

# COME HOME TO IRELAND III

## EXPLORE THE NORTH

*with Paul Byron*

**MAY 11-18, 2018**

### **Friday May 11<sup>th</sup>: Welcome to Northern Ireland**

After gathering in my hometown of Dublin we begin our tour and head across the border into the heather-clad hills of Co. Tyrone in Northern Ireland (part of the United Kingdom). There will be no customs checks and the only difference to note will be that we change currencies from the (€) Euro to (£) GBP pounds sterling. Once we have arrived, we will enjoy a **sightseeing tour of Belfast**, taking in all the areas of interest in this fascinating and historical city. We will see Belfast's compact center on Donegal Square, which is dominated by the elaborate City Hall, which was officially reopened in October 2009 following its £11m, two year refurbishment. The US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton performed a ribbon cutting ceremony and unveiled a plaque to mark the reopening. We will drive through West Belfast's Protestant neighborhood of Shankill Road and the Catholic neighborhood of Falls Road, where large vivid murals painted on the sides of buildings express the feelings that still run deep on both sides. Though the names of these areas were much in the news during 'The Troubles' the gate in the Peace Wall between them now stands open.



Afterwards, we will check-in at our hotel, The Europa, a world famous hotel steeped in the historic center of Belfast. We will prepare for an evening visit to the **Titanic Belfast Experience**, a state of the art interactive museum that provides an unforgettable visitor experience. It tells the story of RMS Titanic, from her conception and launch into the River Lagan in 1911, to the tragic end of her maiden voyage a year later. It was here at Titanic Quarter (the former Queen's Island) in Belfast Harbor, where the ship was built. Enjoy the exhibits at your own pace. I am so excited that this will be the setting for my first performance followed by our first dinner together – this will be a memorable night for sure!

### **Dinner & Overnight: The Europa Hotel, Belfast**

### **Saturday May 12<sup>th</sup>: Unique Experiences in Belfast**

After breakfast this morning, we will head out to take in some of Northern Ireland's iconic sites. Our first stop will take us along the **9 Glens of Antrim**, known locally simply as 'The Glens'. It comprises of nine Glens (valleys) that radiate from the Antrim Plateau to the coast. We continue to the **Giant's Causeway**, an amazing geologic formation of approx. 40,000 basalt stone – some as tall as 130 feet, and mostly hexagonal in shape.



As Northern Ireland's Premiere landmark, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, you'll be free to decide for yourself whether the Causeway is a result of accelerated cooling of lava outflows 60 million years ago. Or is it the work of the legendary Irish giant, Finn MacCool, in his attempts to a) woo a distant lady giant, or b) meet a Scottish giant in battle to determine who the stronger giant was? I believe a lady was the cause!! You will probably take about 700 pictures here....I know I will. I haven't been back in years!

Following this, we stop in **Carrick-a-Rede** which boasts an exhilarating rope bridge experience. Traditionally fishermen erected the bridge to Carrick-a-Rede island over a 23m-deep and 20m-wide chasm to check their salmon nets. Today visitors are drawn here simply to take the rope bridge challenge! The rope bridge originally consisted of a single rope hand rail which has been replaced by a two hand railed bridge by the National Trust. Once you reach Carrick Island, the reward is seeing the diverse birdlife and an uninterrupted view across to Rathlin Island and Scotland. There is only one way off the island - back across the swinging bridge! They always say "Don't look down"...yet you always do!! I've never been so am excited to do this. Hope you won't leave me to do it alone! Assuming we all make it back in one piece...we will return to Belfast and you are free this evening to explore the many excellent restaurants within walking distance of our hotel.



**Overnight: The Europa, Belfast**

### **Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> May: Last Stops in the North**

This morning once breakfast is finished up, we will depart Belfast and Co. Antrim for Co. Sligo, famous for its poetry, myth and folklore, and most importantly, the birthplace of my Grandad Albert, whom I was very close to. On route, we will visit two counties in Northern Ireland before crossing the border back to the Republic of Ireland where we will use the Euro currency for the remainder of the trip.



First, we will visit **Armagh City in Co. Armagh** which is a lively little cathedral city that has been an important religious center since the 5th century. It remains the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland, the seat of both the Anglican and Roman Catholic archbishops of Armagh, and Primate of All Ireland. Their two cathedrals, both named for St Patrick, stare at each other from their respective hilltops. Today, we will visit **Navan Centre and Fort**, one of Ireland's most important archaeological sites, the legendary Emain Macha is home of the famous Red Branch Knights and Ulster Cycle of Tales...the place where myth and reality meet. Next, we continue our journey via the beautiful **countryside of Co. Fermanagh**. The ancient landscape of Fermanagh is shaped by ice and water, with rugged hills rising above quilted plains of half-drowned drumlins and shimmering, reed-fringed lakes. A



glance at the map shows the county is around one-third water - as the locals will tell you, the lakes are in Fermanagh for six months of the year; for the other six, Fermanagh is in the lakes. Later we will arrive in Co. Sligo and will check-in to our accommodation for the next two nights, Markree Castle Hotel, one of the country's finest Victorian Gothic Revival Castles. We will enjoy dinner here together and the remainder of the evening.

**Dinner & Overnight: Markree Castle, Sligo**

### Monday 14<sup>th</sup> May: Exploring Local Sights & Sounds

Refuel on a hearty Irish breakfast this morning as we head out for a day of touring the sites in Sligo and **Donegal**, a county which promises wild landscapes blanketed in bog and heather, isolated white sandy beaches and a roughly hewn coastline. We will head out of Sligo via an area known as '**Yeats Country**' after the Irish poet W.B. Yeats, who spent large parts of his childhood in this area. W.B Yeats died in France in 1939 and according to his wishes he was buried after a discreet and private funeral service at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin – "if I die bury me up there and then in a year's time when the newspapers have forgotten me, dig me up and plant me in Sligo". Our first stop today will be in **Drumcliffe Church**, which is best known as the final resting place of W.B.



Yeats. The crosses in the graveyard are on the grounds of a former abbey. Adjacent to the ancient graveyard is a road leading to the early 19th century St. Columba's Church of Ireland and the final resting place of Yeats. Drumcliffe is set against the striking backdrop of the **Benbulbin Mountains**, undoubtedly Ireland's most distinctive mountain.

Next, we will arrive into **Donegal Town**, situated in a photogenic spot at the mouth of Donegal Bay. With a backdrop of the Blue Stack Mountains, a handsome and well-preserved castle and a good choice of places to shop and eat, it makes an excellent base for exploring. On the banks of the River Eske, Donegal Town was a stamping ground of the O'Donnells, the great chieftains who ruled the northwest from the 15th to 17th centuries. Today, despite being the county's namesake, it's neither its largest town (Letterkenny), nor the county town (the even smaller town of Lifford). After all that, if you still have energy, I will do the second of my performances. If you're too tired, I will understand if you fall asleep during the show. Just be sure to snore in time with the music! **Dinner & Overnight: Markree Castle, Sligo**

### Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> May: Galway and Ireland's Place of Pilgrimage

Fill up on breakfast this morning as we depart Sligo and head northwards to County Galway. On route, we will travel through the wild beauty and haunting landscapes of Co. Mayo, making a stop in **Knock, Ireland's largest place of Pilgrimage**. Knock is Ireland's National Marian Shrine and the site of the Apparition in 1879. The Story of Knock began on Thursday evening of the 21st of August 1879, Our Lady, St Joseph and St. John the Evangelist appeared at the south gable of the church of Knock, County Mayo. There were 15 official witnesses to the apparition young and old who watched and prayed for 2 hours in the pouring rain. I do not expect you all to do the same!!!



We will then reach **Galway**, known as the "City of Tribes" after the 14 merchant family tribes that founded it. This city is a very lively cultural city with lots of music, drama, street performers (buskers), unique shops and of course a huge variety of pubs.



We will take a **panoramic sightseeing tour of Galway**, passing all major highlights of this medieval city including the Galway Cathedral, National University of Ireland, Salthill Promenade and more! Galway is one of my favourite cities in Ireland and you will see why!

Later on when we have finished up, we will check into our waterfront hotel, the Radisson Blu Hotel, which overlooks the unique Galway Bay. You are free to enjoy your first evening in Galway as you wish. Galway is steeped in history, for sure, but the city buzzes from brightly painted pubs with live music and restaurants serving up the areas famous oysters. Try one for

yourself! **Overnight: The Radisson Blu Hotel, Galway**

### **Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> May: Discovering Co. Clare**

Finish up on breakfast this morning as we get ready to engage in unique experiences in neighboring county, Clare. We will stop at two landmarks of the Wild Atlantic Way, the **Burren and the Ailwee Caves**. We meander through an area known as The Burren, which has a landscape similar to a moonscape but shelters a unique mixture of geology, flora and archaeological sites. Next, we return by meandering through an area known as The Burren, which has a landscape similar to a moonscape but shelters a unique mixture of geology, flora and archaeological sites.



We will then head out for a visit to the Aillwee Cave which features The Burren Birds of Prey. The Aillwee Cave is one of the oldest caves in Ireland where you can seek out an unusual mineral specimen, crystal or fossil during a stroll through the beautiful caverns – over bridged chasms, under weird formations and alongside the thunderous waterfall. The Burren Birds of Prey is home to Eagles, Falcons, Hawks, and Owls from all over the world. The dynamic flying displays in the centre offers opportunities to interact and get up close and personal to the birds. Thereafter, we will return to Galway to enjoy my last performance of the trip and dinner together at the hotel.

**Dinner & Overnight: The Radisson Blu, Galway**

### **Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> May: Day Tripping to Connemara**



After a leisurely breakfast we set out today to visit **Connemara**, a unique and very special part of County Galway. Once home to over 2 million Irish speaking people, it still retains its regional heritage as you will discover while we ramble around its lakes, mountains and bog lands. Our first stop this morning, will be **a cruise on Killary Harbor**, Ireland's only fjord...you can sit back and relax as you enjoy your surroundings while enjoying some Irish coffee or tea and scones.

We then visit the picturesque **Kylemore Abbey**, the home of the Benedictine nuns which stands at the edge of a lake surrounded by woodlands. The Abbey was originally built in 1868 by Mitchell Henry, in memory of his late wife Margaret. Its architecture is best described as neo-gothic and the house still displays all the characteristics of that period. Kylemore Abbey's most famous feature is its miniature cathedral, known locally as the Gothic church. You can also visit the Victorian Walled Garden.

We then travel back to Galway where we will enjoy a farewell dinner together to celebrate our last evening in Ireland. Reflect on the memories, friendships and experiences encountered and toast to a successful trip!

**Dinner & Overnight: The Radisson Blu, Galway**

**Friday 18<sup>th</sup> May: Homeward Bound**

Just like that, the trip comes to an end! It's time to pack your bags as you head for the airport where you will board your flight for home...carrying photos and souvenirs, but most importantly, memories that bring a bit of the Emerald Isle home with you. My Land, which I'm so proud to show off to you all. 'The Land of One Hundred Thousand Welcomes' will be expecting you again soon to answer Ireland's Call!



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