

Ireland with Adventures by Disney: An Adventures by Disney Itinerary Review

by Carol Pranis, PassPorter Guest Contributor

To celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary, my husband and I wanted to plan a special trip to the land of my ancestors, Ireland.

We chose to book this with Adventures by Disney (ABD) for several reasons. We loved the Adventure Guides on our previous Adventures to San Francisco/Napa and Italy. These energetic young men and women make you feel like part of the family, and go way above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that every guest has a memorable adventure, no matter what their age or limitation might be. The accommodations are always first class, and although many activities are planned out beautifully, they allow us time to explore on our own, or nap, as the case may be! When I say that our guides were there for us nearly around the clock, on both prior Adventures we had guides who were waiting in the lobby at 4 AM to assist those with early flights home. They always had water and snacks ready before the first hunger pangs hit, and in their Mary Poppins backpacks, they carried every type of necessity, from band aids to "Toner Mist" … thank you Dusty!! They also give fabulous recommendations for places to dine, and directions to get you there, for evenings on your own.

So, in late June, 2016, we were winging our way to Dublin, Ireland. Adventures by Disney arranged for our transportation from Dublin Airport to our lovely hotel, the Dublin Westin. We arrived a day before our Adventure began, in part because we traveled across many time zones, and needed time to acclimate to the new time. We had studied our ABD itinerary, which was sent to us well in advance of departure, so we know which tourist sites ABD would include. Our early arrival gave us time to visit those on our wish list that our ABD would not visit. We found the Hop-On-Hop-Off bus in Dublin, with the help of the Westin Concierge, and we set out to explore the city. First we did the full route overview, and then we were ready to hop off and see the sights at our leisure. If you travel with children, the Dublinia museum is a must see. They have many hands on exhibits that highlight how the Vikings settled and ruled Ireland many years ago. If you have adults in your party who have their hearts set on touring the Jameson Distillery, think of Disney's Fast Pass program, and book that tour prior to arriving in Ireland, or you will face a 2-3 hour wait for an available tour time!

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□The Irish are wonderfully friendly, so we never felt lost. They gave us great advice on the best Temple Bar restaurant to visit for our first Irish

dinner. The Westin was located within walking distance of this part of town, and we found our way to Gogarty's Irish Pub! I am here to assure you that the Irish have discovered gourmet cooking, and every meal we had was absolutely delicious. Along with the amazing food, we so enjoyed the great Irish music provided by the live band.

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□Our Adventure by Disney -- Ireland began on Saturday evening, with a wonderful welcome dinner, complete with entertainment provided by a very talented harpist. We all shared where we were from, and what we were most looking forward to during our journey around Ireland.

Surprisingly, our group had several California families, one from the city next door to ours! It's a Small World…

Sunday dawned early, and after a delicious breakfast, we were off on our Viking Splash! If you have ever done a Duck Tour, that is what this was -- complete with the Viking headgear! We have some really funny pictures! First we did the land portion, then we went for a ride on the river Liffey! We saw U-2's studio -- cruised right past this!! Next we were off on our very comfy bus to visit the Jennie Johnson -- a ship replica of those that took the Irish Potato Famine victims to the USA.

This gave me a new appreciation for the courage of my ancestors… Next stop was Lunch at the Guinness Storehouse -- otherwise known as Mecca for the guys! Lunch was in a large private dining room, and then we were off for the tour. That was great fun, but wow, the place was packed!! After that, we went back to the hotel for our evening on our own. After our daily required nap, our guides recommended a great restaurant called The Bank, built in a gorgeous restored old bank building where we enjoyed another delicious dinner! Oh, but first… I was on a mission to find… The Disney Store!! Of course, our guides had the directions -- it was nearby on Grafton Street! This was a great area to people watch and shop! I found the Dublin Disney Store Mickey & Minnie plush -- too cute!!

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□Monday was the 4th of July, and immediately after breakfast we were on the bus and off to Killarney! Our guides and driver had decorated the bus with red/white/blue streamers from end to end, and we were given necklaces, and some wore other 4th accessories -- sunglasses, bowties, etc… Great fun! We stopped partway at a small hotel for tea and scones, yum! Next stop was the Rock of Cashel, a towering ruin where ancient Irish chieftains ruled.

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□What a shock to arrive in Killarney only to discover that they were in the midst of a HUGE 4th of July celebration!! There were red/white/blue banners everywhere, a band playing in the town center, and later a parade complete with Uncle Sam, the Statue of Liberty, bald eagles, and even Mickey and Minnie in their patriotic finery!! Who

knew?? We enjoyed a light dinner -- Murphy's famous ice cream, and then most of our group went off on the Ghost Bus tour. We sat that one out and went to the hotel's garden Bar for a yummy dinner. Every pub and restaurant had their own version of Atlantic Seafood Chowder, and I had to sample them all!!! Later, we all met in the hotel library for Irish Coffees (hot chocolate for the young'uns and teetotalers). We did not make it to see the midnight fireworks -- but we did hear them!

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□ Tuesday was another full day. First we did the Jaunty Cart ride to Ross Castle in Killarney National Park. Our driver loved kids, so he had two boys up front with him, and he taught them how to drive the cart. After some time to explore Ross Castle -- another ruin… we took our bus to another hotel where many of our group embarked upon a bike ride to the next stop in the Park, Muckross House. Those of us with creaky knees took the bus there! We toured Muckross House, a lovely restored home by a beautiful lake. After the tour and a huge lunch, we had some free time (for our daily nap). Later, we were all off to Kate Kearney's Cottage for a traditional Irish evening of food, Irish music and folk dancing! Almost forgot- every day we had a visit from our guide's plush lamb named Shamrock -- and Shamrock had a special surprise!!! No spoilers here…

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□ Wednesday we checked out of the Killarney Park Hotel, and we were off to kiss the Blarney Stone! We spent a good amount of time at Blarney Castle, but it was raining, and the steps up to the top of the castle were very slippery, so we stayed at ground level and let the younger folk make that climb (those who needed to). We found a ground level Blarney Castle stone, technically another Blarney Stone, and we gave that a quick kiss!! We stopped in a very cute town named Adare and had lunch at the local pub -- Aunty Lena's (thankfully not the Leakin' Lena, as it was still raining!) Finally, we arrived at Dromoland Castle, and the staff were all lined up on the walkway awaiting our arrival! Just like in Downton Abbey!

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□ After we were checked in -- our room was down in the converted stables (or dungeon, depending upon who we talked to…) while our friends hiked up four windy narrow flights of stone stairs to the tower…; the adults met for a delicious dinner at Dromoland Castle's Fig tree Restaurant at the Golf and Country Club while the kids had their own dinner and fun evening.

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□ Thursday we had the day to play at Dromoland Castle. We all met after breakfast for a walking tour of the castle grounds. Our knees were getting a bit creaky after all the walking, so our guide was kind enough to get us a golf cart for this tour! Ed upped her tip significantly for that great kindness!! Later, we attended the falconry tour, followed by lunch

on our own and then another carriage ride around the grounds. That was spectacular! After our now traditional nap, we were off to our medieval dinner at Knappogue Castle -- and our guides arranged for the four of us to be Kings and Queens of Ireland for the night!! What a great 25th Anniversary party that was!

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□Friday, after breakfast at the Dromoland Castle Earl of Thomond restaurant, we were off to our Rathbaun Irish farm tour, complete with scone making with Frances, sheep shearing demonstration, and bottle feeding the lambs! We had a lovely lunch at the farm, and enjoyed our freshly baked scones for dessert! Our last stop was at the Cliffs of Moher -- fabulous!!! That evening was our farewell dinner in a Dromoland Castle private room -- an Irish feast with step dancing and traditional music, followed by the famous ABD Adventure slide show. Best news -- this time ABD sent us a copy of that slide show -- it was hilarious!! Worst news (for most) -- the trip was over and they would be departing for home in the morning… but not us.

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□We chose to add on a few extra days to this Ireland Adventure, and we were so glad that we did. Again, we knew there were parts of Ireland that ABD would not visit, and we planned our escorted Emerald Elite Tour for four to visit these regions. By hiring a car and driver as part of our package, we all were able to relax and enjoy the sights without driving off the road! The Irish not only drive on the left, they make even NASCAR drivers seem tame. We were careful not to watch the van's speedometer!

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□We spent a few days exploring Ireland but by Wednesday, the party was over… but the memories of this Adventure will be in our hearts forever! With 2017 fast approaching, we wonder where we will visit on our next Adventure by Disney.

About The Author: Carol is a lifelong Disney fan and a 20 year DVC member who has enjoyed countless trips to Walt Disney World and Disneyland, many cruises, and now three Adventures by Disney. When not working as a Quality Director, she is always planning that next adventure by land or by sea.

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