

Agnes Scott Alumnae Trip to Ireland June 4-15, 2016

Travel Tips for Ireland



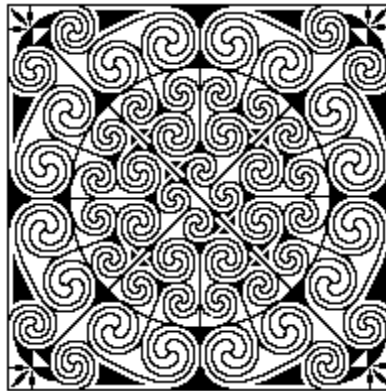
Welcome to Agnes Scott College’s alumnae and friends trip to the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland! I hope you are as excited about our upcoming trip as I am.

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.

Today, Ireland is primarily an English speaking country (though it is important to note, there are at least 80,000 bilingual Gaelic speakers and around 100,000 Polish speakers). For that reason and because of strong ties to the United States built through centuries of emigration, Irish culture can seem very similar at times to that of the US, but of course in most ways, it is its own unique place. 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.

All of the stops on our trip have been carefully chosen to further your knowledge of specific course subjects: Irish history, culture, literature, film, art, and architecture—with an emphasis on literature. We have also provided lots of free time for you to explore Ireland on your own. Most of the places we will be visiting are outdoor sites, especially those outside of the cities of Dublin and Belfast.

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.

Bathrooms In Ireland, while everyone understands "bathroom," the more common terms for bathrooms in public places are "the toilets," "the Ladies'," or "the Gents.'" Sometimes the names are posted in Irish: *Mna* [mn-AWE] means ladies, and *Fir* [FEAR] means gents. Some toilets in Ireland use a different mechanism than do those in the US, and often the flushing handle has to be pumped a few times to make it work.

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.

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 in Ireland. Ireland is, for the most part, a very casual place 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. Thanks to being the first land mass hit by the Gulf Stream coming across the Atlantic, Ireland enjoys a moderate climate—more so than does continental Europe or the United States. The average temperature in June is 60°F with an average daily low of 49 and an average daily high of 62. Interestingly, the average daily temperature for the entire year is 55, so you can see that the temperature is pretty much always somewhere between 40 and 60. When I've been there in

June, it has almost always been 59 or 60.

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 across the country 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 is a great place for clothes shopping. Sweaters of all kinds and related items are a specialty. Both in Dublin and while on the road, we will be near places to shop.

**Driver-guide
Dave Yeates**

Our driver-guide for the trip, Dave Yeates, has led four 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

Ireland and Northern Ireland 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 Killarney, Galway, and Derry where we are staying over for two nights. 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. If you want to do it yourself, the best bet will be at a launderette in Killarney or Galway. Hand laundry in your room is always a possibility, of course.

Meals The food in Ireland is very good! A culinary revolution about thirty years ago and greater availability of all kinds of food have influenced the entire country. In addition to good traditional Irish dishes, there are many great ethnic restaurants now and quite a bit of variety at most 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." 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

The currency in the Republic of Ireland is the Euro. In Northern Ireland, 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 in Ireland, 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! 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.), Ireland will have anything and everything you could want. **Bring your prescription medicines from home, of course.**

As for souvenirs and gifts, Ireland is a great place to purchase woolen items of all kinds, including handmade sweaters and blankets. Waterford Crystal is another popular item; it is not cheap, but at least this company's prices are the same all over the country. We will be visiting Dingle Crystal, where they can ship purchases directly to the U.S. for a reasonable price—or even for free, if you buy enough! There are other nice crystal companies, as well, such as Tipperary. There are fine bookstores in Dublin and in several of the towns we will be visiting.

All the major tourist attractions have excellent gift shops. We will be stopping at several great shopping places, including Blarney Woolen Mills at Blarney Castle, and others.

Some of you may want to purchase a Claddagh ring, the traditional wedding ring of the Claddagh, a region of Galway City. The design shows two hands (friendship) holding a heart (love) topped by a crown (loyalty). Thomas Dillon's Claddagh shop in Galway is the best place to buy one of these; authentic rings in silver can be purchased for about \$70 and up (gold and other more expensive rings as well as a variety of Claddagh jewelry are also available).



Time zone Ireland is on Greenwich Mean Time or GMT with “summer time” and is five hours earlier than the eastern time zone in the US. Since Ireland is 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.

Trip booklet Upon arrival in Ireland, you will receive a trip booklet filled with many poems, prose excerpts, speeches, film scenes, songs, and other literary



selections relevant to our itinerary. We will be reading aloud from these works throughout the trip wherever they are relevant—on the bus as we approach a site; at a house, grave, a public building, or other monument; standing in a church nave, on a sandy beach, or in an open field. I hope you will find this to be one of the most exciting and unique aspects of Literary Ireland.



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.