

Ireland

Group Travel Made Easy

on the *Emerald Isle*

Kylemore Abbey

By Jerry Soverinsky

Having spent over 20 years developing and hosting European group tours, I've found no better destination for group travel—regardless of season or group theme—than Ireland. (To be clear, I sold my company several years ago and now work exclusively as a writer.) The country succeeds in consistently exceeding the expectations of both tour group members and leaders—over and over again.

Any mention of Ireland's success must start with its people. The extraordinarily accommodating nature of the Irish provides the most welcoming environment for group travel. No matter how intricate or complex your group itineraries, they'll never seem insulating, because the Irish will become part of your groups' trip experiences. It might be your motorcoach driver, or innkeeper, or maybe the guy pouring pints of Guinness at the local pub. More than likely, it will be all three, as you'll get to know the people and personalities who make Ireland such a warm, intimate place to visit, and they in turn will provide both you and your group with stories that will remain with you for the rest of your lives.



**Tourism
Ireland**

*Marketing the island
of Ireland*



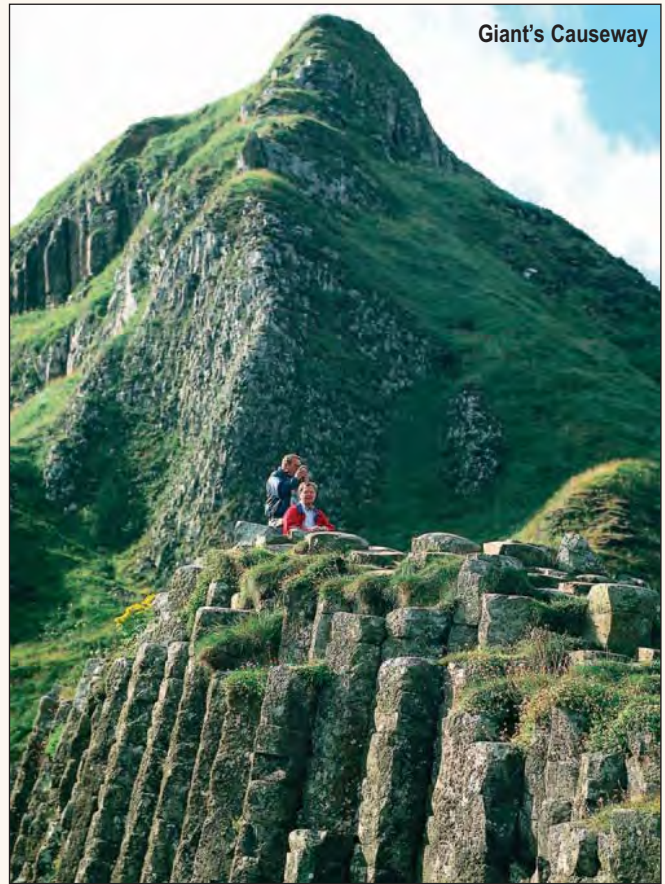
One of Ireland's greatest tourism assets is its huge variety of offerings. Whether your group is interested in history, castles, architecture, cultural events, food and wine, gardens, literature, active pursuits, or natural sites and scenery, you'll find an endless variety of world-class options there, all contained within a very manageable area. This won't go unnoticed by your group, either. Almost all of my Ireland tours ended with one or more participants commenting, "I never knew there was so much to see and do in Ireland. I can't wait to come back." Here's just a snapshot of what you can expect:

Layout

Ireland is an oasis of unspoiled scenery, prehistoric sites, cosmopolitan cities, and bustling towns and villages, all nestled comfortably on a very accessible 300 miles north-south, 150 miles east-west island. You won't need to worry about "dead" time spent on a motorcoach, either, since you can reach most sites and attractions relatively quickly by bus or boat. This will keep your group actively engaged, allowing them to enjoy robust, well-rounded itineraries, even in the most abbreviated time frame.

Sightseeing

The Cliffs of Moher (Co. Clare), Giant's Causeway (Co. Antrim), Aran Islands (off the coast of Galway), Ring of Kerry (Co. Kerry) and Glenveagh National Park (Co. Donegal), are just a few of Ireland's treasured natural sites, as impressive and dramatic a collection as any throughout the world. These are unspoiled, majestic



landscapes and coastlines, not kitschy, fabricated tourist traps. And they're accessible to groups of all sizes.

Additionally, there's an informality at many of Ireland's sites and attractions that allows groups the freedom to explore them at unhurried, individual paces (no small task with groups of 20 and 30 people), free from restrictive reservation times. This is a tremendous asset, one that all group leaders will appreciate. Visits

typically proceed as follows: a bus arrives at a designated parking area; a driver or guide handles admission logistics; and within minutes, the group is busy sightseeing. This “green light” treatment is common throughout Ireland, as its tourism infrastructure places a heavy emphasis on efficiently accommodating group movements.

Along those lines, working with local drivers and guides is a breeze in Ireland. Not only will you find them to be tremendous resources of Ireland information and expert travel managers, but their enthusiasm and passions will become infectious with group members, ensuring truly memorable trip experiences.

Prehistoric Sites

In addition to scenery, Ireland is a treasure trove of archaeological wonders. The Burren and Connemara along Ireland’s west coast are rich with dolmens (megalithic stone tombs) and other prehistoric remnants, all easily accessible to motorcoaches and cars. With the insights from a certified guide, the history comes alive for your group members.

Themes

One of Ireland’s greatest assets for travel planning professionals is the diverse interests that it accommodates. Here are just a few suggestions:



Grand Opera House



Birr Castle

Literature lovers will delight in itineraries that follow the trails of Nobel winners Beckett, Yeats, and Shaw, as well as equally acclaimed literary greats Joyce and Wilde.

Those with a fondness for **castles** will find dozens of stunning examples, including Ross Castle (Co. Kerry), Birr Castle (Co. Offaly), Kilkenny Castle (Co. Kilkenny), Ashford (Co. Mayo) and Dromoland (Co. Clare). For an extraordinary experience, you might also consider spending overnights at Ashford and Dromoland—both double as extraordinary hotels.

Green thumb enthusiasts will find lush, ornate **gardens** throughout Ireland, such as Strokestown House & Gardens (Co. Roscommon), Mount Stewart House & Gardens (Co. Down), Belvedere House & Gardens (Co. Westmeath), and Dillon Garden (Dublin), to name a few.

Active travelers and **outdoor enthusiasts** will find Ireland to be one of the most favorable destinations for golf, walking, cycling, equestrian and watersports holidays. I’ve hosted dozens of tours for all age groups and

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fitness levels on active Ireland holidays; they were all successful.

Shopaholics will find ample opportunities to flex their credit card muscle, with Waterford Crystal, Belleek Pottery, and Irish silver among just a few of the island's handcrafted specialties.

Food connoisseurs will find endless culinary treasures in Ireland. I've hosted very successful food programs for some of the world's most discriminating foodies (including food writers), all interested in the artisanal, world-class offerings of Ireland's specialty producers and its rapidly expanding list of Michelin-rated restaurants.



Finally, Ireland appeals to the most high-browed **cultural** interests. Whether your tastes favor comedy, music, theatre, museums, art galleries, or drama, you'll find an endless assortment of world-class facilities and lively festivals throughout the country, a comprehensive offering that will challenge and entertain the most diverse group interests.

To illustrate Ireland's variety of sites and attractions, a typical tour might include visits to see The Book of Kells, a 9th century manuscript housed in Trinity College's library (Dublin); the Ulster American Folk Park (Co. Tyrone), an open-air museum in Northern Ireland that traces the story of Ulster emigration to America; the Jameson Heritage Centre (Co. Cork), for a lively presentation of the history of Irish whiskey (tastings are optional—though highly recommended); and the Rock of Cashel (Co. Tipperary), the most visited Heritage site in Ireland and a spectacular group of medieval buildings.

Facilities

Ireland's extensive assortment of well-appointed, luxury accommodations and indulgent spas, coupled with the dotting attention of hands-on hotel proprietors and managers, ensure that you and your group receive the attention you require at the end of each day. This extends into all reaches of the country, from large, cosmopolitan cities like Dublin, Belfast, Galway and Cork, to quaint, towns and villages like Dingle (Co. Kerry), Newcastle (Co. Down), Kinsale (Co. Cork) and Doolin (Co. Clare).



Practical Ireland

When to Go

Ireland is perfect for year-round travel, with a mild, temperate climate providing consistent temperature ranges without extremes. With summer temperatures averaging 60-70 degrees, spring and fall 50 degrees, and winter 40-45 degrees, almost any group activity can be planned no matter the season. I've hosted groups with great success in winter and early spring. Not only was the weather dry and comfortable, but airfares were substantially lower than in peak summer months, resulting in very favorable trip costs. To be sure, Ireland receives its share of rain, though it has never diminished any of my groups' experiences (especially with welcoming pubs so prevalent).

How to Get There

With flights from seven US gateways on five airlines providing nonstop service to Ireland, transatlantic travel is simple and hassle-free. Not to mention, because of Ireland's position as Europe's westernmost country, travel times to Ireland are substantially less than to continental Europe. As an example, direct flights from New York to Shannon last just over six hours—roughly the same as travel time to Los Angeles.

For more information on travel to Ireland, contact **Tourism Ireland** at 800.223.6470 or visit www.discoverireland.com.



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