

Ireland 2025

Executive Summary

Here's a brief synopsis of the trip for those that don't have the time or inclination to wade through the more detailed and personal version of our trip.

Day 1 – Dublin

Arrived at DUB around 11am, rented a car, and drove into Dublin to a Park Rite in Smithfield. Walked over to Dublin Castle for a 2pm guided tour, then on to the Dublin Museum of Archaeology, then over to The Brazen Head for dinner. Back to the car park to retrieve bags, then over to the EasyHotel for the night.

Day 2 – Kilkenny

After a quick breakfast at the Cinnamon Cafe, it was on to Glendalough NP, where we walked the Two Lake Loop, poked around the Cathedral, and had lunch at the park cafe. Back in the car to the Kilmacurragh Botanic Gardens for a stroll, then on to The Clubhouse for check-in. Had a nice dinner at the hotel, then headed over to Cleere's Bar for a 9pm session.

Day 3 thru 5 – Cork

After a guided tour of Kilkenny Castle, it was on to Gabriel Guesthouse in Cork. Just time for a quick dinner at Son-of-a-Bun before sliding into a seat at Sin é Bar for the 6:30pm Lee Session.

The next morning, it was off on a series of longish walks around downtown Cork and the College area, including a stop at the Butter Museum and a nice cafe. Had dinner at Luigi Malone's then back to Sin é for another 6:30pm session.

On day 5, we boarded the train to Cobh, joined a Titanic Trail walking tour, then a nice lunch at Seasalt, before visiting the Titanic Museum followed by the Queenstown Story. Returned to Cork via train for dinner at Eco-fish followed by yet another 6:30pm session at Sin é.

Day 6 – Bantry

Departing Cork, we headed for Dromkeen Forest for a short walk, then Timoleague Friary, lunch nearby, and then a visit to West Cork Model Railway. On to Barry's B&B on the harbor, and dinner of mussels at The Snug.

Day 7-8 – Allihies

After breakfast, the main stop was a short boat ride to Garnish Island and a walk and tour around the fantastic gardens and Bryce House then lunch at the Cafe. Then on to Seaview B&B in Allihies.

It was a short drive to Garnish Pier (different Garnish) for the Bull Rock Tour, then over to the Dursey Island cable car for a several hour walk around the island. Back to Allihies for dinner and a surprise early session at O'Neill's.

Day 9-10 Dingle



Entire trip

It was off to the Hag of Beara, Ardgroom Stones, Dereen Gardens (and Cafe), and Uragh Stones before making the two hour drive to Bambury's GH in Dingle. Just time for dinner before the 7:15pm concert at St. James Church.

Then onto Dunquin Pier for a boat trip to Blasket Island, where we walked most of the island after a tour by one of the rangers. Then the return boat ride followed by a stop at Reask Monastery and Gallarus Oratory before arriving for our dinner reservation at Out-of-the-Blue. Over to Nelligan's for a session,

Day 11-12 Doolin

Departed Dingle for Conor Pass and Waterfall, whisked around a closed Listowel Castle, then the Tarbert/Killmer ferry, lunch at Diamond Rocks and a walk at the Kilkee Cliffs. From there to Churchfield B&B and McDermott's for dinner and a session featuring Blackie O'Connell on pipes.

Made a day trip to Ennis, including a walking tour, the Clare Museum, and Ennis Friary, then a visit to Dysert O'dea Castle on the drive back to Doolin. Another session at McDermotts.

Day 13-19 Shannon River

Headed to Portumna via Pallas Castle, then stopped at O'Meara's for provisions for the upcoming week, arriving at Emerald Star (LeBoat) for our 2pm checkin. After a brief competence check, we were off by 3pm, heading upstream through Victoria Lock to Banagher for a night's mooring. Dinner at JJ Hough's but we were too tired for the upcoming late session.

From Banagher, it was on to Athlone with a lunch stop at Clonmacnoise, dinner at Di Bella, again failing to muster the energy for a possible late session at Sean's Bar.

From Athlone, it was on to Shannon Bridge and JJKilleen's for dinner.

After the Portumna Bridge opening, it was on to Terryglass for dinner at Paddy's.

Traveled the length of Lough Derg to Killaloe for a nice dinner at Molly Malone's followed by a session at Liam O'Riain's Bar.

Then it was back to Portumna, getting back early enough to visit Portumna Castle and Gardens. After dinner at the Ferry Inn, it was one last night on the boat.

Day 20 – Dublin

Heading back to Dublin, we stopped at Birr Castle and Gardens for an interesting visit, followed by a fuel top-up near Dublin, before navigating a maze of turns to the Q Park The Spire for a short walk to the Point A Hotel. After dinner at Musashi, we headed to The Cobblestone for their continuously running session, although we never could get a seat and our legs gave out after a few hours.

Day 21 – Home

Early breakfast at the hotel and a short drive to DUB, to board our miserably long flights back to home in S. Oregon.

Detailed Report

Here's the blow-by-blow report for those with time on their hands!

Warning: *I talk about some health issues we ran into, that did have a big impact on my trip, so I hesitantly mention them – besides they are almost comical in hindsight – or will be. Also be warned that this is for our remembering our trip, so there are pictures of people, silly things, etc.*

Overview

This is our fifth trip to Ireland, but we traveled with another couple with fewer trips, so the itinerary was a combination of “new places”, “great places we wanted to share”, and a week on a boat on the lower Shannon River, which was new territory but very reminiscent of a 2016 trip on the upper Shannon. As usual, it's a three week trip to compromise between the airfare investment versus time away from home and the dogs.

The weather was spectacular – sunny and clear skies except for an hour thunderstorm one day and a brief shower then next day.

Day 1 – Medford to Dublin

We had a fairly uneventful trip from home to Medford, and the three flights to Dublin. We did run into a woman in Medford that was moving to Costa Rica, and I've never seen one person with so much luggage. Several big roller suitcases, several backpacks, and at least six big Rubbermaid totes, all duct-taped up. Hate to imagine the luggage excess fees! The one issue of concern was that despite wearing masks on most of the travel, we ended up sitting in front of someone with a very wet cough (cue the dramatic music).



Dublin Castle

Having flown Icelandair several times, we carried food on board (since there's little to be had). As on previous trips, the third leg, from KEF to DUB, was half-full, so we got bumped to first class via a minimum upgrade bid. Well worth it in boarding priority, food options, and free drinks. We eventually arrived at DUB on time, and eventually met up with our friends after figuring out we had arrived at different terminals and that “meet at the Alamo counter” was rather ambiguous. I had originally planned to avoid having a car in Dublin, but the extra one-way drop-off and the time lost finding the rental depot made it a no brainer. After an effortless rental (no up-selling of features, insurance, etc) I reset my “which side of the road to drive on” setting, and we trundled off to Dublin in our Nissan Juke, to a Park Rite lot near Smithfield, an easy walk from the EasyHotel Dublin.

It was too early to check-in, so we left our luggage in the car and headed over to Dublin Castle for a guided tour. By this time, we had all discovered our “data-only eSims” were not allowing WiFi-calling texts/calls as advertised, so I diverted to a Three Store to get an Irish phone number. It was probably the fault of our home carrier, but our friends made due by using WhatsApp for texting/calling. My wife Kathy just lived without texting, which wasn't that onerous. Not sure we'll ever know where the problem was.

Anyway, we arrived at Dublin Castle, and got the full-meal deal tour, including the Viking excavations, Rooms of State, and Powder tower. After finishing up, we headed to the National Museum of Archaeology to peruse the many exhibits of mostly old bones. We're into that, so no complaints!

We then walked over to The Brazen Head, too late for the famous Sunday session, but at the perfect time to hear the last notes and eat a hearty meal. After dinner, it was back to the car park for the luggage, then check-in to the smallest hotel rooms I've ever experienced. It was a queen-size bed with about 12" of space on three sides, and a bathroom you could barely turn around in. It was very modern and well appointed – it just needs a few dozen square feet of floor space! Of course, as a very price-conscious traveler, it was a good value.

We were way too exhausted to go out and party, and instead hit the hay for a nice 10-hour sleep.

Day 2 – Dublin to Kilkenny

After getting to sleep in, we threw the luggage into the car, then walked over to The Cinnamon Cafe for good food served awkwardly. From there, it was back to the car for the drive to Glendalough National Park. We had been in the area 30 years earlier, but had little memory. We took the Two Lake Walk in addition to poking around the ruins of the Cathedral. The Cafe was being renovated, so we had lunch in a small encampment of food trucks, which was fine, if less than expected. Being a bank holiday, the whole park was quite crowded – seemed to be a popular spot to just picnic on the grass.



The Clubhouse – notice Fox & Hounds



Museum of Archaeology

From Glendalough, we headed to the National Botanic Gardens in Kilmacurragh. The map provided was a little vague, but there were lots of fine old trees, ponds, walls, gates, and lots of people and birds, again, enjoying a bank holiday.

We hopped back into the car for the drive to Kilkenny, checking into The Clubhouse. I had chosen the hotel based on price and being able to reserve months in advance, and had no great expectations. I was pleasantly surprised by the luxurious accommodations and atmosphere. The "Clubhouse" refers to it having been a literal clubhouse for the fox hunting set. Beautiful stained glass, comfortable rooms, wonderful breakfast.

After a brief walk around to explore for dinner options, we ended up back at Victor's within the hotel for an excellent meal, before adjourning to Cleere's Bar where three of us made it until 11:30pm listening to the session tunes. Made it back to the hotel by midnight.

Day 3 – Kilkenny to Cork

After a posh breakfast at the hotel and stashing the bags in the car, it was off to Kilkenny Castle for a tour. Very storied castle from the Anglo-Normans to the Butler Family. Much more interesting tour than I expected. Our

tour group consisted of some Canadians and Vermonters, the latter of which gave Kathy a “Un-Trump the World” button, which she wore until we hit immigration on our way home.

Walked over to the Fig Tree for a nice lunch, then back to the car and off to Cork. A fellow bar patron the previous night had told us to avoid the M-road for a much more scenic drive, so we ended up back in Clonmel (where we had all been in 2019), and this time, the Tipperary County Museum was open, so we spent some time there.

Despite four previous trips, Cork had escaped a visit thinking it was just a smaller Dublin, which didn't turn out to be the case. We arrived at Gabriel House B&B, discovering the entry driveway and parking lot was a wee bit steeper than what shows up on Google Maps. No problem once we worked up our nerve.

After a brief breath-catching, we walked 10 minutes to Son-of-a-Bun for a quick (but delicious) dinner.

One of our party has really weird dietary restrictions, and finding vegan cheese on a beef burger with gluten-free bun is a real score. After dinner, we walked into Sin é Bar, asked where the session would be held, and grabbed some stools right nearby. Within a few minutes, some players strolled in, evicted the unsuspecting patrons from the reserved space, and began playing. The players were a Canadian uilleann piper, an English guitar player and a French fiddler – all very good.



Cleere's Bar, Kilkenny



Kilkenny Castle

Day 4 – Cork City

After a yummy breakfast at Gabriel House, we met up on the patio to pet the resident dogs, heading into town to do some pre-packaged self guided walks. It turns out the maps are several years old, the informational signs have all be removed or vandalized, and following the route was fairly challenging. The first walk included the Butter Museum (this was a winner!) eventually delivering us to the English Market where we gawked at all the booths full of meat while we selected what to have for lunch. While our friends headed back, we ventured on the third pre-planned walk, the “Green Walk” featuring walks along the River Lee and through the UCC campus. Made a stop at the Art Gallery. The first of my health issues kicked in during all these walks, with my feet sprouting blisters on blisters. Despite walking 4-5 miles every day at home, walking on pavement or hard trails seems to create problems for me. Luckily, I came prepared with special bandages to control the problem, although I did walk a little slower and more clumsily for the weeks they took to clear. After the walk, we headed back to the hotel for a brief nap.



Gabriel House Patio

The troops then headed back into the city to Luigi Malone’s restaurant, where everyone found something good to eat, then back to the Sin é for another round of surprised patrons being evicted from their seats, while we calmly waited in the seats nearby. A guitar, fiddle, accordion, 2 flutes, and a bodhran provided a wonderful session. Talking with a local, we learned that in Cork City one drinks Beamish, while in County Cork, one drinks Murphys. Guinness was an insult to locals. I tried them both but reverted to Guinness, risking reprisals.



Cobh – pronounced “Cove”

Day 5 – Day trip to Cobh

After another good breakfast, it was a short walk to Kent Station for the 30 minute train trip to Cobh. I so wish the US had a good train system!

First off was a Titanic Trail walking tour which related tales of the Titanic and Lusitania era in addition to mounting the hills of Cobh, walking through the Church, and learning other interesting stuff including seeing the perrigrine falcon that sit’s atop Mary’s statue picking of pigeons all day every day.

This tour ended early enough to have a quick lunch at Seasalt Cafe before our Titanic Experience tour. During entry, everyone is given a boarding ticket, with the name of a real passenger, with the assignment of figuring what their fate was based on exhibits in the museum. Glad I wasn’t really there, or I wouldn’t be writing this!

Following the museum, it was off to The Queenstown Story (another museum), this time getting a boarding pass with a real passenger from the Lusitania. I'm happy to say I passed out in the bar when the bartender evacuated as the ship sank, and was found alive floating in the freezing water – never say a bad word about a little anti-freeze in your blood!

Then it was back onto the train for the short return to Cork, headed for dinner at Eco-Fish, then back again to Sin é for a third repeat of great music. While waiting for the seating re-arrangement event,

we met with a local med student who despite living in Cork for nearly 30 years, had never heard a music session and had no idea one was about to commence. How quaint!

Sometime during the music, Jim's second health event flared to life, feeling like just a bad cold, at first. Called it a somewhat earlier evening, made the short walk back to the room and got some rest.



Perrigrine Falcon atop Mary



Timoleague Friary

Day 6 – Cork to Bantry

Another great breakfast starting our sixth day of bright sunshine and blue skies. There was no rain in any forecast for far into the future.

My original plan called for staying in Ballydehob on Friday night, since there was a long standing session in

town. Unfortunately, the only B&B in walking distance of the bar that accepted a single night stay was closed for the owner's holiday.

After conquering the steep parking lot and entrance to escape the hotel, it was off to Dromkeen Forest, a small wood full of little fairy houses, dollhouses, and many loud and active birds, including rooks, great tits, wrens, robins, jackdaws, gold-crests and blackbirds. The entire visit was only 20 minutes, walking the entire route.

Then on to Timoleague Friary for a self tour. Originally built in the 1300s and burned by Cromwell in 1642, it had loots of nooks and crannies to explore. We then headed to the Teacup Cafe for lunch, eventually arriving at the West Cork Model Railway Village. Lisa (one of our companions) is a miniature enthusiast, and this might have been the highlight of her trip. Any red-blooded person that likes trains would also enjoy it!



Dromkeen Forest



West Cork Model Railroad

Barry's, we headed to Glengariff Pier for a short boat ride to Garnish Island. The skipper took us up close to several seal colonies, all sleeping happily in the warm sun, before dropping us off on Garnish Island. Spent hours strolling through the gardens, including the Italian Garden and many others. We tried to get on a Bryce House tour, but it was full. Since there were almost a dozen of us that were turned away, another guide offered to give us an abbreviated tour through a few rooms, just to get the feel of it. The story of the family, the gardeners, and the maid were all fascinating. We then had a nice lunch at the Garnish Cafe Bistro, before heading back to the mainland on our scheduled boat. The entire island was magical, but I

We made a short stop at Castle Donovan, finding iron bars preventing any real exploration, before checking into Barry's B&B in Bantry. Friday afternoons are market day, so the city center was super crowded and we ended up parked far away from the B&B. A few hours later everything evaporated and we moved to front of Barry's.

An afternoon walk around the harbor found it full of uniformed Danish sailors on shore-leave from their training ship square rigger out at anchor. There was also a huge Le Monde cruise ship at anchor. I believe it is one of those floating condominiums where you own a cabin.

We had a dinner of mussels at The Snug, only having a single Guinness before a coughing Jim called it a night. A woman across from us was enjoying a Fish & Chips with the dog sitting next to her.

Day 7 – Bantry to Allihies

After a nice continental breakfast at



Garnish Seal Colony

hate to think what it's like later in the summer when the crowds swell.

Continuing of to Allihies, we checked into the Seaview B&B, where Jim went to bed coughing while the rest of the group had a nice dinner at O'Neill's. Jim was consuming throat lozenges at a high rate with little effect.

Day 8 – Allihies

After a huge breakfast of scrambled eggs (except Jim had given up eating), we headed for Garnish Pier, relegating Jim to the back seat with the



Italian Garden

window open, to make our boat trip to Bull Rock. The trip involved a “high speed boat” featuring seats that were more like a mechanical bull in a pub than conventional seats. Although the weather was relatively calm, the skipper found lots of waves to fall off, sending shock waves up spines (not approved by my back surgeon) and probably fun for younger folks. Anyway, the boat passed under the Dursey Island Cable Car, then circumnavigated Dursey to make brief stops at Calf Rock, Cow Rock, and finally Bull Rock while letting us see dolphin and the usual suspects of birds, including gannets. Maybe one puffin, but that may have been wishful thinking (this is the first trip to Ireland where we didn’t see lots of puffins). The skipper Frank related that he climbed around Bull Rock as a child, as he waited to see if the seas were mild enough to motor through the cavern – they were not. Headed back to the pier having enjoyed the entire trip except the vertical shocks before learning to take the weight off your butt.



Bull Rock

Having gone under the cable car by boat, we decided to change our afternoon plans and take the trip to walk around on Dursey Island. While hiking the “high road” on the ridge, poor Jim with blisters, sore back, and having coughing spasms, took a wrong step, rolled his ankle, and did a somersault into a hedge of young Gorse. The ankle didn’t react too badly (until later) but Jim did get to spend the rest of the walk (and the next few days) plucking tender young gorse thorns out of his arms, legs, chest, and clothes.

Walking back to the cable car, we met a somewhat eccentric Corker traveling alone. After a bit of chit chat, he revealed he was a guide on Spike Island, so we got a bunch of Spike Island information without actually taking the tour. He had a two hour wait for a bus, but our car was too small for a fifth person (and he would have ended up with Jim’s cold. We

returned to the B&B, Jim took a nap, while the rest had lunch at the Copper Cafe and visited the underwhelming Copper Museum. Eventually returned to the B&B, roused Jim and went back to O’Neill’s for dinner and a surprise trad session featuring a guitar/bazooki, flute, mandolin and others trickling in. Jim gave up early.



Dursey Island

Day 9 – Allihies to Dingle



O'Neill's Bar, Allihies

After another great breakfast and gorgeous weather, we hit the road. Luckily, the hostess was able to stop us before we dashed without paying – this is the only lodging that hadn't been pre-paid. Whoops!

Made our way the rest of the way around the Ring of Beara arriving at the Hag or Beara (smaller

than expected), then moved on to Ardgroom Stone Circle, then Dereen Gardens. The gardens were full of exotic plants from around the world – quite nice. We ate a nice lunch at the garden Cafe, Jim having a hot lemon tea (his first tea ever – he must be sick!).



The Hags of Beara



Ardgroom Stone Circle after the sheep fled

Drove on to Minard Castle only to find out it was private and secured, although it was only slightly more than a pile of rock. We then proceeded to Bambury's GH to check-in before heading to Lord Baker's for a nice dinner before making our way to St. James Church for a 7:15pm concert. The first half featured a famous pipes player along with an excellent guitarist. After a short break, a duo of concertina/flute and bouzouki, later joined by the piper. It's refreshing to see great music without the loud bar patrons and crowded bar setting.



St. James Church

Ireland.

Day 10 – Dingle

After a nice breakfast to start another beautiful warm day, and after a brief stop at a market for a sack lunch, we

Feeling desperate to do something besides go to bed, we headed to Neligan's Bar, where we found a session just starting, and we were able to stay for 90 minutes or so of great music, sitting next to a couple of Michigan resident nurses looking to emigrate to



Dereen Gardens



Blasket Island

been two years earlier, but they had added a visitor center, a long walk from a new car park, and an entry fee. Returned to the B&B for a short nap, rendezvousing at Out-of-the-Blue for our 6:30pm booking. The entrees were about twice the price we were used to, so we ended up settling on starters for our meal, leading to the

headed to Dunquin Pier to take a boat to Blasket Island. Last trip had seen this trip canceled. After the short ride from the pier to the boat in a dinghy, a short boat ride, then another dinghy ride, we arrived on Blasket, just in time for a guided tour by one of the rangers. It was the ranger's second tour (ever) but he did a great job. With rather vague instructions, we attempted to walk a loop around the eastern half the island, only to become concerned with the departure time, aborting the loop and retracing our steps. While hiking, we did see a Minke whale and several dolphin, and lots of whale-watching boats pestering the Minke. Eventually got back to the dock in time for our dinghy, returning to Dunquin, for the long uphill hike to the car.

We then headed to the Reask Monastic site for a poke-about, then on to Gallarus Oratory. We had

feeling of a bit of a bum's rush to fill the table with big spenders. Although I admit to being a bit of a penny pincher and not a foodie, in this case, the starters were more attractive. Still managed to spend 90 euros.

Back to Neligan's for more music and chat with patrons and the bartender, holding out until about 11 pm before surrendering.

Day 11 – Dingle to Doolin

After another excellent breakfast at Bambury's, with Jim still relegated to the back seat with the window open, we headed off to Conor Pass and Waterfall. Unlike two years ago, there was no fog or clouds, so you could see forever. We stopped briefly at Listowel Castle which doesn't open until June, then queued up for the Tarbet ferry to Killmer across the mouth of the Shannon River. After a short wait, we headed to Kilkee where we had pizza at the Diamond Rocks Cafe (the formal restaurant was not open, but the cafe was fine). We



Neligan's Bar, Dingle



Conor Pass

host's Grandmother had a resistance to the fees involved with card usage or booking.com. Everyone but Kathy took a nap, while she found a table across the road at McDermotts to have a pint and do some journaling. Apparently the bartender wanted to make sure he was mentioned in the journal.

then did the easy stroll along the Kilkee Cliffs, sighting the usual diversity of birds and beautiful vistas. I don't think the trail made it to the actual cliffs, but you could see them to the south.

Our Garmin took us down the smallest roads it could find for the trip into Doolin, where we checked into Churchfield B&B. This was the only place I actually used cash, as the



Kilkee Cliffs

The troops reconvened around 6pm and ordered dinner, then nursed beers and whiskies until the music started around 9:30pm. As advertised, Wednesdays feature Blackie O'Connell, who might be the best uilleann piper on the planet. He explained he could never get that honor while his teacher was living. He was joined by a

bouzouki player and flute. Blackie has apparently been suffering hard times as his regular singer had died unexpectedly, but was on the mend. We lasted until 11pm, and let some deserving folks have our perfect seats.

Day 12 – Doolin (Ennis)



McDermott's Bar – Blackie O'Connell

After a perfect breakfast by our host Effa, we spent some time with the dogs, and drove off into another day of perfect weather to find a modest traffic jam of cows, spending 20 minutes waiting patiently for the herd to make their way, to a parking spot in central Ennis. We joined Jane O'Brien for a walking tour of town, including seeing statues of her ancestors. Ennis had the first democratically elected Catholic, so the British were compelled to end the laws forbidding Catholics from holding office, which made Ennis the center of the eventual re-alignment. We also found out that spitting on your hand before shaking hands when making deals was to assure neither party was a fairy (not to be trusted).



Ennis Friary

After a visit to the Clare Museum, we had a nice lunch at Cafe Aroma, walked over to Ennis Friary,

then headed to Dysert O'Dea Castle. Though private, it was thoroughly restored, and full of interesting nooks and crannies along with the requisite information. Enjoyed a conversation with the fellow collecting the modest fee, talking about the history of the O'Day family and the effort to do the restoration.



Dysert O'Dea Castle

It was then back in the car to return to Doolin, with only about 5 minutes of cow delays as another herd was moved between fields. Again, the Garmin seemed to relish sending us on the narrowest route available.

Back in Doolin, we had another good dinner at McDermotts, then walked out to the Court Tomb across the street from the bar. Saw lots of the usual birds,

including cookoos and linnets, walked out to the beach to see the Celtic Door of Tomarix, then returned to town, taking time to chat with the farmer that owned all the land, thanking him for allowing all the invasive snoop tourists. He indicated he was just the caretaker and that it would be there long after he was gone.



Not technically a cow...

We returned to McDermotts and nabbed the best seats in the house for a second night of music, making it until 11pm yet again.

Day 13 – Doolin to Banagher



Pallas Castle

...the boat... several failed stops, eventually forcing a march up to the top of town. Needless to say, Jim was exhausted by the time he got back due to the steep climb, continuing cough, and residual blisters, and swollen ankle. While Jim was marching, Kathy found him some shorts. We all rejoined at JJHough's for a very nice dinner on the rear patio. Music was promised at 10pm, but that was later than anyone could handle, so we headed back to the boat for the night.

Day 14 – Banagher to Athlone



Victoria Lock

to Portumna to find our charter boat. Stopped at (to buy provisions for the week of boating. Had a quick LeBoat) base for our 2pm check-in. They took us the boat at a dock without crashing too hard. Our boat is also 40 years old and built like a tank, so there was no problem (a few times).

...ed on Facebook music promises, so he was ... the three hour cruise to our first stop. Getting ... in about ... er Harbor, ... ed our ... aving us a ... leave, but

(the boat ... veral failed

Boat Charter – Consider it!
EmeraldStar (owned by LeBoat) and its several competitors offer a wide selection of conventional powerboats for charter to anyone – no experience or competence necessary. The boats have a full galley, dining area, varying numbers of bedrooms, and most have a sundeck. The boat is your hotel room for the time, which makes them quite competitive with moderately priced hotels. The water routes offer an opportunity to visit small villages and towns that you would probably never visit by car.

We've done LeBoat three times, once in Southern France and on the upper and lower Shannon River. All very pleasant.

After a nice breakfast with scrambled eggs

we walked a bit in Banagher to find some sunglasses and cough medicine. We then cast off, continuing upstream against a mild current, seeing a white tailed eagle, lots of swans, some mallards with ducklings, peregrines, herons, red shanks, swallows, wagtails, rooks, robins, black headed gulls, pigeons, and lots of cattle and horses, many with calves or foals.

We stopped at Clonmacnoise for an onboard lunch, and walked up to the reception, again finding that things had changed since 2019 when we were there last, adding an admission fee. We cast off and continued upstream.

We had a brief man-overboard drill as two hats blew overboard, both of which we rescued successfully. The weather was so hot and sunny that they were dry in minutes. We eventually made it to the Athlone lock, tailgated another boat through, then tried to find a mooring on river-right. Construction of an under-river tunnel meant there was lots of fencing blocking the quay, so we ended up on river-left.



Clonmacnoise

Although Sean's Bar's FB page claimed there was a 6:30pm session, the bartender told us there was music at 10:30pm and he wasn't sure it was trad. We had included Sean's on our itinerary only because of the memory of a session there a few years earlier, and it was very frustrating to see all the planning laid to waste. We walked uptown to Di Bella for a nice dinner, then walked further uptown to a potential music spot, again meeting with failure. We returned to the boat, took brief naps, and decided going back to Sean's at 10pm was just not in the cards.



Sean's Bar, Athlone

Day 15 – Athlone to Shannonbridge

After another oats/eggs breakfast, Kathy finally decided Jim should go to A&E and seek medical care. We were there at the 10am opening time, and were seen almost immediately. Diagnosed with “walking pneumonia”, Jim was prescribed a round of antibiotics, prednisone, and some cough syrup. The pharmacy didn't open until 1pm on Sunday, so Jim went back to the boat to nap while Kathy waited for the opening time.

We cast off and queued up for the lock only to find the lock keeper took his one hour lunch break as we arrived, so we sat at the entry dock for the hour. At 2pm, we were joined in the queue by a big Viking tour boat, that took boatloads down to Clonmacnoise leaving them to return by bus. We eventually got to Shannonbridge, then headed into the village to Killian's for a nice dinner. They expected music much later, so we retreated to the boat, finding the only other music was at Luker's in the form of an Elvis impersonator (we think).

Day 16 – Shannonbridge to Terryglass

After our regular oats/egg/bread/sausage breakfast, we cast off, only to land a few hundred feet downstream to use the pump-out facilities. The



Viking Party Boat

current was very strong at the landing and the holding tank placement required a downstream landing, which was a little key-stone cops – falling, rope slipping, stumbling, and shouting. With the help of a dog-walking veteran boater, we managed to get the boat tied up the right direction, only to find out the dang pump-out was out-of-order.

We proceeded downstream to Banagher, where we landed at the Carrick-craft (a LeBoat competitor) pump-out (even though it was marked as public on the charts). An employee ran over saying we were delaying their customers, but when I explained the public pump-out was blocked by a parked boat, he relented, and paced back and forth stewing while we did the job. Thanking him, we cast off a little lighter, and headed back through Victoria Lock, again timing it for the middle of lunch hour.



Maybe it does rain in Ireland?

At 2pm, the lock opened, we passed though, and the skies grew suddenly dark as we made the trip to Portumna Bridge. We had a one hour thunderstorm, complete with lightning and

stunning amounts of rain. The boat has both an indoor helm and one on the bridge, so we got to use the inside one along with the antique windshield wiper for the hour. With the skies now cleared, we arrived at the Portumna swing bridge 30 minutes before the scheduled opening, tying up at the waiting dock (the same dock we used for our checkout training). Bridge opened on schedule, we slipped through with two other boats, and we arrived in Terryglass in about 30 minutes, finding an easy mooring on the inside of the quay.



St. Columbo's Eye Well

We walked up to the small village, finding only one choice for dinner, enjoying a meal at Paddy's Bar. The other choice, The Derg Inn, was closed on Mondays. On the way back to the boat we walked to the Eye Well, supposed able to restore sight, and the Headache Well, able to clear headaches, both according to St. Columba from the 1300s.

Jim ran into Molly (border collie) which looked a lot like our puppy, so it was a nice jolt of "dog" for him. The nearby public toilets were very nice and even had sunscreen dispensers next to a clock-face indicating that UV was in the "high" range. The weather had really been too hot and sunny, especially for the native Irish. Early to bed.

Day 17 – Terryglass to Killaloe

We cracked on fairly early, as the guidebook indicated Killaloe could be a mooring problem. Loch Derg was smooth as glass as we motored along at the governed 6mph, planning on about 4 hours to a mooring. We had another much more brief and light rain, again retreating to the indoor helm. It was refreshing to have something other than incessant hot and sunny! We arrived in Killaloe shortly after noon,, found a nice mooring, and had a nice lunch on the boat.

We walked into Killaloe to hunt up a few essential provisions (we were out of coffee, bread, jam, and cookies) at the Supervalu, then walked back to the boat, reading some placards about the 1000 year anniversary in 2014 of Brian Boru's naming as the King of Ireland in Killaloe after he rid the place of those pesky Vikings.

The one lane Killaloe Bridge connects Country Clare with the sister city of Ballina, County Tipperary. A several times rebuilt bridge over the centuries, it was mired in a large controversy about it's future. A modern replacement was opening in just a few days a klick downstream, but they were debating whether the original bridge be repaired, removed, converted to pedestrian, or what. Emotions were quite high around town.



Killaloe Bridge – since the 1300's

We scoured the dinner menus around town, selecting Molly Malone's, where we had another good dinner. We then headed to Liam O'Riain's for some drinks and promised music. We sat with a mix of locals and Irish visitors, and were struck with how everyone was place-based. Accidentally saying we were in County Clare brought an immediate rebuke that we had crossed to Tipperary. A gentleman, Dave, sharing our table was in town for his 75th birthday, and proudly stated he was a Donegal man, though he was living in Dublin with is Dublin wife, revealing all his prostate and bypass

surgeries of the last few years. Another gentleman, Jack, mentioned he had been born upstairs (in the bar) 80 years ago, also sharing his prostate treatment.

Everyone seemed to have friends in common. Very nice thing you don't find in the US. The subject did turn to politics, and once it was clear we didn't vote for Trump, they offered pity and sympathy for our nice mess. We ran into similar sentiments most

places, with no one worried about it being permanent. Everyone said they lit a candle for their man Joe Biden.



We're astern of the blue sailboat

Musicians arrived around 9pm and a bouzouki, guitar fiddle, and flute were eventually joined by a banjo. We lasted till 11:00pm, then walked home, hearing the next morning that we had missed some more rain.

Day 18 – Killaloe to Portumna



Liam O'Riain's Bar, Killaloe

Breakfast was bigger than usual as we were needing to empty the fridge in just one more day. Although we had a seven day rental, we opted to shorten it by a day to meet other planning goals. We cast off and headed across a smooth Loch Derg once again, arriving at the Portumna bridge an hour before the schedules opening. The queuing dock was connected to land, so we had a nice walk on a newly build pathway leading to Portumna Castle, full of bicyclists, joggers, and other walkers. Didn't quite make it to the castle before we had to return, casting off to get through the bridge, then pulling back into the charter docks. An adverse wind made the task a little complicated, so the attendant hopped aboard and did the job right. It's remarkable how differently the boat maneuvered from the familiar sailboat.



Portumna Swing Bridge



Farewell to the boat

Once at the dock, we took the car to Portumna Castle and Gardens, having a nice look around the restored castle and exploring the extensive gardens and most impressive, the kitchen garden. Lots of bees and other pollinators buzzing everywhere. Most impressive castle and garden so far!

Walked back to the boat, then headed across the bridge to The Ferry Inn for a nice dinner on the patio. No music prospects, so home to our berth.

Day 19 – Portumna to Dublin



Portumna Castle

Having already checked the boat in the day before, we had a “fridge cleaning” breakfast, short showers (except Mike ran out of hot water), and back in the car for the trip to Dublin. First stop was Birr Castle and Gardens,

which turned out to be one of favorite spots on the entire trip. The owner of the castle had been interested in the sciences, and one of his descendants built the largest telescope to date until finally surpassed in 1917. His observations revealed the nebulae hidden in the otherwise bright stars, and made it clear the Milky Way was just another galaxy. Very thorough scientists, discovering lots of firsts, including the first steam turbine ships, better and brighter telescopes, all in a very detailed science center above the reception area. Mind blowing dedication to the sciences.

The gardens included a scale solar system, a fernery with many exotic species, a spiral planting of trees to reflect a spiral nebula that went on forever. Very cool!



The Great Telescope, Birr Castle

Eventually called it quits and headed for Dublin. After a very convoluted tour of one-way streets, we found the Q-Park The Spire, parked, and walked the short distance to the Point A Hotel. Another “budget” hotel, but this one gave you the extra few square feet and included breakfast. Several of us took showers to make up for the cold and/or no water on the boat.

M&L went to a booked tour at the Book of Kells, while Kathy and Jim headed to This is Knit, which turned out to be buried in the Powerscourt mall. Lot’s of Google Maps misdirection before finding it. We then went the the National Leprechaun Museum, which we absolutely loved. Unlike most museums full of objects, the NLM took it’s cue from the Littlest Museum in Dublin, offering performance by well



The Fernery, Birr Castle

trained guides/actors, relating stories with minimalist props/scenery. Not to everyone’s taste, but we absolutely adored it, despite the pricey 16 Euro entry. Our three stories included a tale of a drunken Irishman who drank away the profits from selling their cow and the eventual dealings with his wife, a story of a Selkie captured by a fisherman, and a tale of the origin of the Giant’s Causeway. Very high drama!

After meeting back up at the hotel, we headed to Musashi for a good dinner. We did the 20



The Cobblestone, Dublin

minute walk to The Cobblestone to stand for several hours listening to the music. Very crowded, and others

were far more aggressive than we at jockeying for seats. There were also a lot of presumed Americans consuming stools at the bar without ordering any drinks – a behavior most people think is rude, since the bar makes money selling drinks. At least we had great standing spots. We waited until the 9:30 personnel change, and realizing there wasn't going to be any break to the dicing for seats, we listened to a few more tunes, then headed back to Point A.

Day 20 – Dublin to Selma, OR

Met for an early good breakfast at the hotel, loaded up the car, then drove to DUB to drop off M&L at Terminal 1. Getting from there to the Alamo return was fairly complicated, since it involved some backtracking, but we eventually got the car returned (and cleared for no damages), and the shuttle took us to Terminal 2. Since we had been upgraded to Saga, we got to use the Lounge for a second breakfast and nice seating, then eventually headed to the gate for the LONG trip home. From getting up at 6am it took 26 actual hours to arrive in Medford, then another hour to drive home. We hate that return trip!



Our only puffins spotted – Keflavik Airport