

Donegal Square Tour of Ireland

June 19 - 28, 2009

Itinerary

Fri, Jun 19

UNITED STATES TO DUBLIN

Depart your hometown and take an overnight flight across the Atlantic. Enjoy in-flight entertainment and meal service as you travel to start your vacation.

Sat, Jun 20

DUBLIN ARRIVAL & WESTPORT

After landing at Dublin Airport, complete customs and immigration formalities. Then your CIE Tours driver/guide will welcome you to Ireland and escort you and your luggage to the coach. Depart Dublin and journey across the rolling pastures of Ireland's heartland to visit Clonmacnoise. This monastic settlement was founded in 545 AD by St. Ciaran and is delightfully set on the banks of the River Shannon. Then continue your drive to the estate-planned town of Westport and check into your hotel. Enjoy some time to relax and settle in before joining your group for dinner.

DINNER & OVERNIGHT: HOTEL WESTPORT , WESTPORT

Sun, Jun 21

CROAGH PATRICK & ACHILL ISLAND

This morning drive a short distance to the conical mountain of Croagh Patrick where tradition maintains that St. Patrick fasted for 40 days. It is a popular place of pilgrimage where people climb the stony path to the summit. Then continue your sightseeing of this scenic area by traveling around Clew Bay, reputed to have 365 islands. Drive via Newport and across the Curraun Peninsula to reach Achill Island, joined to the mainland by a bridge. Follow the Atlantic Drive to capture wonderful and wild scenic views of steeply sloped mountains plunging into the shimmering Atlantic Ocean. Also see stretches of windswept bogland and golden beaches. Return to Westport where the balance of the afternoon and evening are at leisure for independent activities and dining.

OVERNIGHT: HOTEL WESTPORT, WESTPORT

Mon, Jun 22

BELLEEK CHINA FACTORY & DONEGAL

Leave Westport today and travel through County Mayo and into Sligo, a county of gentle mountains, lakes and coastline. This area is associated with the great writer, W. B. Yeats. Continue your drive into Northern Ireland to reach the town of Belleek to visit the Belleek Pottery Factory. Here you can find clay formed by highly skilled craftspeople into decorative pieces. They are especially renowned for basketweave items and you can see the full range of goods in the showrooms. A short drive will take you into Donegal town where you will check into your hotel. Enjoy the balance of the afternoon at leisure for independent activities before joining your group for dinner.

DINNER & OVERNIGHT: MILL PARK HOTEL, DONEGAL

Tue, Jun 23

GLENVEAGH NATIONAL PARK & CASTLE

This morning travel west to the town of Kilcar to visit Rathlin Knitwear and see where the finest local wool, cotton and linens produce sweaters that are unique, stylish and hard-wearing. Then drive northeast through countryside of windswept hills where sheep are the only animals that thrive in this harsh, though starkly beautiful, landscape. Visit Glenveagh National Park where high walls and conifers provide shelter for an amazing collection of exotic plants, trees and flowers gathered from all over the world. Also visit the Castle, a Scottish-style baronial mansion, which contains fine antique-filled rooms. Motor through the open countryside to return to Donegal for a free evening.

OVERNIGHT: MILL PARK HOTEL, DONEGAL

Wed, Jun 24

ULSTER AMERICAN FOLK PARK, GIANT'S CAUSEWAY & LIMAVADY

Depart Donegal this morning and travel towards the town of Omagh to visit the Ulster American Folk Park. The Park is located on the farm of Thomas Mellon, whose cottage home has been preserved. You can visit this and many other cottages, schools, churches and farms to see how people lived in past centuries in Ireland. Then see how emigrants sailed to the New World to establish themselves in colonial America. Then board the coach and drive along the north coast of Ireland to explore the Giant's Causeway, huge hexagonal columns formed over 60 million years ago. The huge rocks have given rise to many legends, especially involving Finn McCool. Travel back to Limavady and check into your hotel for dinner and overnight stay.

DINNER & OVERNIGHT: RADISSON ROE HOTEL, LIMAVADY

Thu, Jun 25

BELFAST SIGHTSEEING & NEWCASTLE

This morning depart Limavady and drive southeast into Belfast to embark on a sightseeing tour around the city. Drive to the outskirts of the city to take a look at Queen's University, founded in 1849 and built in Tudor-Gothic style. Pass the Botanic Gardens with their extensive collection of plants and the nearby Ulster Museum. In the city center see the Albert Memorial and the ornate Victorian buildings of the Opera House and the Crown Liquor Saloon. In Donegal Square see the imposing City Hall, completed in 1906. The richly decorated interior contains stained glass portraying Belfast's principal industries. After some free time board the coach and travel south to the town of Newcastle and check into your hotel. Enjoy some time to relax and settle in before joining your group for dinner.

DINNER & OVERNIGHT: SLIEVE DONARD HOTEL, NEWCASTLE

Fri, Jun 26

ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRALS IN ARMAGH & SILENT VALLEY

This morning travel to the town of Armagh which has been the spiritual capital of Ireland for over 1,500 years and the seat of both Catholic and Protestant archbishops. Visit both cathedrals which are named in honor of St. Patrick. The Protestant cathedral dates from the 5th century and was restored by Francis Johnston in the 1770s. Brian Boru, High King of Ireland, is buried in the graveyard. The Catholic cathedral is located across the valley and decorated in blue with depictions of many angels and Irish saints. Then board the coach and drive southeast to visit the Silent Valley, a mountain park surrounded by the Mourne peaks, Slieve Binnian, Slievenaglough and Ben Crom. The reservoir was built to gather water from the Mourne Mountains. The Silent Valley and Ben Crom Reservoirs supply water for most of County Down and a large part of Belfast. From Silent Valley, a short drive will take you to the town of Annalong where you will enjoy a visit with storyteller Doreen McBride.

OVERNIGHT: SLIEVE DONARD HOTEL, NEWCASTLE

Sat, Jun 27

DOWNPATRICK & FREE TIME

This morning drive a few miles north to Downpatrick to visit the Saint Patrick Centre and learn about Ireland's Patron Saint and the importance of monastic life in the early Christian period. See his reputed burial place, marked by a granite boulder at Down Cathedral. After your visit, return to your hotel in Newcastle where the balance of the day is at leisure for independent activities. You may choose to take a walk thorough the six acres of private hotel grounds or stroll along golden sands swept by bracing sea breezes. Take time to explore the unique features of this one hundred year hotel, which evokes memories of the golden age of railway hotels. In the evening join your fellow travelers for a farewell dinner in the hotel restaurant.

DINNER & OVERNIGHT: SLIEVE DONARD HOTEL, NEWCASTLE

Sun, Jun 28

RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES

All too soon, your vacation in Ireland has come to the end. Depart Newcastle and travel south via Dundalk and Drogheda to Dublin Airport in plenty of time to check in for your flight, clear security and claim your VAT refund. You may do some last minute shopping at the duty free stores. Then clear U.S. Immigration before boarding your aircraft and fly west across the Atlantic Ocean back to the United States

Those who are interested may consider a two day additional stay for a more in depth look at the Friends of St. Patrick program at the St Patrick's center, where you will have the opportunity to stay at The Ballyduggan Mill and get a more in depth look at the work of the center including the reconciliation process in N. Ireland and spend more time learning about St. Patrick. (pricing and full outline for the additional days will be available very soon)