castle accommodation and this will be your base for the next 2 nights.**

Day Twelve

After breakfast take the drive for a morning visit to **Brú na Bóinne Visitor Centre**, which interprets the Neolithic monuments of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth. The extensive exhibition includes a full scale replica of the chamber at Newgrange as well as a full model of one of the smaller tombs at Knowth. This will be followed by an afternoon visit to **Malahide Castle** and its humble beginnings began around 1185a.d., when the lands of Malahide and its harbour were presented to Richard Talbot for his loyal service as a Knight to Henry the Second of England. The oldest remaining parts of the castle date back to this era, when the castle, which was more of a fortified keep at the time began. The original structure has been extended and developed over the centuries and has provided a home and a sanctuary for the Talbot family for over 790 years. The only time during this extended period that the Talbots did not own the castle was from 1649 to 1660 when Miles Corbet took residence of the castle. He was given ownership of the castle and grounds, temporarily as it turned out by Oliver Cromwell, after the Cromwell invasion of Ireland. Following the end of the Cromwell reign Miles Corbet was executed and the Castle once more returned to the ownership of the Talbots. During King Edward IV reign in England the Castle was greatly extended and the famous towers were added to the four corners of the original structure. Return to your **castle accommodation for overnight.**

Day Thirteen

Take the journey to the **airport in time for your return flight home.**