

## **Explore Ireland**

### **Day 1**

**(Meals in flight)**

Board your wide-bodied jet for departure from USA for an overnight flight to Dublin, Ireland

### **Day 2 – Dublin**

**(Dinner)**

**1 night**

Upon arrival, clear customs and immigration and then be met by your escort and transferred to your hotel. Tucked away to the west of mainland Europe, Dublin is probably one of the world's best-kept secrets. Being harder to access than most other capital cities in Europe have proven to be a distinct advantage, as it has allowed Dublin to retain its unique village atmosphere. Medieval and Georgian architecture provides a stern backdrop to the bustling and lively streets filled with street entertainers of all kinds. The aroma of freshly brewed coffee mingles with the distinct smell of hops from the nearby Guinness brewery drawing visitors indoors. There is time to rest before a welcome dinner in the evening.

### **Day 3 – Waterford**

**(Breakfast, Dinner)**

**1 night**

We leave Dublin this morning and drive south to Enniskerry, a secluded hillside village and the gateway to County Wicklow, the Garden of Ireland. Continue through the mountains via Roundwood, the highest village in Ireland, to Glendalough, a scenic glen between two lakes that once held St. Kevin's 6th-century monastic city. Walk among the ruined churches, round tower, and Celtic crosses, and savor Glendalough's story at the visitor center.

Continue this afternoon to Wexford, an ancient town with rich Viking/Norman traditions. Begin an unforgettable journey through 9000 years of Irish history at the Irish National Heritage Park. Next, arrive in the ancient city of Waterford, whose colorful terraced houses, which overlook the quayside. Take time this afternoon to slowly wander the streets. This evening you will meet your local Irish hosts at your accommodations for the night. Overnight Waterford

### **Day 4 – Killarney**

**(Breakfast, Dinner)**

**2 nights**

This morning journey to Cobh, the 19th century point for many Irish emigrants. From 1848 - 1950, over 6 million adults and children emigrated from Ireland - over 2.5 million departed from Cobh. Visit the Victorian railway station in which you see "The Queenstown Story" which retells the story of this exodus from Ireland. It was largely a result of poverty, crop failures, the land system and a lack of opportunity. Next we travel on to the village of Blarney to visit the Blarney Castle, an impressive baronial mansion with formal gardens and woodland walks. Here you can see its fabled stone, which gives the gift of eloquence with a kiss! There is time for you after the visit, to go to the famous Blarney Woolen Mills, where you can buy everything from Irish sweaters to Waterford Crystal. Today enjoy one of the finest scenic views as we wind our way into Killarney for a wonderful two-night stay.

### **Day 5 – Ring of Kerry**

**(Breakfast)**

Travel on to tour the Ring of Kerry today, or "Heaven's Reflex," one of Ireland's loveliest districts. It is a panorama of mountains, lakes, valleys, and seacoast and bog land, interspersed with colorful villages. Much of the dramatic coastline is rocky and has been shaped by the pounding action of the Atlantic Ocean. However, there are sandy beaches to explore here too. The most famous one to visit is the Derrynane strand near Caherdaniel. Without doubt however the most impressive feature of the Ring of Kerry is probably the Macgillycuddy's Reeks with the highest mountain (Carrantoohill) in Ireland. Kerry offers a rich diversity of wildlife and flora that has evolved due to its unique location on the Gulf Stream. Returning to Killarney, enjoy the highlights of the town and the gardens and walking trails of Killarney National Park.

### **Day 6 – Limerick**

**(Breakfast, Dinner)**

**1 night**

Travel to Limerick this morning with a stop in the picturesque village of Adare, considered to be the prettiest village in Ireland with its thatched cottages. Continuing north, stop at Bunratty, famous for its 15th century castle & park, where we will learn about the Ireland of Medieval times. This afternoon arrive at Dromoland Castle, dating back to the 16th century it is one of the most famous baronial castles in Ireland. Its romantic gardens & grounds, luxurious accommodations, prestigious dining room, splendid wood and stone carvings,

original oil paintings and magnificent paneling combine Old World charm with the facilities the New World demand.

### **Day 7 – Galway**

**(Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)**

**2 nights**

Drive through the winding streets of Ennis, County Clare's chief town and setting of an impressive 13th century friary. See the famed and dramatic Cliffs of Moher, rising 700 ft. above the Atlantic Ocean. Then drive north through the bare limestone region known as the Burren to Ballyvaughan, where the Burren Exposure complex tells the story of its unique landscape and flora. Stop at Rauthbaun Farms in County Galway for a home cooked lunch and enjoy a tour of this Irish working farm. Next, arrive in Galway, City of Tribes, which is the capital of the West of Ireland. Visit the Galway Cathedral & the Church of St Nicholas, where Columbus is reputed to have prayed before sailing to America. Our next 2 nights are at an abbey converted into a wonderful 4-star hotel.

### **Day 8 – Connemara**

**(Breakfast)**

Relax this morning at your hotel before we depart through the wild and scenic coast of Connemara. Here the mountains of Galway & Mayo drop down to meet the rugged coastline. Continue for a stop at the famous Knock Shrine. On the 21st of August 1879, Our Lady, St. Joseph & St. John the Evangelist appeared at the south gable of Knock Parish Church. Fifteen people, young & old witnessed the apparition. From this miraculous occurrence, Knock has grown to the status of an internationally recognized Marian Shrine. This afternoon return to your hotel & enjoy Galway's quaint city highlights. You will want to take time to visit the Spanish Arch, Eyre Square, and the Galway Crystal Heritage Center or just find a small pub to relax, enjoy a traditional Irish lunch and of course a pint of the local speciality.

### **Day 9 – Enniskillen**

**(Breakfast, Dinner)**

**2 nights**

This morning we head northeast to Sligo, homeland of poet William Butler Yeats. We visit the highlights of Yeats Country, including his quiet churchyard grave at Drumcliffe. We then continue through the villages and towns of Donegal. Located at the mouth of Donegal Bay in the Northwest of Ireland and surrounded by the vista of the Blue Stack mountains, the area offers a rugged beauty and mystique that you are unlikely to find anywhere else in the world! Donegal Town itself would be regarded as a town of great historical interest, for it was the family seat of the O'Donnells, chieftains of Tirconaille in 1474. Some 178 years later, Brother Michael O'Cleary, together with three laymen wrote one of the seminal texts of Irish history, The Annals of the Four Masters, which has been described as "the most remarkable collection of National tradition in all Christendom". The town dates back to Viking times when a fortress was at the mouth of the river Eske. It is thought that this gave the town and ultimately the county its name, Dun na Gall, meaning "Fort of the Foreigners". It could also have been the earliest account of their reputation for hospitality! Enjoy the rest of the day in the peaceful surroundings of the Manor House Hotel near Enniskillen.

### **Day 10 – Donegal**

**(Breakfast, Dinner)**

The first outing this morning is a leisurely cruise on the lovely lake around Devenish Island to view their early monastic ruins. Devenish is an L-shaped island of 70 acres at the southern end of Lower Lough Erne. Ballycassidy is on the north of Devenish Island on the eastern shore of the lake. The ruins of a monastery, two churches, an oratory and one of the finest round towers in Ireland occupy a sloping hillside on the southeast tip of Devenish. One century after St. Patrick's death and paralleling the growth of monasticism in Ireland in the sixth century, St. Molaise (whose death is recorded in the Annals of Ulster in both 563 and 570 AD), founded a monastery on Devenish Island. The story is told that St. Molaise, resting from his labors, listened spellbound to bird song that was the Holy Spirit communicating. The reverie lasted a hundred years, and then St. Molaise looked around after the interval and the monastery had been built.

**Day 11 – Dublin****(Breakfast, Dinner)****2 nights**

Today we follow the road south to Dublin. Along the way we make little stops in the small villages along the way. One such village will be Lisburn, which is famous for its Irish Linen Centre, then on to Armagh, the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland and home of two St. Patrick's Cathedrals plus St. Patrick's Trian, a heritage center devoted to Ireland's patron saint. As we arrive into Dublin for our last two-night stay, check into your hotel, get out, and explore this fascinating big city of Ireland. Tonight we enjoy a festive and lively dinner at Abbey Tavern. The food is delicious and the traditional Irish music is top class - a blend of fiddles, concertinas, tin whistles, pipes, spoons and lots of hand clapping. It's well worth the trip to the Dublin seaport suburb.

**Day 12 – Dublin****(Breakfast, Dinner)**

Street-side cafes and pubs are always buzzing with animated conversations and visitors may soon be engrossed in topics as diverse as sport, politics and literature or the old favorite - the weather. It is interesting to note that it was in many of these same cafes and pubs that the literary giants such as Joyce, Kavanagh and O'Casey discussed the topics of the day over a thick creamy pint of Guinness. Many visitor attractions throughout the city pay tribute to its fascinating history. There are a variety of museums, art galleries and visitor attractions to suit every taste. You can ask your tour director to point out the off the beaten track areas of Dublin, or you can find yourself immersed in shopping in the best shops in the country. Tonight join your fellow travelers for your Farewell Dinner, where you can trade the Irish limericks you have learned over a pint of Guinness.

**Day 13****(Breakfast)**

This morning we transfer to Dublin International Airport with ample time to check your luggage and board your flight back to the USA