



## **Belfast and Northern Ireland Plus Trip Notes** **July 2 – 17, 2018**

**Highlights** per [www.thewayfarers.com](http://www.thewayfarers.com) - Northern Ireland - Giant's Causeway & Glens of Antrim.  
July 8-14, 2018 – 6 nights

- Spectacular coastal walking around The Giant's Causeway.
- Belfast, tour and insight into healing from a painful past.
- Ferry trip to Wild Rathlin Island.
- Encounter The Gobbins, a dramatic and exhilarating coastal walk.
- Hike in the renowned Queen of Glens, in Glenariff, described as Switzerland in Miniature

Terrain: Spectacular coastal paths, unspoiled moorland, some hills. 8-10 miles walking per day.

The delights of Antrim and its coast encompass some of the UK's finest visual experiences such as the iconic Giant's Causeway and Rathlin Island with its colony of seals competing for attention with the haunting cries of seabirds soaring and diving around rugged cliffs.

**Observations** on this new-to-me tour company:

- Similar to many other hiking tour companies.
- Recently purchased by a biking company. That is similar to many others too.
- Double the price of my domestic hiking company Parks Plus Hiking (PPH). Almost double of [www.frescotours.com](http://www.frescotours.com).
- Alcohol served in the evening only and seemingly unlimited quantities. No alcohol provided with PPH. Alcohol provided lunch and dinner with Fresco and Country Walkers (CW) plus some liquors.
- Not guaranteed-to-go; I've made tries and now might give up on trying to book again. PPH, CW and Fresco guaranteed-to-go for all trips. Backroads probably not.
- Van transport is slightly better than PPH, lesser than CW and Fresco. Fresco even provides Wi-Fi in the van.
- Managed with one hiking leader and one tour manager which is somewhat unique.
- Meals provided with a limited menu saves time. The best snacks and even better than Backroads. PPH provides self-made/self-carried snacks and picnics for lunch and full menu selection in evenings. Fresco gives simple snacks, limited options and simpler meals. CW is mixed and inconsistent.



**Headlines**

- Devils Causeway - a famous coastal walking path that is quite dramatic. Worth the trip.
- Hotels are interesting old mills or historical castles.
- Bug Bites! I'm likely to go home with itchy scars from bug bites. Little sandflies and then big horse flies.
- Poop Trails! Maybe that helps keep the land green. Or maybe that brings all the horse flies?

### **Observations** about Ireland in general:

- Good prices. Example: Hilton in \$130 range
- They have been at war forever. Northern Ireland partly continues. Still has walls, protests and eruptions.
- Intelligent! For such a small country, check out all the brilliant prize-winning famous Irish.
- Language is even tougher to understand than the Brits.
- The terrain is beautiful. To some. Ireland is said to be the most deforested in all of Europe. What wasn't felled for building, was for firewood, or fell to disease. I find much of the land sad with sheep causing even more damage. Yet when they are not in drought apparently the green pastures as far as you can see look lovely.
- So much seaside and dramatic cliffs and island rocks make it a photographers dream.
- Food can be fun with shepherd's pie, fish and chips, but other than that not much to write home about. They still over cook like the Brits. I think they need all their beer.
- Friendly and helpful people. For instance, during a coastal walk our guide saw someone with a flat tire and insisted upon changing it for them instead of their having to wait an hour and a half. Yet probably not so friendly to the other side of their walls.

### **Notes sent home:**

Polaris lounge: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ericrosen/2018/06/04/united-opens-new-polaris-lounge-at-newark-airport-today/amp/>

Ugh about the new lounge. It is all too stuffy and problematical. It is only for International first and business class passengers and you cannot bring a guest.

Cannot come in if domestic even if you're first class.

Buffet but also table-service and ordering. Ritzy food with a lot of choices.

No wonder first class tickets got so expensive.

Found in my 2011 trip notes from the Dublin marathon. I am off to Dublin today but no marathon. I think I like Irish dancing better.

<http://videos2view.net/irish-dance.htm>

Miserable little plane. This is one of those 2-4-2 and my row flies backward. No under seat storage. Two kids next to me. The lineup to board was jammed because we are at the end of C where about five gates all come together. Of course there were numerous flights all boarding together and lots of people all jammed together. We were to board at 6:50 so of course I showed up at about 6:35 then we didn't board until after 7:15. I got crammed in with people, I got hot, I thought I was going to black out, I leaned over to get blood in my head, and then I leaned against the wall a couple of times even after getting into the jet-way. By the time I boarded I was crying and quivery. Maybe because I was fearful I was going to black out. But I didn't and now just a few minutes later I drowned my water bottle and feel hugely better. Oh my but the treasures of flying! Something good just happened. I see they have poached salmon with lentil chili and broccolini. Lovely older woman attendant. She saw my tears and brought bottled water.

Update from the hotel: I got the Airlink Airport bus which brought me direct to the front door of the hotel. Despite the early hour they had a room available and I did quick thinking and dumped my luggage and went off to the big breakfast buffet. I was asked for my room number and they didn't find me but they let me eat anyway and I think I won't get charged €29. I am in room 402, well fed, and despite a couple of cups of coffee, I think I need a nap.

The Bank on College Green -- All is well now and I've had a little walk through St Stephens Greens, then the famous shopping and pedestrian street Grafton and into the Trinity College. Now I am at a lovely place that has won awards for food and bar and it's down the street on the College Green called The Bank. I ordered the shepherds pie though I first came in for fish and chips. See [www.Bankoncollegegreen.com](http://www.Bankoncollegegreen.com). I hope the website tells about the historic past and shows pictures of the Stained glass. When they say it is a bank of Victorian majesty, I sure agree. If the shepherds pie is good, all the better.

Another Santiago Calatrava Bridge! So very distinctive. [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santiago\\_Calatrava](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santiago_Calatrava)

### **I am off to the Ireland(s) - July 2nd.**

I have never been to Northern Ireland and only spent 13 days in the Republic of Ireland back when I did the Dublin marathon. With Brexit and “troubles“ looming ahead, this seems like a good time to go before confusion looms. If you are interested, follows is a brief explanation of some of the troubles that will likely occur:

What Brexit Means For Peace in Northern Ireland - <http://time.com/5325315/peace-ireland-border-brexite/>

But first. I gave myself a couple days in the five-star Conrad Hilton again not only because it is so glorious but also its location on the edge of the St Stephens Greens and quite close to Trinity College and lots of action.

I have a food tour and pub crawl booked for July 4th and the next day I'll train from Dublin to Belfast for a three day stay riverside at another Hilton before joining a 7-day walking tour on July 8. All that is new territory: the walking terrain up on the upper coast to include devils causeway and a lot of the castles look delightful. (Very much like my memory of Scotland.). And maybe the weather will hold and the typical wet Ireland will be mostly dry as predictions only go to 20% chance of rain. I don't worry because I don't melt.

Some truth-in-packaging: I've never been a fan nor a believer of people saying everything is wonderful on their vacation. Mine didn't start exactly perfectly.

I had looked forward to meeting Marie's uncle Parker but somehow we got our wires crossed and missed. After a few masters degrees and various career changes, he has perhaps found himself as a United flight attendant and he was just coming in from a flight.

I was also looking forward to seeing the newly renovated lounge. Ugh. It is all too stuffy and problematical. It is only for International first and business class passengers and you cannot bring a guest. Cannot come in if flying domestic even if you're first class. Buffet but also table-service and ordering. Ritzzy food with a lot of choices so no wonder first class tickets got so expensive. Meanwhile there is only one other club of any size but it's much too crowded and then there's a little junky pop-up that is also crowded. The renovation and making it Polaris first class only was an absolute waste of space. Some pics:

Polaris lounge - <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ericrosen/2018/06/04/united-opens-new-polaris-lounge-at-newark-airport-today/amp/>

Did it get better? Not quickly. I boarding one of these miserable little planes where even first class with the 2-4-2 seat configuration is cattle car feeling. Every other row flies backward. No under seat storage. No storage anywhere. Two kids next to me. But I wasn't going to like it no matter because the lineup to board was jammed (at the end of Terminal C where about five gates all together). I showed up at 6:30 to board but it didn't happen until after 7:15. Crammed in with people, I got hot, thought I was going to black out, and considered asking for help but then I was afraid they wouldn't let me board. By the time I boarded I was hyperventilating, crying and quivery. But after few minutes with a cold water bottle, I was fine. Oh my but the treasures of flying! The good is that the flight was very short, we had some older excellent flight attendants, and I had poached salmon with lentil chili and broccolini plus a couple of hours of good sleep.

Continuing with luck, the Airlink bus was quite convenient and gave me a Dublin tourist overview before dropping me in front of my hotel where despite it being early morning a room was available. I was pretty proud of myself to think quick enough to sneak into the breakfast room for a big meal.

The weather was next to perfect for a long walk through their small Central Park and pedestrian shopping areas lined with little small streets with pub after pub. After wandering through Trinity College and renewing tourist acquaintance from my 2011 trip, I found a restaurant-pub worthy of writing home about.

[Www.Bankoncollegegreen.com](http://www.Bankoncollegegreen.com). I hope the website tells about the historic past and shows pictures of the Stain-glass. When they say it is a bank of Victorian majesty, I sure agree. I had intended to be unhealthy and have fish and chips but then I saw the shepherds pie.



Free drink coupons at the hotel bar finished my evening but not until I noticed with surprise that it doesn't get dark until well after 10pm.



On the way in I saw that Santiago Calatrava has created a bridge for Dublin too. We've seen his bridges in Barcelona, Seville, Bilbao, Jerusalem, Buenos Aires, Amsterdam, and almost completed in Dallas. I will soon be going to Milwaukee to see his famous art museum and many of you know that he did the New York City World Trade Center transportation hub.

Inside Trinity College where on prior trip I've taken walking tours. This is the home to the Book of Kells. That bronze statue is the door butler at this over the top bank and now a pub-restaurant that has won many awards.



The streets seem much more crowded than I remembered and it's only Tuesday. The park also looks like a Sunday afternoon. Many more streets have become pedestrianized.

You might notice this famous bronze has been polished bronze in two areas more than others. In among the old and between the pedestrian streets and St. Stevens Square (which is their little Central Park) one finds this big modern shopping mall. I would guess that the economy is good. Please forgive my typos as at least this time I have jet lag to blame. Early tomorrow starts a food tour.

**In Dublin - July 4th - happy anniversary to Americans** and best wishes for continued democracy. . . . If there's anything that traveling and reading history books tells me, it's that we had better vote.

Me? I'm on a hiking trip but can barely walk? It is true and rare for me. What started with an ankle that would give out every once in a while worked into a whole bottom leg and calf soreness and limping. Fortunately most things heal on their own in time and this eases up enough after 10-15 minutes walking.

Despite a 10am food tour I had the hotel's full breakfast first not trusting that food on the tour would come soon enough. It did. So I did too. Always ready to eat.

From <https://www.secretfoodtours.com/dublin/food-tour/> - Why Georgian Dublin? We take you around the creative quarter of Dublin as it has the most to offer in terms of culture, history and of course delightful food. This beautiful, quaint, historic area of Georgian Dublin was the cultural, gastronomic and commercial hub of the city for well over 200 years and the food is delicious if you know where to go. Given its very central location, we can show you more than one area, including the famous Powerscourt Townhouse, home to the Viscounts



Powerscourt and one of the the finest Georgian buildings standing in Dublin, the ancient Medieval Temple Bar and the bustling lively district of Grafton Street with its street musicians and flower peddlers. End.

What did we eat/experience? May I remind you that you don't come to Ireland for fine food. They would claim it has to do with having very little food during the famine, but however did France manage to learn how to even cook rats during their famine? I find that after getting the basics of tourist sites that taking a food tour gives you the soul of the country.

Places and food:

Kilkenny Design Centre, Nassau Street, Dublin 2: Irish breakfast – Potato cake, White pudding & Tomato Relish, Secret Food- Gur Cake

Celtic Whiskey Shop. Dawson Street, Dublin 2: - Knappogue Castle Single Malt: 12 Years Old, - Coole Swan Irish Cream Liqueur

Hairy Lemon Traditional Irish pub - Beef and Guinness Pie, Traditional Lamb Stew, Vegetarian Pie, Dublin Coddle

Fallon & Byrne – Cheese, Killeen fenugreek goat's cheese (Co. Galway), SmokedKnockinore unpasteurised (Co.Cork)

Murphy's Ice cream, Wicklow Street - Flavours: Dingle Sea Salt, Caramelized Brown Bread, Irish Garden (Fennel), Dingle Gin (my choice), Honeycomb Caramel, Buttermilk, Irish Coffee (with Jameson whiskey), Rainwater Sorbets (Chocolate & Raspberry)

Burdocks Fish & Chips - In Temple Bar: Battered Smoked Cod cooked in Beef Lard - end

Seen on a public bus: Homosexual? Who gives-a-sexual!

Conrad Hotel – This is part of the Hilton chain which still gives me gold member benefits whereas Marriott and Starwood have stopped. I was here in 2011 for the marathon and remembered it as being rather elegant. Now that Tom has me so spoiled, a regular 5-star is not so exciting. Yet it is well appointed, with classy employees, a big breakfast and drinks/snacks in the eve included.

Tourist comfort – I have often times thought about Paris being so comfortable in part because it is familiar and I have no rush to see the main sites. This is how I felt about Dublin because I had really worked in 2011 to see a lot. The castle, the museums, Trinity College and the book of Kells, bridges and the other side of the river, Temple bar pub areas, Grafton Street, St Stephen's Square, The Jamison whiskey tour, the Guinness factory, etc. Plus doing 42 km on your feet, very slowly, and even going into some Pubs along the course, lets you see a lot. I'm sure there's plenty that I haven't experienced but this time I didn't feel like making myself ragged to "do" it all.

I would like to return and learn about the lower southern area of the Republic of Ireland. In 2011 we went and stayed in Bunratty, hiked the Cliffs of Moher, thru Conamara, toured the horse farm that is the most important outside of Kentucky, toured an outdoor museum of different Irish houses where I found the near replica of where I believe I lived in another life, and stayed in Galway before departing out of Shannon. You can see a lot in two weeks when you push it. Smile. Tomorrow I take a train to Belfast.

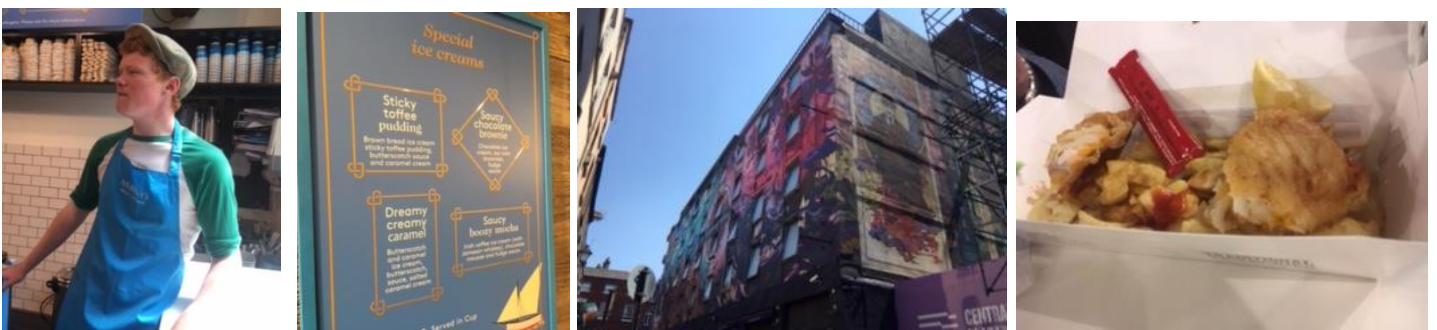




The white pudding vs black pudding which is really a sausage served with a fried potato mixture. Our guide was a character. Tattoos, nose ring, lip piercings, dreadlocks, and look at this outfit. She was a musician so what can you say. Some had Irish stew but when I heard the story of the owner being a dogcatcher I chose a vegetarian dish.



This store appeared to be for ex pats who would be missing their American products.



Isn't he as Irish as one would expect? He was also very generous with the ice cream sampling to include a few with alcohol.

Some of you know our years ago fondness for sticky toffee pudding at the Chesterfield Hotel in Palm Beach. This was not the same.

Into Temple Bar area. It's a hotel. Fortunately not mine.

Fish and chips is unhealthy enough. This was smoked fish fried in beef lard. I already warned you about the Irish food.



It is very wise that they remind us that Irish drivers are on the "wrong" side of the road -- to our view.



The Conrad Hilton lobby followed by my room.

### **Belfast - 2nd day in**

Me? One leg down. The calf has survived because the tenderness moved up to the quad instead. I am walking better no matter. Odd. I'm not happy but working diligently on remembering all those body parts that do work well.

If I have to stay still more, I have the right room to do it in. After a little dissension over my first assigned room, I was given a beautiful small corner suite overlooking both sides of the river and downtown.

There are not as many tours as I expected but I've done reasonably well since I only had three days anyway. Had a very humorous Irish guy that I could even understand.

Is this a foreign place? I have mixed emotions in that their life is so different and yet the world really is flat. Some of the same stores, same tour companies, similar problems, and I think I miss it being more foreign. Yet sometimes I think their language is foreign and I have to keep asking for a repeat.

I should find a list of some of the famous people who came from Ireland. One can only surmise that these are exceptionally intelligent people and were it not for all the wars .....

Wars/battles, memories and factions are everywhere. Whether it be the walls that still remain between Protestants and Catholics or the huge amount of messaging murals or the Memorial Gardens for those lost, I am constantly wondering about this thing called religion. Surely this isn't what religion is supposed to be about.

You could say in my sadness that I turned to drink. I tested quite a few pubs.

Crown liquor saloon. I saw this in the tour books and it had a big write up by Rick Steves. I was checking out the opera house and the next-door famous Europa hotel and hungry or not I felt like I must eat here.  
[https://www.nicholsonspubs.co.uk/restaurants/scotlandandnorthernireland/thecrownliquorsaloonbelfast?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=organic&utm\\_campaign=gmb](https://www.nicholsonspubs.co.uk/restaurants/scotlandandnorthernireland/thecrownliquorsaloonbelfast?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=gmb)

One of a Kind: The Crown Liquor Saloon is one of many rare gems in the Nicholson's collection of iconic and great British pubs — held in the highest of regards for their distinctive buildings, intriguing history and vibrant atmosphere.

Dating back to the 1880s, The Crown is a gem of the Victorian era. Formerly known as The Liquor Saloon in Great Victoria Street, our ageless and priceless pub was one of the mightiest Victorian Gin Palaces in the city, and still boasts many of its original features, including gas lighting. Refurbished in 1885, and at least twice since, The Crown is a grade A listed building owned by the National Trust, and is a truly stunning example of a traditional Victorian gin palace.

Speaking of the Europa hotel, I had in mind to eat there or at least have a drink and a snack, but it looked a little plain Jane and stuffy despite its famous reputation. One thing its famous for is being the most bombed hotel in the world. This is Northern Ireland after all; plus it was the place where dignitaries and journalists stayed. That in itself made for big headlines.



The Cloth Ear. A bar pub that is attached to the 5-star Merchant hotel where I will stay next week. I saw earlier where they had an Irish Flight which included special small tastes and three different drinks.

<https://www.themerchanthotel.com/bars-restaurants/the-cloth-ear/>

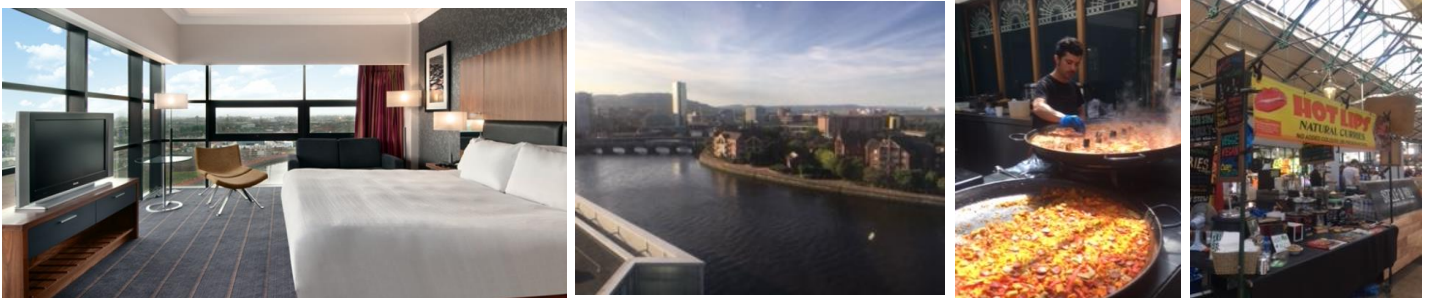
This not only gave me special food and drink but also the experience of sitting in a bar with a bunch of Irish watching soccer. Living soccer. (It was England over Sweden). I walked out of other pubs because of the cacophony and expected this group to be more sophisticated. If they are then the roof of the other places must have blown off.

The Merchant Hotel is in a world of its own. It blends garish and tacky with elegance. It would not be my choice but it will be fun.

From <https://www.themerchanthotel.com>

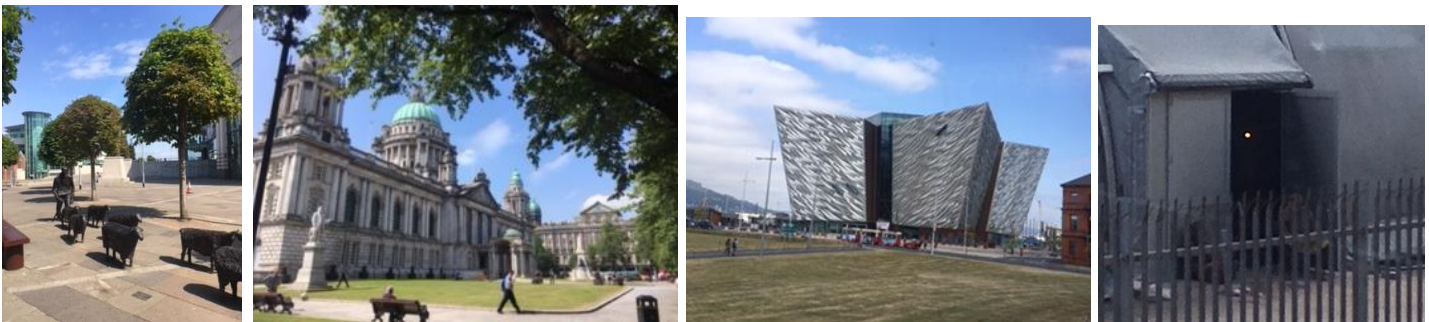
The AA 5 Red Star Merchant Hotel in Belfast is situated in the heart of Belfast city centre's historic Cathedral Quarter. The grandeur of the original Grade A listed building is complemented by an elegant Art Deco inspired wing with a multitude of exciting amenities. Our Hotel includes a stunning luxury spa, a rooftop gymnasium with panoramic city views, a dedicated meeting and events suite and a fabulous jazz bar.

Tomorrow is Sunday when I start my hiking tour.



My room with a view of the river in both directions.

There are a number of markets and this is closest and very tempting to eat my way through it. But I don't know about these Curries.



Their City Hall is pretty dramatic and I think built to show the world they could do it. It includes a museum where I took a tour. So many smart people in their history. And so many battles with pretty much all of them having to do with religion. If you call it religion.

The huge new titanic museum brought tourists. It is a huge complex. They would say that the titanic was fine when it left their dock. But within days it was gone as were the other two ships that were built there.

I keep going places where they say they film Game of Thrones but here they claim most of it is filmed and this is a big complex where I saw two actors sitting on the doorstep having a smoke.





Paris has the Eiffel tower. New York has the statue liberty. Sydney has an opera house. Belfast has the largest dry dock crane in the world. It is almost like their logo. And within the same complex of the titanic you can go skydiving. They say they air shoot you up so you can fall down.

A soldier had to come into our tour bus before we could enter the huge grounds of the Parliament. I don't know what he was looking for but the guide said if we look guilty to please lean down and tie our shoelaces when he came in.

Belfast is famous for their murals and they were almost like a war among themselves. I toured the main mural area but soon found that they covered the town.

Some are not protestant versus Catholic and some are just pictures made to look like people standing in the window. Even the flowers were just artwork.

It is not just murals around town but there are a lot of high walls. They still separate the two factions.



I found a few universities and this is the main one with large grounds.

A globe within a globe.

This probably isn't funny but it is next to a suicide center.

Down in the middle of town is their opera house which has been burned down and rebuilt many times.

It is next-door to the most famous hotel called the Europa which has the record of being the most bombed hotel in the world.



Inside the famous old pub with a take on Sheppard's Pie but it was lentils topped with sweet potato, with kale on the side. The dome of the capital where I took a tour, and found a poster showing how Belfast was newly ruled by women.





The chess set would be recognized as historical Irish figures. That's in honor of the Queen of England visiting and at the end of the newly named Queen Elizabeth Bridge, and next to the huge tiled salmon sculpture next to some locks/dams representing the newly cleaned river. I went to take a Titanic Boat Cruise until I saw what the boat looked like . . .



The Clock Tower represents a guiding post for much of the city. It is near to the Merchants Hotel where I'd be staying later in the week. An opulent over the top bank building converted to a hotel.



The famous black taxi under a billboard saying "Have No Plans – Sounds Like A Plan" which works well in Pub Ecentric Belfast. I took part in a flight of lovely food, two beers, a whiskey and three foods, all out of the Merchant's Hotel kitchen. I didn't do the beer trolley but I did eat within the excited pub drinkers watching the English beat the Swedes in Soccer's World Cup.

**Sun - Mon July 8 – 9** - Day 7 of trip and Day 1 of tour

Meet in Belfast for a poignant black taxi tour of the town. Northern Ireland now is a peaceful place, and Belfast continues to heal. We visit memorials and important historic sites, and hear moving first-hand accounts. After, we transfer (about 45 minutes) to our Ballygally hotel for our Welcome cocktails, meet and greet and Dinner.

Hotel - Ballygally Castle – 2 nights

From <http://www.hastingshotels.com/ballygally-castle> - Perched on the tip of one of the greatest road journeys, the Causeway Coastal Route, sits a 17th castle called Ballygally Castle. Originally built in 1625, it has a fascinating history. It has glorious views over the golden sands of Ballygally Bay towards Scotland and is just a small distance from the 9 Glens of Antrim and the Giants Causeway. The original period rooms have been sympathetically and cleverly updated to retain the enchanting charm of the original castle. Each bedroom has its own style and charm and offers ensuite bathroom, phone, TV, tea/coffee-making facilities and hairdryer. The Garden Restaurant serves up a range of delicious dishes, many using the finest local produce.

Mon Jul 9 – Day 8 and Day 2 of tour - Walk with splendid views of Scotland across the sea into Glenarm, one of the nine Glens of Antrim. We continue to the private Glenarm Castle with its beautiful park, home to the Earls of Antrim. We take lunch in the castle gardens and enjoy a walk through the earl's private garden and estate.

Famous Irish people. I think these lists will knock your socks off especially when you think how small is Ireland. One link has pictures and is chronological and the other is by type of talent.

<https://www.thefamouspeople.com/ireland.php>  
[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Irish\\_people](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Irish_people)

Some say that America has about 70 million people with Irish descent. Think about that. Many if not most were hated when they were immigrants. Now look at them!

I believe that the Wikipedia list has 22 American presidents with Irish descent. And the literature list is no less impressive. So why can't they get along? I felt sad for religion in general but I also wondered if the many memorials aren't pushing hate.

Q. Are people you meet on your trips wondering about the sanity of citizens in USA?

A. Despite having lived in Europe for 5 years in the 70s, despite having traveled Europe consistently ever since, despite having a military husband who was attached to the SHAPE/NATO headquarters, I have only recently become embarrassed to be an American. One is continually asked how could it happen, Tour Guides openly make fun of American politics, and TV stations are more verbal in their dismay than even "fake news" CNN. This was even prior to the G7 disaster and now there is added concern in not knowing how to plan with such an unpredictable administration.

New subject: Is Apple playing games with us? Can anyone explain why on some computers my pictures show upside down. Sometimes they come in perfectly. Sometimes they come in as attachments and sometimes they're all right there for me to just copy and paste. I've no idea why such the difference. I take them on my iPhone all the same way. I select them off my photo gallery and add them to email, all the same way. What a mystery. One person sent the trip notes pictures back to me to show me how they come in upside down but they were all correct on my iPhone.



The black taxis are sometimes psychedelic looking. Maybe the stories are a little bit so too because they are always one side or the other. It is a sad state of religions.

Murals are everywhere because walls are everywhere. This particular wall even has a message from the Dali Llama. It doesn't seem that he was able to make much impact on putting the two sides together. Walls are supposed to come down by 2023 but no one seems to believe that it will or can happen.





The garden of our castle which you may have seen on Game of Thrones. There are really rooms up those steep steps. Mine is not on that wing and is very modernized. I have a direct view just across the road of the ocean and the sound of the surf. If you watch Game of Thrones you probably recognize this door.



It is not easy to eat healthy in Ireland. This was a decent piece of haddock buried under the tomato sauce. Plus potatoes three ways.

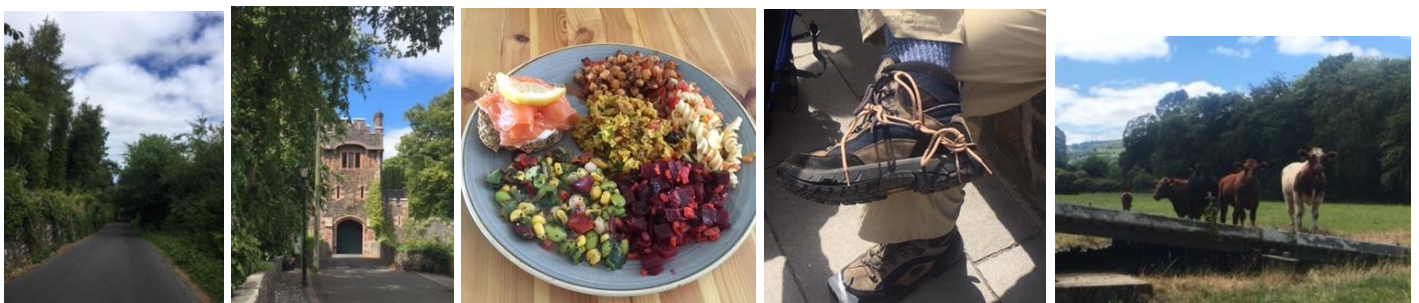


Later I will learn how much elevation we gained within our 10 miles of up-and-down's over Peat Bogs. Surely over the nine "stiles" (ladders) will count for something.

A mushroom or what?

Most all of our day was within the site of the ocean.

Interrupted only by Julia, the Cordon Bleu Chef, meeting us with delicacies out the back of the van.



It was to a private castle we went hiking, touring, and enjoying a lunch with some real vegetables. Only one of us had a tough time hiking since her 10-12 year old rarely used boots fell apart. Not an unusual happening as rubber gets old, dry and the glue also gives out. The cows posed for us. Prior to our tour of the gardens. That's another of the armoured police cars.





**Tues - Wed July 10 and 11 - Days 3 and 4 of tour**

Ireland has been having hotter weather than they've seen in 40 years and a rather extreme drought. By Wednesday the weather seemed to have broke. Cool and rain. Now THAT is Ireland!

Tue Jul 10 – Day 9 and Day 3 of tour - Today's hike takes us to the Queen of Glens to explore the most dramatic of the nine Glens of Antrim, Glenariff. We'll pass waterfalls, gorges and woodland, and continue to the famous Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge hanging precariously over an 80-foot chasm (crossing it is optional!) Then head to the tiny harbor village of Ballintoy and walk along the water's edge on the glorious sandy beach at White Park Bay.

Overnight: Bushmills, Bushmills Inn Hotel for 3 nights -

<http://www.bushmillsinn.com>

This award-winning hotel & restaurant has very successfully recreated its origins as the oldest Coaching Inn and Mill House dating back to 1608. Located in the same village as the world's oldest distillery, between the Giants Causeway and Royal Portrush Golf Club, this hotel excels in providing an inherently warm, welcoming and relaxing atmosphere. The rooms are spacious and include telephone, TV, radio, hospitality tray, hair dryer, iron and ironing board, trouser presser, room safe and connection for modem or fax. Overlooking the garden courtyard, the award-winning restaurant takes in the original 17th century stables and wine cellar. The Taste of Ulster restaurant welcomes visitors for an imaginatively planned selection of dishes with a unique blend of classical and new Irish cuisine. Relax and savour the atmosphere of the Victorian bar and sample a glass of 25 year-old Bushmills malt whiskey from the hotels private cask.



Wed Jul 11 – Day 10 and Day 4 of tour - Transfer to Ballycastle Bay where we take a ferry to fascinating Rathlin Island, eight miles off the coast towards Scotland. This island has a particularly unspoiled environment which attracts scientists and bird watchers alike. It is where Robert the Bruce retreated from Edward I (Longshanks) in 1306 and where, in 1898, Marconi made the world's first radio communication. End.

The room was spacious and the gardens were luxurious and the restaurant was excellent. The weather was on the hot side the first day and the flies bit me and then the weather drenched me the next day.



Our group was to be seven but one copped out before the trip and she ever came. One had shoes that literally fell apart but what can you expect for 14-year-old shoes, and another had slipped and hurt her knee while in Belfast and was unable to walk. On the day of the island tour we had three guides and five hikers. Maybe that's why the company The Wayfarers has been bought out by a cycle company?

The guides are plenty fine but it seems rather pricey for what I get compared to what I have been getting. I will work up a comparison.

By Wednesday I was needing a lay-day. Others were admitting that too but I suspect I'm by far the oldest so I have an excuse. Ha. But I got up and dithered around and finally made it out the door. I just can't turn the light off at midnight, not sleep well through the night, and come alive at 6 AM. The truth was in the pudding: I had trouble remembering how to put my zippy pants together.



Dinner the night before of chicken liver pate as a starter.

Again, potatoes three ways.

Sunset out my room window where I could hear the surf. I would never see the sunrise as it is something around 5 AM and the sunset is not until so late that it seems quite light all night but becomes darkest around 11 PM. A walk to a series of waterfalls.



And then along the Cliff above the coast.

It big time favorite which excitement evades me because of all the tourists for one thing and because the long lines for another. But if they were waiting and thought it was a experience of a lifetime, I waited too. But I refuse to go over while someone was jumping on this rope bridge.

Lunch at a little tiny seaside resort where reservations are required as much is one year in advance.

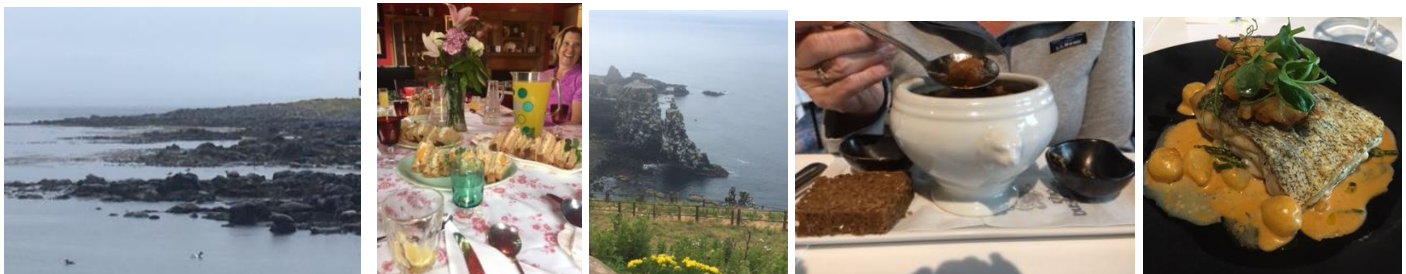


Dinner at our new hotel. Included fresh trout and then sticky toffee putting. Our sweet gal who had the unfortunate experience of a accident injury to her knee on the first day. Our guide is quite renowned for her culinary expertise and she is pictured on the right.





You know BushMill Irish Whiskey? The Inn was an old mill and now renovated quite nicely to our hotel for three nights. Then the next day onto Ratlin Island, a rough little place made seemingly uninhabitable due to all the wind and rain. The ferry to get there took all the effort I had and all the cold wind outside for me to keep my breakfast.



Those black rocks? Many were seals. We took our wet and cold bodies into a B&B for lunch. It was very British looking and run by a comedian. There were to be puffins out on those rocks but the best entertainment was the old coot of a bus driver. For dinner, the best was all the vegetables. I don't eat desserts (I drink) but I know everyone enjoys the food pictures.



**Thursday July 12 - my next to last full day with the tour**

The scheduled activity was the Goblins which was said to be a bit of trial and error, touristy, requiring a harness and a helmet, and that there was better things to do. Coupled with the fact that one of our hikers was deathly fearful of the suspension bridge or being anywhere near a cliff.

Thus we walked to the seashore, visited a medieval castle, onto a sweet tea house for scones, a long coastal walk to their main coastal town of Portrush for lunch and the July 12th parade, and finally to Bushmill Distillery for a tour and generous tastings. That helped get me through an Irish history lesson at the hotel's Secret Library. Dinner at a French restaurant - well, it was Almost French.

The Twelfth (also called the Glorious Twelfth or Orangemen's Day) is an Ulster Protestant celebration held on 12 July. It began during the late 18th century in Ulster. It celebrates the Glorious Revolution (1688) and victory of Protestant King William of Orange over Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne (1690), which began the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland. On and around the Twelfth, large parades are held by the Orange Order and Ulster loyalist marching bands, streets are bedecked with British flags and bunting, and large towering bonfires are lit. Today the Twelfth is mainly celebrated in Northern Ireland (where it is a public holiday), but smaller celebrations are held in other parts of the world where Orange lodges have been set up. The Twelfth involves thousands of participants and spectators. [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Twelfth](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Twelfth)

The Orangemen are originated from the Masonic? Some think yes. Lately they have predominately been calm but not always. I get the impression there will always be dissension. [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orange\\_Order](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orange_Order)

BushMill whiskey Distillery and remember that we are staying at the old mill hotel called BushMill Inn. [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old\\_Bushmills\\_Distillery](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Bushmills_Distillery)

Secret Library in the Bushmill Inn is an out-of-the-way stairway and then what looks like a bookcase with the button to open and into a lovely library and private dining area. It was where we got our history lesson. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/united-kingdom/northern-ireland/hotels/bushmills-inn-hotel/>

Britain and the World Cup. I can't imagine what it was like when they lost. I was having a meal with them and took pictures of the huge excitement when they won over Sweden on July 7th. I thought they were going to raise the roof with their excitement.

Attendees. We started at seven, and one was a no-show and four of our six were like a family as they had traveled together often. With the other one not hiking I felt a bit of an outcast but didn't really mind that no one ever ask me anything. I'm getting good at being a hermit anyway. Or maybe they tried to include me and I didn't hear. That's more of an issue.

I love bread and I never met a potatoes that I didn't like so maybe I really am Irish. They have excellent examples of both.

Q. What is Irish soda bread? And why is it so wonderful?

A. The ingredients of traditional soda bread are flour, baking soda, salt, and buttermilk. The buttermilk in the dough contains lactic acid, which reacts with the baking soda to form tiny bubbles of carbon dioxide. Other ingredients can be added such as butter, egg, raisins, or nuts.

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soda\\_bread](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soda_bread)

Re hiking shirts. What a coincidence - I hadn't realized what hiking shirts I'd packed. My few years worth of permanent hiking packing included the Dublin marathon lime green long sleeve shirt and also the Shamrock Virginia beach marathon black long sleeve shirt. There must've been some kind of Irish pull going on here.

Movies/films: Not only is Game of Thrones filmed mostly here but also Star Wars. I saw your buses that were solely focused on Game of Thrones.

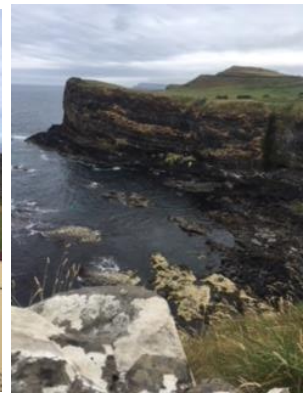
Books: A non-fiction I read and enjoyed. [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/How\\_the\\_Irish\\_Saved\\_Civilization](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/How_the_Irish_Saved_Civilization)

Earrings of tri-color trinity knot: The history and meaning of the trinity knot is often debated, especially since it holds meaning for both Christians and non-Christians alike.

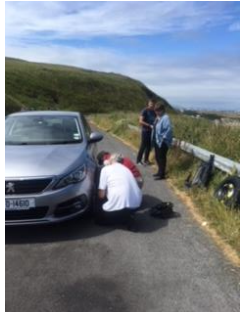
The trinity knot is also called a triquetra. Christians believe that the three points of the Irish trinity knot represent the three elements of the holy trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Pagans (with related beliefs to the Celts) see the trinity knot as a representation of the natural forces – earth, air, and water. The trinity knot has also been known to symbolize life, death, and rebirth.

<http://irishfireside.com/2012/12/03/trinity-knot/>





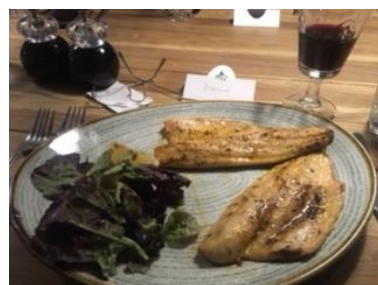
There are fields of these lovely flowers but they are invasive and not necessarily appreciated.



The Irish might be continually warring with each other but they are also friendly. Our Guide insisted upon helping change a tire for a total stranger.



After walking the beach, the tourist town was our lunch stop, but maybe better was the later day tour of the whiskey distillery. Before dinner, find the Secret Library, where a lecture on Irish History would be held behind.



It was called a French restaurant . . . Then those who know my travels will recognize one of the only shopping treats I get – earrings for a friend. It's a tradition and these were very Irish.

**Fri Jul 13 – Day 12 and Day 6 of tour.** Our last full day.

Itinerary: Walk along a memorable stretch of coastline past the Giant's Causeway – the extraordinary geological phenomenon of 40,000 basalt columns. We descend by the shepherds' steps to the stones themselves and stop into the new visitor center. After lunch, we take the coastal path around Runkerry Point.



After a transfer to Belfast, we have some time to explore the town, and conclude our day with our Farewell Dinner. End.

Overnight: Belfast, The Merchant Hotel – 1 night - <https://www.themerchanthotel.com>

One of Belfast's most renowned and best-loved buildings, the Merchant Hotel is the former headquarters of the Ulster Bank and a prime example of High Victorian architecture. It is located in the beautiful Cathedral Quarter, one of the oldest parts of the city. A luxury hotel with elegant rooms furnished with elegant Victorian or Art Deco styling, it also features a spa and gym. Each guest room enjoys full air-conditioning, free WiFi, blackout blinds or curtains, hospitality trays, fridge, television, hairdryer, robes and slippers, safe and multimedia hub. Diners in the Great Room Restaurant can enjoy the remarkable original Victorian interior topped by a glass cupola (the largest chandelier in Ireland), while savoring the imaginative menus which use the finest seasonal ingredients.

The hotel had been pictured on my first day in Belfast and I had looked into some Victorian rooms with the hope that that was what we would have. But after I saw my art deco room I grew fond of it. Certainly over the top with a lot of specials as was the dinner. The group met for champagne an hour before dinner and played games with prizes. You will probably not be surprised that I avoided that.

After six dinners, I was tired of eating, tired of trying to listen to conversations, and certainly looking forward to an empty day.

My leg and ankle? After days of good walks, obviously it's well enough. A wonderment about the sometimes weak and silly ankle so I stuck with trekking poles. So many glitches simply heal themselves in time.

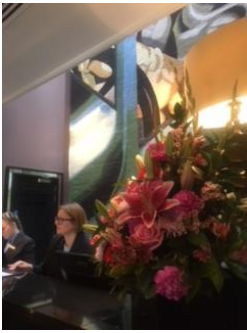
How was the hiking or walking? One day we did 242 m up and 293 m down over 7 1/2 km. That day got flatter with a total of 14 km with 319 m going up and 575 m down. It was all over bumpy spongy peat fields full of poop. I didn't ask for statistics on other days but most of them were flatter and longer but rarely with less poop. Other than the beach walks was sometimes free of poop.

On being an American. I felt like poop. If I thought I was embarrassed about US politics a few days ago, one wants to acquire a British accent now. Anyone who thinks CNN is fake news, would be at least sick if not humbled by BBC, local news and newspapers.

Soccer versus tennis. There was no doubt where their hearts lie. I'd walk into a pub and everybody would be standing around hollering and hooting over the soccer whereas on the other side of the pub was Wimbledon with nobody.



Our walk manager would meet us along the trail with snacks morning. Always salmon is available and you could almost see the salmon farms of Scotland's Isle of Skye where I once worked.



Flowers and art deco in the reception didn't seem to go with the Victorian dining room. My art deco room came with a separate stand-alone bathtub plus a huge walk in shower.

Our guides. Both were excellent and very talented in their own rights. Robbie had multiple careers but currently also made jewelry of which I purchased a piece. Julia is a caterer and had studied at the Cordon Bleu school and had lived around the world.



The dome of Merchants Hotel. Dinner underneath. I had dressed crab. Best end of lamb. And others had the cute Swan Profiteroles. Not mine but I thought you would enjoy the picture. I choose alcohol instead of desserts.

Little did I know that the next morning I would be offered a three-course breakfast. All over the top.

**Sat - Sun - July 14 and 15. Alas, finally my own again!**

Starting Saturday morning I just couldn't do enough of nothing. I tried but I woke up earlier than my alarm and then couldn't go to bed early either. After six days of early alarms, late nights, and feeling in gear full-time, I was sure that I was ready for doing nothing.

It wasn't difficult leaving the Merchant Hotel for the Hilton. Despite one costing up to three times more than the other, the Hilton was quite agreeable and not so over the top. Breakfast at the Merchant Hotel was not a buffet but rather a three-course menu selection. I did my best despite the extra weight I'm unhappy to be carrying.

My do-nothing couple of days included 2 to 3 hours at their famous market where every kind of knickknack and crafty item was available plus lots of food choices and a live band. I walked all through town again and didn't need more pictures because I had been there before. But near to City Hall I did take in the protests and the gay rights flags. I asked one of the dozens of policemen surrounded by dozens of armored vehicles why there were so many and he claimed that's how they keep a lid on protests. There were almost as many street performers and one was never without the sound of one or two.

You remember that the Titanic was built here? As were two other big ships that also went down. Yet the Irish claim that the titanic "was fine when it left here" and they use her story as a tourist draw. It is said to be one of the worlds best tourist attractions and thus I "should" visit. But I kept putting it off and the more I thought about it the more I was just "should-ing" on myself.



On my last day, after putting it off three other days, I found myself on the Titanic trail. MapQuest says that is a hair under 3 miles one way and of course I just keep going just like Forest Gump who didn't know when to quit walking.

Once there, why not? I still find it odd that a big graveyard memorial to one of the biggest accidents in history can be of interest. It was not and coupled with the huge crowds and screaming babies I left shortly after getting in. Next-door the Hotel Titanic of a converted factory with modern add-ons was certainly more interesting especially faced with a glass of wine.

Weather gave me my second day of rain of the entire trip with some coming down sideways and some just like what you expect in Ireland. They need rain so badly that I'm sure no one complained. What rain I didn't get the bugs made up for it and days later the weepy sores remain.

### **End?**

Was I unpatriotic? My comment about being embarrassed for the American political system may have been unfairly criticized as being unpatriotic. The following article explains in part what those in the UK are saying. (Remember that Northern Ireland is the UK).

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/07/15/the-backlash-from-trumps-britain-visit-will-be-felt-for-years-to-come/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.98da99686d98&wpisrc=nl\\_opinions&wpm=1](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/07/15/the-backlash-from-trumps-britain-visit-will-be-felt-for-years-to-come/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.98da99686d98&wpisrc=nl_opinions&wpm=1)

### **Next?**

I would move from the pricey Merchant Hotel a few blocks away to the Hilton where I'd stayed three nights pre-tour. They gifted me with another corner suite and access to the Lounge and full breakfast. After two days, an express bus of about 1 ½ hours to Dublin Airport for an overnight then supposedly an early morning flight home. But that's another whole story. Overall, I'd say that I stayed about one day too long in Belfast.

### **Home Again**

I got home much later than expected after a pretty wild flying day which totaled nearly 20 hours. Between early morning get up and then hours of delay, a flight with kids next to me who screamed the whole way, a medical emergency on board, Newark being closed for thunderstorms and us diverted to an Air Force Base for fueling and finally back to Newark, all was well but tedious. It was added to by Tom losing his phone which was later fortunately found in Newark necessitating another trip. Then I was up early the next day for appointments, including weight training then hair coloring and haircut, a car repair, and I wasn't home until evening so one day down.

Yet I am only home again until our July 25 adventure starts and Marie arrives for a trip to Santiago Chile.

## ***Itinerary***

### **Mon Jul 2 – Day 1**

7:35pm Depart Newark EWR via UA#23

### **Tue Jul 3 – Day 2**

7:05am Arrive Dublin Ireland DUB

Conrad Hotel options from airport to hotel:

1. A taxi from the airport rank costs €30.00-€35.00 approximately – cash
2. Air Link bus, line 757. Departs from the Dublin Airport - both terminals every 20 minutes during the day (every 30 minutes morning/evening time and Sundays). Costs €7.00 one way. Stop is just outside the hotel.
3. Air Coach Bus which departs every 20 minutes from both terminal 1 and 2. The Air Coach leaves you at Lower Leeson Street, a two minute walk from the hotel. The cost is €9.00 each way.

Hotel Conrad Hilton – 1<sup>st</sup> of 2 nights  
Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin, Ireland Tele: 353 1 602 8900

*From concierge: No lounge, but as a Gold Member the breakfast will be complimentary for you.*

*Additionally, upon arrival we will provide drink vouchers that can be exchanged for a beer, house wine or soft drink in our Bar and Restaurant.*

*Centrally located in Dublin, minutes from Iveagh Gardens and St. Stephen's Green. 5-star hotel is close to National Gallery of Ireland at Merrion Square and St. Patrick's Cathedral.*

### **Wed Jul 4 – Day 3**

Food tour

Hotel Conrad Hilton – 2<sup>nd</sup> of 2 nights

### **Thu Jul 5 – Day 4**

1:20pm Depart Dublin Connolly Train Station

3:35pm Arrive Belfast Central Train Station

Conrad Hotel suggests:

The better way to Belfast is by train. There is only one rail provider in Ireland, which is [www.irishrail.ie](http://www.irishrail.ie) and you can book tickets on-line. If you choose to travel by train, your train station is going to be:

Connolly Train station – approximately 15min by taxi to get there (BTW: bus station is just beside it).

Hotel Hilton Belfast – 1<sup>st</sup> of 3 nights  
4 Lanyon Place, Belfast BT13LP, UK Tele: 44 28 902 77000

This is the Hilton next to central station where tour starts and as suggested by company.

*From web: Hilton Belfast with an idyllic location on the banks of the Lagan River, only a two-minute walk to the city center and a 10-minute drive to Belfast City Airport. Amenities and convenience make this Belfast hotel a favorite for Capital City and Titanic Experience visitors. Take in the river view and dine on Irish and British cuisine at the hotel's Sonoma Restaurant.*

### **Fri Jul 6 – Day 5**

Hotel Hilton Belfast – 2<sup>nd</sup> of 3 nights  
4 Lanyon Place, Belfast BT1 3LP United Kingdom

### **Sat Jul 7 – Day 6**



Hotel            Hilton Belfast – 3<sup>rd</sup> of 3 nights

**Sun Jul 8 – Day 7 and Day 1 of tour**

2:00pm            Courtesy pick up at Central Rail Station, East Bridge Street, Belfast

Meet at seating area near Platforms 3 & 4. Tour Belfast's Murals. Guides will take luggage here.

Meet in Belfast for a poignant black taxi tour of the town. Northern Ireland now is a peaceful place, and Belfast continues to heal. We visit memorials and important historic sites, and hear moving first-hand accounts. After, we transfer (about 45 minutes) to our Ballygally hotel for our Welcome Dinner.

Overnight:        Ballygally, Ballygally Castle Hotel – 1<sup>st</sup> of 2 nights

Coast Road, Ballygally - Ballygally, Co. Antrim BT40 2QZ T: +44 (0) 28 2858 1066,  
<http://www.hastingshotels.com/ballygally-castle>

Perched on the tip of one of the greatest road journeys, the Causeway Coastal Route, sits a 17th castle called Ballygally Castle. Originally built in 1625, it has a fascinating history. It has glorious views over the golden sands of Ballygally Bay towards Scotland and is just a small distance from the 9 Glens of Antrim and the Giants Causeway. The original period rooms have been sympathetically and cleverly updated to retain the enchanting charm of the original castle. Each bedroom has its own style and charm and offers ensuite bathroom, phone, TV, tea/coffee-making facilities and hairdryer. The Garden Restaurant serves up a range of delicious dishes, many using the finest local produce. Guests at Ballygally Castle can enjoy the use of Cairndhu Golf Course, with its magnificent coastal views. Only 2 miles from the hotel, tee off times and preferred green fees can be arranged by the hotel. Other excellent courses nearby include Portstewart, Castlerock and Masserene.

**Mon Jul 9 – Day 8 and Day 2 of tour**

Walk with splendid views of Scotland across the sea into Glenarm, one of the nine Glens of Antrim. We continue to the private Glenarm Castle with its beautiful park, home to the Earls of Antrim. We take lunch in the castle gardens and enjoy a walk through the earl's private garden and estate.

Overnight:        Ballygally, Ballygally Castle Hotel – 2<sup>nd</sup> of 2 nights

**Tue Jul 10 – Day 9 and Day 3 of tour**

Today's hike takes us to the Queen of Glens to explore the most dramatic of the nine Glens of Antrim, Glenariff. We'll pass waterfalls, gorges and woodland, and continue to the famous Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge hanging precariously over an 80-foot chasm (crossing it is optional!) Then head to the tiny harbor village of Ballintoy and walk along the water's edge on the glorious sandy beach at White Park Bay.

Overnight:        Bushmills, Bushmills Inn Hotel – 1<sup>st</sup> of 3 nights

9 Dunluce Road, Bushmills - Co Antrim, Co Antrim Northern Ireland BT57 8QG  
Tele: +44 (0) 28 20 73 3000 <http://www.bushmillsinn.com> yes coffee in room

This award-winning hotel & restaurant has very successfully recreated its origins as the oldest Coaching Inn and Mill House dating back to 1608. Located in the same village as the world's oldest distillery, between the Giants Causeway and Royal Portrush Golf Club, this hotel excels in providing an inherently warm, welcoming and relaxing atmosphere. The rooms are spacious and include telephone, TV, radio, hospitality tray, hair dryer, iron and ironing board, trouser presser, room safe and connection for modem or fax. Overlooking the garden courtyard, the award-winning restaurant takes in the original 17th century stables and wine cellar. The Taste of Ulster restaurant welcomes visitors for an imaginatively planned selection of dishes with a unique blend of classical and new Irish

cuisine. Relax and savour the atmosphere of the Victorian bar and sample a glass of 25 year-old Bushmills malt whiskey from the hotels private cask.

**Wed Jul 11 – Day 10 and Day 4 of tour**

Transfer to Ballycastle Bay where we take a ferry to fascinating Rathlin Island, eight miles off the coast towards Scotland. This island has a particularly unspoiled environment which attracts scientists and bird watchers alike. It is where Robert the Bruce retreated from Edward I (Longshanks) in 1306 and where, in 1898, Marconi made the world's first radio communication.

Overnight: Bushmills, Bushmills Inn Hotel – 2<sup>nd</sup> of 3 nights

**Thu Jul 12 – Day 11 and Day 5 of tour**

Today we'll drive south to Sallagh Braes, to walk the exhilarating Gobbins Coastal Path. There's many interesting twists and turns, with tubular and suspension bridges, caves and carved tunnels, and spectacular views over the ocean and of the waves crashing far below. We continue back to our hotel with the option to visit the famous Old Bushmills Distillery.

Overnight: Bushmills, Bushmills Inn Hotel – 3<sup>rd</sup> of 3 nights

**Fri Jul 13 – Day 12 and Day 6 of tour**

Walk along a memorable stretch of coastline past the Giant's Causeway – the extraordinary geological phenomenon of 40,000 basalt columns. We descend by the shepherds' steps to the stones themselves and stop into the new visitor center. After lunch, we take the coastal path around Runkerry Point. After a transfer to Belfast, we have some time to explore the town, and conclude our day with our Farewell Dinner.

Overnight: Belfast, The Merchant Hotel – 1<sup>st</sup> of 1 night only – too pricey to stay on  
16 Skipper Street - Belfast, BT1 2DZ Tele: +44 (0)28 9023 4888  
<https://www.themerchanthotel.com> – yes coffee in room

One of Belfast's most renowned and best-loved buildings, the Merchant Hotel is the former headquarters of the Ulster Bank and a prime example of High Victorian architecture. It is located in the beautiful Cathedral Quarter, one of the oldest parts of the city. A luxury hotel with elegant rooms furnished with elegant Victorian or Art Deco styling, it also features a spa and gym. Each guest room enjoys full air-conditioning, free WiFi, blackout blinds or curtains, hospitality trays, fridge, television, hairdryer, robes and slippers, safe and multimedia hub. Diners in the Great Room Restaurant can enjoy the remarkable original Victorian interior topped by a glass cupola (the largest chandelier in Ireland), while savoring the imaginative menus which use the finest seasonal ingredients.

**Sat Jul 14 – Day 13 and Day 7 end of tour**

We bid farewell after breakfast and transfer to our onward connections.

Gratuity guideline: \$40 a day but pay in local currency – 6x\$40=\$240 or 7=\$280

Hotel Inquired of The Merchant Hotel for best price and to stay in same room  
It is very pricey at \$400 range or suites on Sunday at \$550 range.

Hotel Hilton Belfast – 1<sup>st</sup> of 2 nights  
4 Lanyon Place, Belfast BT1 3LP, UK Tele: 44 28 90277000

**Sun Jul 15 – Day 14**

Open for tours



Hotel Hilton Belfast – 2<sup>nd</sup> of 2 nights

**Mon Jul 16 – Day 15**

Hilton Belfast suggests [www.aircoach.ie](http://www.aircoach.ie) to Dublin Airport which picks up at Glengall Street, a 15 minute walk or a 5 GBP taxi.

3:30pm Air Coach from Glengall Street to Dublin Airport – pin 2k89pjlx.  
5:20pm Arrive Dublin Airport

Hotel Hilton Dublin Airport – 1 night only  
Northern Cross, Malahide Road, Dublin, Ireland Tele: 353 1 866 1800  
Shuttle requires Hilton Gold card or 3Euros each way.

**Tue Jul 17 – Day 16**

9:20am Depart Dublin IE DUB via UA#22  
11:35am Arrive Newark EWR

**Participants:**

Diana Burton – Middletown NJ  
Gayle Hartsook – San Rafael CA  
Kay Handcock – Libertyville IL  
Dave & Marilyn Robertson – Demarest NJ  
Julie Vanek – West Newton MA

Robbie Wright – Walk Leader – Born and bred in rural southern England, Robbie has been a resident in Northern Ireland for the past 35 years. After 10 years in the British Army (which brought him to Northern Ireland in the first place), he enjoyed a varied and entrepreneurial career in the restaurant, retail, and Medicare sectors and is now a jewelry designer/maker. Past sports include field hockey, cricket, rugby, sailing and skiing. With his father – who is a keen mountaineer and Arctic explorer – he climbed Mt Blanc at the age of 16. Currently his main interests include family, culture (visual arts and music), travel, the two dogs (border collie and cocker spaniel), walking, windsurfing, cooking and enjoying time with friends. Robbie has had a lifelong interest in the natural world since completing a natural sciences degree, a broad knowledge of the earth's history, formation of landscape, geology and mining.

Julia Shirley – Walk Manager – After living in both Hong Kong and New York, Julia is now based in her Native Northern Ireland. Julia has travelled extensively in Europe and Asia, from where she has gathered much of her culinary knowledge. She is a trained Cordon Bleu cook and runs her own successful private catering business from her home near Belfast Lough. When she is not preparing wedding canapes or picnics half way up a mountain, she enjoyed walks on the beach with her energetic laborador.

**Emergency contacts:**

The Wayfarers UK office Tele +44 (0) 1600 3200 03.

Registered with STEP at [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)

**Emergency Assistance** Plus Program – 24/7

United Mileage Plus member #0186014 (card in file and in D's Wallet)  
Tele: 866 816 2073 or 60 328 1752 collect

**Embassy/Consulate:**

US Embassy Dublin  
42 Elgin Rd, Ballsbridge Dublin 4 D Tele: +353 16 688 777

US Consulate General Belfast  
Danesfort House, 223 Stranmillis Road, Belfast BT9 5GR Tele: 028 9038 6100

**References:**

BBC - Travel - Northern Ireland's secret underground river  
[http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20180530-northern-irelands-secret-underground-river?ocid=global\\_travel\\_rss&ocid=global\\_bbccom\\_email\\_31052018\\_travel](http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20180530-northern-irelands-secret-underground-river?ocid=global_travel_rss&ocid=global_bbccom_email_31052018_travel)