

Irresistible Ireland

BY JAN ROSS

"Ireland is where strange tales begin and happy endings are possible." —Charles Haughey

Determined not to be those slack-jawed North Americans who stare at the unfamiliar in Ireland in incredible awe — we fail. But this is different. This is incredible. This is a castle. We stand outside the first hotel of our stay on our escorted tour of Ireland and try to be cool and calm when inside we are as giddy as schoolkids at the thought of staying and sleeping in an actual castle.

Irish do and wear a raincoat with a hood that you can throw back when, inevitably, the wind blows away the rain clouds and the sun comes out. If you miss seeing a rainbow, don't worry, there will be another one shortly. We've never seen as many rainbows as we saw in Ireland.

A mystical, ancient land, there are crumbling towers next to modern neighbourhoods because the superstitious Irish people don't believe in tampering with history. But it's not only their love and reverence for their history that makes the Irish people so interesting, as we found with our friendly and voluble tour guide, it's also their knack for storytelling.

Dromoland Castle, our first hotel stay, is an ancient castle converted into a luxury hotel. This is by far the most fantastic place we have ever stayed. We drive through the stone gateway and wind through gorgeous acres of lush grass, while we view the green rolling hills of the world-class golf course and beautiful, old trees covered with gold and copper fall leaves. As we pull up to the ivy-covered front of the grey stone-walled castle, we realize this could very well be the highlight of our trip.

One of the most famous baronial castles in Ireland, it was the ancestral home of the O'Briens, Barons of Inchiquin. The O'Briens are one of the few native Gaelic families in Ireland and direct descendants of Brian Boruimhe (Boru), the High King of Ireland in the 11th century. Donough O'Brien, a son of Brian Boru, was the lord of the castle when Dromoland was just a defensive stronghold. The Queen Anne Court was built in 1700 with 29 guestrooms and is a century older than the rest of the castle, which was rebuilt in 1800 with stone from a nearby quarry on the Dromoland Estate. In 1962, the castle and part of the grounds were sold and converted into a luxury hotel, but the O'Brien family retained a home and part of the estate and continues to live there.

Walking out of the cold, rainy, grey Irish day into the comfortable front lobby, it could be any luxury hotel until you notice the grey stone castle walls and the two suits of armour



Dromoland Castle

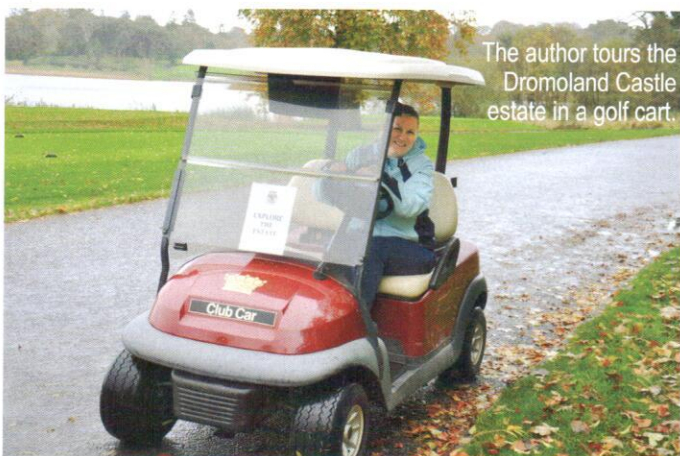
On our first night in Ireland, after travelling for many hours, we collapse onto our bed at a little hotel near the airport. The next morning, strolling around waiting for our ride, we notice the palm trees growing around the hotel. We are astonished to see palm trees in Ireland, but apparently, the climate is so temperate that a wide variety of foliage can be found here. After this eye-opening introduction to Ireland, we board our shuttle and head out to experience Ireland.

The country is remarkably beautiful. Fields are as bright green as a newly polished emerald surrounded by stone fences carefully laid by hand hundreds of years ago. The cold, grey Atlantic smashes against craggy cliffs and rocks, creating a sombre mood, but, just when you wonder how the Irish people stand that depressing weather, a perfect rainbow appears and lifts your spirits. If you plan your outings around a sunny day, you will never leave your hotel. Just do what the

displayed by the front desk.

Marvelling at the beauty of the furnishings and the lusciously appointed guest rooms, we stroll around the grounds, visiting the turret Sir Edward O'Brien built so he could watch his racehorses; he once gambled the entire estate on a race but, luckily, his horse Sean Buis won. The horse was later buried under the Temple, 100 yards from the entrance to the castle. Everywhere are colourful and fearless pheasants that run across the path in front of us and dart into the thick undergrowth.

The best way to see the grounds, if you are short on time, is to rent a golf cart; we drive all around the lush grounds of the golf course and have a wonderfully different view of the castle over the beautiful Dromoland Lough.

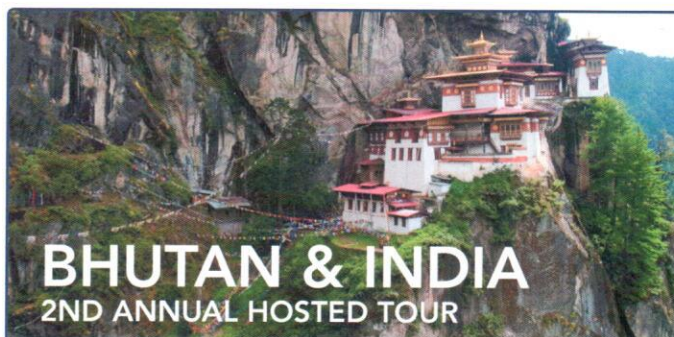


The author tours the Dromoland Castle estate in a golf cart.

This trip to Ireland is an escorted vacation with Brendan Vacations, but several tour operators provide escorted vacations in Ireland. Those who enjoy cruises or all-inclusive resorts will truly enjoy an escorted vacation. The all-inclusive price and someone else taking care of all our transportation needs while moving our suitcases from one gorgeous hotel to another is lovely. The comfortable motor coach waits for us each morning and we clamber aboard to be transported from one incredible experience to another. There is also plenty of time to head off on your own for adventures, if you are so inclined.

From Dromoland, we venture out to the Cliffs of Moher for our first full day of sightseeing at this incredible location. You should be aware that Ireland, although it does have highways, is mostly comprised of small, winding roads and those with motion sickness should definitely talk to a doctor before travelling. After becoming used to green fields, still lakes and craggy rocks, it's a shock to see the Atlantic Ocean stretching to the horizon. It's easy to forget that Ireland is an island until you arrive at the beautiful coastline.

Most movies about Ireland contain a clip of the Cliffs of Moher. Rugged and grey, they tower over the Atlantic while white lace-capped waves crash against the shore. Seabirds



BHUTAN & INDIA 2ND ANNUAL HOSTED TOUR

"The Last Place on the Roof of the World" merit hosted

Highlights: 7 nights in India, 10 nights in Bhutan; Old Delhi; Taj Mahal; Jaipur; visit a development site in Delhi; Taktang Monastery (the Tiger's Nest); all meals in Bhutan.

Your host Barry Mackey has invested over 42 years of his life and career in international relief and development including 25 years of residence in South Asia.

\$5,499 | 18 days
Departs Nov 7, 2011

Limited availability - call today to book

Colwood 1913 Sooke Rd. | 250.478.9505
Victoria 3617 Shelbourne St. | 250.477.0131
1.800.409.1711 merit.ca

merit
...for the experience

CDN\$, pp, dbl occ. Land only. Single supplement \$1225. Hosted based on minimum 16 passengers.
TICO ON-4499356/4499372 | BC-33127/34799/34798 | QC-7002238 | Canadian owned.

Get a Lift with Bruno

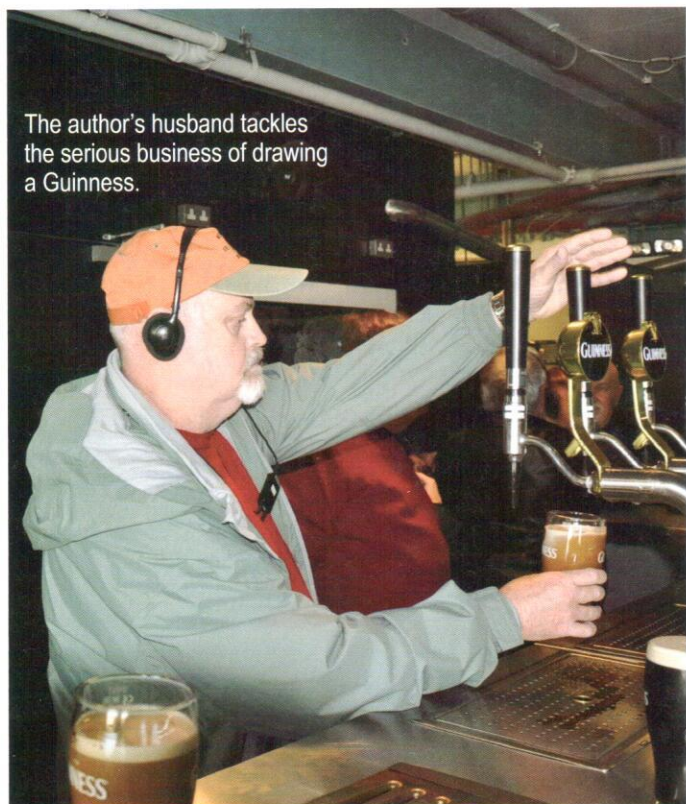


BRUNO
for your independence

MEDichair®
the home medical equipment specialists

Victoria - 1856 Quadra St
(250) 384-8000
Sidney - 7 - 9764 Fifth St
(250) 656-6228
victoria.medichair.com

circle overhead and make quite a spectacle as they scream in dismay at the tourists who invade their territory. There are stairs that climb all the way to the top of the cliffs for an incredible view and lead to a lovely visitor centre, where we drink a cup of hot tea and recover from the climb.



The author's husband tackles the serious business of drawing a Guinness.

Photos: Jan Ross

From the Cliffs of Moher, we drive to Rathbaun Farm, a working Irish farm, where we are thrilled to watch a collie herding sheep in a demonstration set up just for us - but we are even more thrilled with the lovely farm lunch. We devour the fresh Irish scones, heaped with black current jam and delicious, whipped cream. It's worth a trip to Ireland just for those scones.

Ireland, surprisingly, is known for its excellent homemade

chocolates and we stock up on several boxes of Lily O'Brien, Butler and Skellig chocolates. Most of the beautiful Irish sweaters and capes found in the shops are not actually made in Ireland, but you can find beautiful Irish linen as well as the delicious chocolates. Lovely silver necklaces and rings in interesting Celtic shapes are also great souvenirs.

The next day is spent marvelling at the fabulous landscapes in the famous Ring of Kerry or the Iveragh Peninsula. This unspoiled region is a tourist trail in County Kerry, which runs from the fantastic coastline inland to scenic, ancient stone forts and rolling, green fields where slabs of limestone rock poke through the tundra to create an alien yet compelling landscape.

IF YOU GO

- Ireland is temperate so, even in November, the weather is pleasant. The temperature remains moderate throughout the year.
- Take a light jacket or sweater for layering as well as an umbrella or raincoat because it rains often - although that usually results in a rainbow!
- An escorted tour is one of the best ways to see the highlights of Ireland. We were very pleased with Brendan Vacations (brendan-vacations.com).
- An escorted vacation is an especially economical way to travel since many meals are included as well as entrance fees to attractions, etc. (from around \$1,000 pp and up, not including airfare).
- Dromoland Castle (www.dromoland.ie) is a wonderful, historical and fascinating place to stay and conveniently located in County Clare, close to the Shannon airport.
- Don't miss the magnificent Cliffs of Moher (www.cliffsofmoher.ie)
- Stop for lunch and a visit at Rathbaun Farm (www.rathbaunfarm.com) and experience an authentic Irish farm.
- The Foynes Flying Boat Museum (www.flyingboatmuseum.com) is interesting and well worth a stop.
- Try to spend as much time as possible in the beautiful city of Dublin (www.visitdublin.com).



Affordable Services Customized to Suit Your Needs

Shopping	Transportation
Pickup/Delivery	Reminders
Pet Care	Meal Prep & Delivery
Handyman	Holiday Decorating
Housekeeping	Gift Wrapping
Companionship	

Just a few of the things we can do for you!



Tara Gibson & Lori McColl

Giving Caregivers More Time
For What Matters Most

Insured & Bondable
Criminal Record Checked
Service Provider for
Veterans Affairs Canada

Tara Gibson & Lori McColl
250.590.3001
info@prioritytime.ca
www.prioritytime.ca

*Call us for your free consultation.
We will come to you and bring the coffee!*

Priority Time
ERRAND AND CONCIERGE

The traditional village of Adare is located in County Limerick and advertises itself as the “prettiest village in Ireland” – we don’t argue. With traditional, thatched-roof homes, an ancient and beautiful church and a scenic stream running through town, Adare is so scenic the sun shines brightly during the entire visit as we admire the scenery and the bright flowers.

Next, we find ourselves at the Killarney Park Hotel, one of the five-star hotels selected for the tour; our room has a TV in the bathroom, right above the deep Jacuzzi tub. How luxurious!

Not particularly excited about our next planned stop at The Foynes Flying Boat Museum, where the most interesting claim to fame includes a replica of Pan Am’s Yankee Clipper, I am pleasantly surprised. Irish Coffee was first concocted in the small airport at Foynes and they give free samples during the museum tour. The most interesting part is the Yankee Clipper. Generous bunk beds, seven-course meals, room to stroll around – if only we could fly like that today!

From the museum, we wander across the street to a local pub for lunch. The pubs in Ireland, although they do serve alcohol, are like family restaurants. With dark wood decor, heavy glass serving dishes, and wonderful, filling and inexpensive food along with friendly people, the pubs are a wonderful place to stop for a meal.

After spending several nights at Dromoland Castle, we are ready for more castle adventures and excited to be visiting Blarney Castle. Seeking eloquence, my husband and I both willingly kiss the Blarney Stone after a steep, tight and unnerving climb to the top of the castle. My mental image of an impressive stone with some sort of brass plaque is dashed; the stone is nothing like that. Visitors kiss the side of the castle. Somewhat anti-climactic, but at least I can say I’ve kissed the Blarney Stone!

Our tour of Ireland ends in the beautiful and historic city of Dublin, where we are impressed by the Book of Kells, but even more impressed by our tour of the Guinness Storehouse. Originally the Guinness factory, the savvy Guinness Company transformed the factory into one of the most popular tourist destinations in Dublin. Designed to resemble a glass of Guinness with golden foam surrounding you, the building includes a lot of original equipment used to make the tasty brew, as well as a bar where tour goers can learn the correct way to draw a Guinness – and get a free drink in the process! Everyone then heads to the very top of the building with free drink passes where a large round room includes a bar in the centre and huge, glass windows that provide the best view of Dublin in the whole city.

As we fly out of Dublin the next morning, I mull over Ireland – incredible coastline, gorgeous green fields strewn with boulders, ancient castles, churches and cities, scenic pubs, and incredibly hospitable people. Our first visit to Ireland – but not our last!

SL

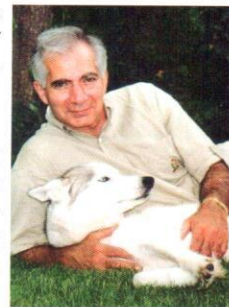


Senior Living
invites you to...

Capture the Moment

Senior Living has always encouraged ‘seizing the day’ and now we want you to capture it. In photographs!

We are pleased to offer you the opportunity to meet world acclaimed photographer **Onnig Cavoukian**. A sampling of Mr. Cavoukian’s work can be viewed at www.cavouk.com



Although best known for his portraits of royalty, world leaders and celebrated artists, Mr. Cavoukian will share his love of nature during an informal outdoor photo outing at Government House Gardens. (In the event of rain, an alternate indoor location will be selected.)

Saturday August 20th 2011

8:30am – Noon

\$45 plus HST

Registration is limited to 25 senior participants.

For more information and/or to register, please visit seniorlivingmag.com/photo-outing

Photos courtesy of Cavouk Portraits

