

Greetings Ireland Travelers!

This letter will provide some insight into what to pack, what you'll experience on the tour, and little things you should know to enhance your travel to the Emerald Isle.

There's a lot of information here over a wide range of topics. Please read it over as soon as you can. Some of this letter is generic European travel information. Some is specific to our Ireland tour.

I've always found the Irish to be very welcoming and warm. When you step into a pub expect to be greeted and be prepared to respond in turn. Don't be surprised that you've had a pint purchased for you. When that happens, be prepared to return the generosity.

The food in Ireland has improved a bit over the years, largely because of other Europeans coming to live there. Beer is abundant. Whiskey as well. I hope you'll acquire a taste for Guinness or a Murphys. There's no finer breakfast beer in the world than a stout from either of these well-known breweries.

There's no wine made in Eire that I'm aware of, and I would steer clear if you come across any. You'll be able to find a selection of French and Italian wines in most restaurants and for some reason Chilean and Argentinean wines are plentiful.

The Irish are likely to press you for opinions on American politics. Their economy, like much of the rest of the world, hinges on our policies. It used to be that religion and that particular time frame known as "the troubles" were completely off-topic. This was more the case, then closer you were to the border counties, where much of their day-to-day existence was driven by religion and the institutional and generational hatred between Catholics and Protestants. I found this still to be the case when visiting Derry seven years ago. There is a tension that still exists in Northern Ireland and the border counties that doesn't exist in the south of the Republic. Even still, avoid the topic of religion.

May not need to say it here, but do not order a Black and Tan (Stout & Lager layered) in Ireland. The term carries political meaning. That also applies, perhaps obviously, to an Irish Car Bomb. Delicious and dangerous drink (and I'd be happy to make one for you), but please don't order one in an Irish Pub.

Important topics for your tour

Airport Check in

Please check in for your flight at least 2 hours prior to flight time. I always recommend an early check in for a trip like this. You'll need to have your passport and confirmation/ticket number for your flight. It's a good time now to verify that your passport is valid for the length of your stay in Ireland. If not, your passport must be renewed.

Remember your passport

Make a couple of photocopies to place in your baggage and another with a friend at home. If lost or stolen, passports are much easier to replace if you have a facsimile copy. **Take a picture of the signature page as a backup.**

No visas are required for Ireland (for US or Canadian Citizens), and your passport need not have any specific validity beyond the length of your stay. It's suggested that you should have at least 3 months validity remaining from the date you depart Ireland for home.

There is some speculation that the EU may place a visa requirement on US Travelers, but this is a long shot. If there are changes to the current situation, you'll get an email from me. **Check your passport expiration date today.**

24-hour clock

Get used to using the 24-hour clock. Most of Europe works this way. 11:30 pm is noted as 23:30. This is especially important when catching any sort of scheduled transportation. Add 12 to PM times to come up with the correct number. Two PM becomes 14:00. Five AM is 05:00.

Suggested Dress

Ireland Weather in Summer

Ireland is green for a reason. The Irish use many words to describe the rain, ranging from "soft" to "filthy wet". We can hope for dry days and blue skies, but

plan on at least some precipitation along the way. I advise that you check Accuweather.com or Weather.com prior to packing your bags. It's an island with a Marine Weather designation and weather is notoriously difficult to predict, but at least that will give you a sense of what to expect.

No matter the forecast, bring a rain shell for the trip. Ireland is not typically hot, with highs in the lower 70s (August) and in the lower 60's (September). Lows in the low 50s. Cool mornings, so bring layers to wear. On average, Ireland gets over 3 inches of rain a month in August and September with an average of 14 rainy days a month.

Daylight Time in Ireland

Ireland is situated pretty far north. Here's the chart for sunrise/sunset:

	Sunrise	Sunset
August 23rd	6:32 AM	8:42 PM
September 10th	7:02 AM	8:02 PM
October 1st	7:38 AM	7:11 PM

Dining on our tour

We're dining together 8 of the 11 nights of the tour. Other nights and for many lunches you'll be on your own. Our local guide will have suggestions for you.

Most restaurants require that I pre-select an entrée or two for the group. I will need to know about allergies, sensitivities, and dislikes in that order. If you are vegan, vegetarian, pescatarian, or carnivorous, I need to know. If you've not advised me of issues, I would like to hear from you right away. Rest assured, internal organs are not on my menu.

The staff at the villa and restaurants will be made aware of these issues. The servers will be searching for the diners that have special dietary needs. Help them (and me) out by identifying yourself when we gather to dine.

Language?

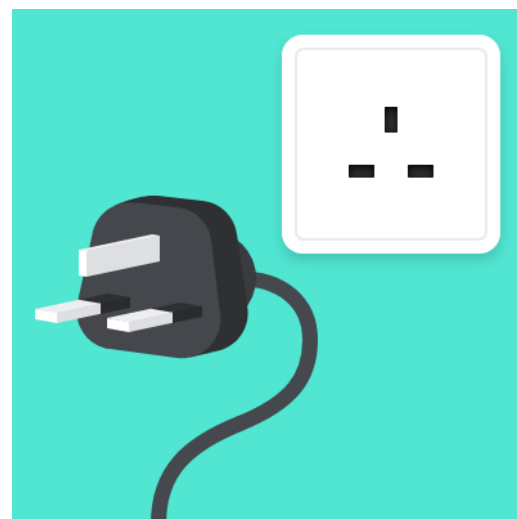
English and Irish (Gaelige) are the two official languages of Ireland. In just about every situation, you'll have English to use as an option. Even in the Gaeltacht part of the island, most native Irish speakers will also speak English.

That said, it's fun and respectful to greet people in the local dialect. Here's a list of words that you might have an opportunity to try out at a local pub or restaurant.

Hello	Dia dhuit	"Jee-ah ghwitch"
Good morning	Dia dhuit ar maidin	"Jee-ah gwuitch air modgin
Thank you	Go raibh maith agat	"Guh rev mah a-gut"
Cheers	Sláinte	"Slawn-Che"
Whiskey	uisce Beatha	"ish-kuh baha"
I'd like a pint	Pionta, le do thoil	"Pyun-tah, leh duh huh-ill"
My name is...	___ is ainm dom	"___ iss an-im dum"
What's your name?	Cad is ainm duit?	"Kod iss anyim ditch?"
How are you?	Conas atá tú?	"Kun-ass ah-taw too?"
Rain	báisteach	"bawsh-chokh"
One	a haon	"ah hain"
Two	a dó	"ah dough"
Three	a trí	"ah tree"
Four	a ceathair	"ah ca-her"
Bye	Slán	"Slawn"

Electrical plugs and adaptors

You will need an adaptor and convertor for most US manufactured electrical devices that you take. The convertor changes the voltage, and adaptor allows you to plug it in. US Voltage is 110-120, and Europe runs on 220-240 volts. Battery chargers, curling irons, hair dryers are among these items. You can buy adapter/convertor kits at most drug stores. They come with many adaptors. There is a wide range of plug types. For Ireland the associated plug type is G (a legacy of British colonialism), which is the plug that has three rectangular pins in a triangular pattern. Ireland operates on a 230V supply voltage and 50Hz.



Your computer and/or smart phone, if you bring one, should have already come equipped with a transformer/convertor in the cord. Check the voltage requirements on the transformer portion of the power cord. If it comes with a transformer in the cord, you will just need a plug adapter, not a current convertor.

Adaptors/convertors are available at travel stores, Target, Amazon, etc.

Telephones

Call your provider to see what they recommend for phone coverage overseas. Each year it seems that US carriers become more competitive with coverage plans for Europe.

If your current phone isn't equipped to work in Europe, one of the most affordable options is to buy a simple phone over there with pre-purchased minutes. There are many local phone stores in Europe that will sell inexpensive phones with preloaded minutes if you need to have the means to call home. An inexpensive smartphone preloaded with 300 minutes will probably cost you less than \$100.

I've been using T-Mobile with the \$10 a month international plan that gives me unlimited text and data, with discounted calling. Check your provider to see what's best for you.

Whatsapp

This is the app most widely used to communicate in Europe and elsewhere. It's sponsored by Meta (Face Book) and is free. It allows you to text for free (wifi) and to make calls the same way, using the app. The calls can be sketchy in terms of quality. It uses a VOIP technology so that you sometimes get some echo.

I would like you all to download this app if you're not already using it. Send a text to me, using the app, at 425 417 3322 (with your name, please) so that I can add you to the Ireland Whatsapp groups. It's best that you download the app, add me as a contact, then send a request to me.

Whatsapp groups for Ireland IRE01-IRE04

Tour 1-August 19-August 30 (IRE01)

Tour 2-August 31-September 10 (IRE02)

Tour 3-September 11-September 22 (IRE03)

Tour 4-September 22-October 3 (IRE04)

Be sure to identify your group code with your request to me. Any changes to schedule during the week will be announced and posted to the whatsapp group. It's a great tool.

Currency

The Euro has been the official currency in Ireland since 2002. At that time, the Dollar bought a lot more Euros than it does now. Two years ago, the Euro was on par with the dollar. As of today (7/10/24), one Euro is worth about \$1.10, meaning it takes one US Dollar to buy 92 cents in Euro. Projections are that the dollar will continue to lose ground against the Euro.

Spending overseas

The ATM is the best way to obtain cash in Ireland. They are easy to find along the route. Plan on a trip to the ATM every other day to withdraw Euro. You get the best exchange rate and won't have to worry about whether a vendor will accept a credit card.

Credit cards give you a fairly good exchange rate and most card offer consumer protection on your purchase. You also have a record of your purchase. Some bank cards charge 1-2% for purchases made in foreign currency, which offsets the beneficial rate somewhat. Chase Bank and a few others offer cards that do not charge the foreign exchange fee. Check with your bank to see about foreign currency fees. Make sure you keep your receipts.

I have found that Visa cards seem to have the widest acceptance, followed by Mastercard. It is sometimes difficult to get a vendor to accept American Express, perhaps because of their fee structure. Most smaller shops will not want to accept your card. They get hit with fees that make cash a much more attractive alternative for them. This has changed somewhat with the cashless society that sprang up with covid.

Bringing US Currency and hoping to exchange notes is a mistake. Banks keep shorter hours. Some don't offer foreign exchange, and many others won't like the condition of the notes you want to change. It certainly couldn't hurt to bring some US Dollars (new bills, \$50 or \$100 denomination) to use as an emergency back up in case your card gets compromised or your banks security department locks it down.

You should be able to order some Euros from your bank if you want to arrive there with some (though really not necessary). There is usually a fee and you have to allow time for your bank to secure the currency. It's easiest just to hit the ATM at the airport or the nearest one to your destination. At each ATM Stop, get enough cash to last you for a couple days. Please note that airport and rail station ATM machines charge a higher fee. The last note related to ATMs is to use one that's associated with a bank. Try to avoid the EURONET machines as they charge higher fees and exchange rates. The "stand-alone" machines can charge more.

Traveler's checks are a thing of the past. Yes, they still offer them, but steer clear!

It used to be that your bank wanted to you advise them regarding overseas destinations and dates. Their loss management departments now find it easier to simply shut down your account at the first sign of irregularity than to manage individual travelers. Chase Bank won't even take the information online or over the phone. Be aware that your credit card may be suspended with overseas use. If generally takes a call to your bank to rectify the problem. You should be sure to get the toll-free international number for your bank in the event of an over-reaching security algorithm at your bank.

You should still make an attempt to contact your bank with your schedule and dates. Some banks allow you to make these notifications online. Otherwise get in touch with the customer service section of your bank.

Another Note: I have a wallet that is **RFID protected**. Some credit and debit cards can be read remotely using a portable reader. Add a level of protection by purchasing RFID sleeves for your cards. You can also find RFID wallets online.

Packing your bags

There are a few excellent websites dedicated to the art of packing for a trip. I have reproduced some of that information here, but you may want to visit some of these sites yourself. The links are www.oratory.com/travel, and <https://happytowander.com/suitcase-packing-tips/>. Please do what you can to reduce the size of your bag and remember that laundry is available at the villa.

Make sure you have a bag with wheels. Don't take too much. Leave some room for the wine you'll be taking home.

Laundry

Your hotels will be able to launder clothing along the route. There is a per item charge for this and you generally need 24 hours to get the work done. Check with the desk upon check in. We won't comment if you choose to wear the same shirt twice.

Security/Safety

There is very little violent crime toward tourists in Ireland. There really isn't a great deal of theft or pickpocketing either. That said, it's still a good idea to stay alert any place the tourists gather.

Take a photo of your passport with your phone. It's also a good idea to photocopy the data page and zip it into a suitcase pocket. Leave a copy with a friend or relative that is able to fax or email that copy should you need it. It's much easier to replace a lost or stolen passport if you have a facsimile to present.

Rick Steves and people that have used them, swear by a money belt. I've always found them to be somewhat uncomfortable, but you may want to give it a try. Please! No wallets in back pockets! Purses and backpacks should always be zipped closed and held in front of you in crowded situations. See the section on RFID protection under Banking.

Suggested Gratuities

Tipping is a commonly accepted practice in restaurants, anywhere from 10%-15%. Taxis generally are tipped about 5-10% of the bill.

Hotel porters-generally 1 € per bag.

Our guides are compensated for their time, but work hard for a little extra gratuity at the end of the week. If you enjoyed the service provided by our resident guide and driver, show your appreciation. Guidelines are €3-€5 per person, per day for the guides, and €2-€3 per person, per day for the driver. The driver will be with us most, if not all, of the tour and I'll pass an envelope close to the end of the tour for contributions for him.

I've got local guides joining us in each of our overnight destinations. Tip as you go for these guides.

Transportation

We'll be using a small coach with room for bags in the bay. I would like to suggest that you pack lightly.

Suggested reading, film, and TV list

The Quiet Man-1952 film featuring John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara

The Guard-Drug smuggling film on the West Coast-very funny Brendan Gleason

Derry Girls (Netflix) (first season only, last season is terrible) (subtitles necessary)

My Left Foot-Oscar winning film about disabled writer Christy Brown

Angela's Ashes-Great Book and movie-although depressing

The Commitments-Movie about a Dublin music band and their struggles

Michael Collins-Movie about the Irish Civil War and fight for independence

The Wind that Shakes the Barley-Movie about brothers in the civil war

The Dubliners, Finnegans Wake, or any other book by James Joyce

Bodkin is a recent Netflix mystery series that is interesting

Belfast-recent Netflix movie about coming of age in the north during The Troubles

Traveler Name list

I don't usually send guest name lists in advance of travel. Using the Whatsapp phone/text program will provide you with contact details for other tour members.

Cheers!

Brad Cilley

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