

## Agnes Scott Alumnae Trip to Ireland and Scotland June 3-15, 2018

### Travel Tips for Ireland and Scotland



**W**elcome to Agnes Scott College’s alumnae and friends trip Northern Ireland and Scotland! I hope you are as excited about our upcoming trip as I am.

These “Travel Notes” will answer some of your questions about the trip and give you a starting point for your own planning. If you need more information on any subject, don’t hesitate to ask.

The island of Ireland is really two countries—the Republic of Ireland in the south (26 counties) and Northern Ireland in the northeastern part of the island (6 counties), which is part of the United Kingdom—and contains a number of distinct (and sometimes overlapping) cultures that have their own complex histories and characteristics. Being “Irish” has many meanings and nuances. Look for and appreciate the differences within Irish life and between Ireland and the United States, whether they are subtle or blatant. Our trip begins in the Republic of Ireland, but we will quickly drive to Belfast and spend four nights there before traveling to Scotland for the remaining, eight nights of the trip.

All of the stops on our trip have been carefully chosen to further your knowledge of specific course subjects: Irish and Scottish history, culture, literature, film, art, and architecture—with

an emphasis on literature. We have also provided lots of free time for you to explore on your own.

The alphabetical list that follows will answer many of your questions. But please let me know if you have more questions, and if I can't answer them, I will find someone who can.

**Baggage** Our Irish tour company Celtic Tours will take care of one suitcase for you; at each stop your bag will be unloaded and delivered to your room. If you bring a second suitcase or other baggage, you must carry it by yourself from the bus up to your hotel room and from the hotel down to the bus. So it's a good idea to bring one medium to large suitcase and a tote bag or other bag in which you can keep the things you'll need with you on the bus. Make sure all your luggage is clearly labeled; you will receive special blue tour luggage tags with your travel documents.

**Bus etiquette** It is important on a group trip to sit in different places on the bus each day. That way, you will get to know more people in the group, and we will also take turns sitting in the more desirable seats. Be sure to take whatever you need for the day with you on the bus, as you will not have access to your suitcase during the day.

As a courtesy to your fellow passengers, please don't use cell phones for calls while on the bus.

To maximize efficient arrivals, when we arrive at a stop, if you need time to gather belongings or know that you will be slow in getting off the bus, please wait and let others get off first.

**Checking out of the hotels** On the days when we move from one town to the next, don't forget to check out of your room in a timely manner and to pay any costs you may have incurred such as telephone fees, room service, laundry, etc. There is usually a line at the reception desk in the morning, so you may want to get up a bit earlier than usual and complete your checkout before going to breakfast.

**Departure times** Our days are carefully planned so that we can see as much as possible and work in some free time for you. Please respect the posted times for departure each day and, on the days when we are moving to a new town, the early morning time for putting your suitcase out in the hotel corridor for pick-up.

If the departure time is set for 9:00 a.m., for example, then you should be on the bus in a seat and ready to go (having had breakfast and used the

facilities) by 8:50 a.m.

All our hotels will be happy to provide wake-up calls for you, and most have alarm clocks on the TV or in the room. Please use these ways of making sure you get up in time to do everything you need to do before departure.

**Documents**

In May you will receive your travel documents. This packet will include your airline itinerary, the trip itinerary, and other materials. These documents are your responsibility and should be kept in a safe place. Each of you is responsible for having a valid passport with you at all times.

**Dress and dressing for the weather**

“Casual,” “warm,” “comfortable,” “layers,” and “interchangeable” should be your guiding principles for what to wear on the trip. Ireland and Scotland are, for the most part, casual places when it comes to dress, and you will not need to “dress up” unless you want to. I usually bring about four outfits with pieces that are interchangeable.

Please keep in mind that many of our activities involve spending time outdoors, and there is a lot of beautiful scenery. The average daily high in Belfast in June is 63°F with an average daily low of 52. Temperatures in Scotland are similar though lower by a degree or two.

In that kind of weather, I am comfortable wearing a sweater over my other clothes and bringing a lightweight raincoat. Umbrellas can be handy, but it is often windy, so be prepared for them to be turned inside out in a gust. When it rains, it is usually a light rain compared to the deluges we experience in Atlanta. And because of the winds coming in off the Atlantic, weather moves fairly rapidly: if it is raining in the morning, it is likely to be clear by afternoon, for example.

If you don’t bring the right clothes, Ireland and Scotland are great places for clothes shopping. Sweaters of all kinds and related items are a specialty.

**Driver-guide Dave Yeates**

Our driver-guide for the Ireland portion of the trip, Dave Yeates, has led six Agnes Scott student tours and is a beloved friend to those travelers, as he will be to you. Please get to know Dave early in the trip—he has already won the hearts of several generations of Agnes Scott Ireland trippers. Dave and I work together to plan the trip and to maximize the experience for you day by day while in Ireland. Dave will be an important part of our group and a great resource for you as you get to know Ireland. In various towns around the country, Dave will lead expeditions—including pub crawls—for anyone who wants to go. Be sure to sit next to Dave at meals to hear his stories and insights first hand.

**Electricity** Northern Ireland and Scotland use a three-pronged electrical plug that is unique to Ireland and the United Kingdom. You can purchase adaptors (electrical plugs with holes for your American plug and prongs for the Irish/UK socket) in the US or in Ireland. The current in Ireland is 220V. Your American communication devices and computers will say whether or not they can be switched to that voltage (today, most switch automatically), but you will always need an adaptor. Bathrooms in Irish hotels usually have a US-friendly outlet for shavers, and all rooms will have hairdryers (do not bring your American hair dryer).

Speak with Christine Cozzens if you require any electronic medical equipment or anything more complicated than a laptop or battery charger.



**Guided tours** Our trip includes many guided tours, some with guides we know and have used in the past, others who will be new to us. Guides can be extremely helpful in developing your knowledge of Ireland. They welcome your questions. Their fees and tips are included in the price of the trip, but we hope you will make an effort to thank them individually.

**Hairdryers** All of our hotels provide hairdryers in the rooms; they are often stored in the desk drawer.

**Hotel room keys or key cards** Most of our hotels will use plastic key cards. In some hotels, these cards are inserted in a little wall pocket near the room door to turn on the room's electricity. This is a great way to save energy AND to keep your room key in a safe place!

**Itinerary changes** The printed itinerary you will receive just before departure is our plan for the trip, but sometimes changes are necessary or desirable and may be made at the last minute. The weather, driving conditions, opening and closing hours of the various attractions, and unexpected opportunities (and sometimes problems) all may play a part in causing last minute changes. We will keep you informed of any changes or rearrangements to the schedule.

**Laundry** If you need to do a load of laundry, check out the hotel rates in Belfast, Ayr, or Melrose. Laundry usually takes a day: drop off at the hotel desk in the a.m. and delivery to your room around 5 p.m. It usually costs about \$15 to \$25 for a load, depending on the size. Hand laundry in your room is always a possibility, of course.

**Meals** The food in Ireland and Scotland is very good! A culinary revolution about thirty years ago and greater availability of all kinds of food have influenced both places.

Breakfast is included at all of our hotels. There is usually a buffet with everything from hot and cold cereal, to toast, fruit, yogurt, eggs, bacon (Irish bacon is more like what we call Canadian bacon and is called “rashers”), sausage, etc. Sometimes the buffet includes hot items; at other hotels, you request a “hot breakfast.” In Belfast a “full Irish breakfast” includes an egg or eggs, rashers, and sausage links, black and white pudding (varieties of sausage), and sometimes a grilled tomato or sautéed mushrooms. You can order any combination of those items.

A couple of dinners are included. Dinners at hotels usually include several choices for each course, and there is always a vegetarian choice. If you have special requirements, most restaurants will work with you to prepare a meal. For example, if there’s no vegetarian choice or if you can’t eat the one they have, they will prepare pasta with vegetables for you, or something like that. Be sure to give the dining room advance notice.

I’m sure you will be eager to try local restaurants. Your leaders or the hotel staff can provide suggestions.

#### **Money**

In Northern Ireland and Scotland the currency is Sterling (British pound). Using an ATM card is the easiest way to get cash in both places and provides the best exchange rate.

Visa is slightly more common than other credit cards, though MasterCard is just about as common. Many businesses do not take American Express; the bigger shops, restaurants, and all hotels do take AMEX.

#### **Passport**

**Check your passport to make sure that the expiration date is more than six months in the future from the dates of our trip. This regulation has become standard in recent years, and travelers have been stopped if their passports don’t comply.**

#### **Shopping**

I am an expert at shopping in Ireland and Scotland! I would be happy to give you suggestions and recommendations as we go around the island.

In terms of personal items that you might decide you need (toiletries, over-the-counter medicines, etc.), shops in both places will have anything and everything you could want. **Bring your prescription medicines from home, of course.**

#### **Time zone**

Ireland and Scotland are on Greenwich Mean Time or GMT with “summer time” and are five hours earlier than the eastern time zone in the US. Since both Ireland and Scotland are so far north, in June daylight continues until

about 11 p.m. Some people like to use an eye mask at night.

**Tipping**

Tips or gratuities for luggage and meals at our hotels and for our guides are already covered by your trip fee.

When you go out on your own, keep in mind that tipping is not usual at bars unless you order food. A tip of about ten percent of the bill is common for food orders at restaurants and pubs. “Rounding up” or a bit of change is the common practice for taxis.

**WiFi**

All of our hotels will have free WiFi. Be sure to inquire about the password at the front desk. The speed is not always optimal, so don’t count on being able to download or upload at all times.