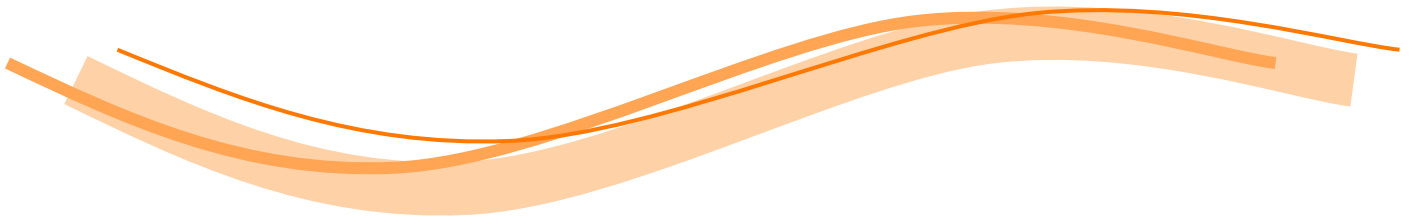




IRELAND & ROYAL IRISH TOURS





ROYAL IRISH TOURS

Jump into Ireland with Royal Irish Tours! With a depth of knowledge and understanding of Ireland, plus friendly and well-informed staff, Royal Irish offer an exciting range of tours - or they can customize your own itinerary.

Royal Irish is Canada's leading tour operator to Ireland with the largest and most diverse range of holidays - and they have just celebrated 16 years of offering tours to the Emerald Isle.

Royal Irish offer 8 first class coach tour vacations with leisurely itineraries that allow you lots of time to explore and to enjoy the relaxed pace of Irish life. In many cities you stay 2 nights at each stop – and with all tours you get a full Irish breakfast and 3 course evening meals, plus an abundance of visits showing the very best of Ireland. It's a great way to see Ireland worry free. Everything is taken care of for you and your Tour Director is with you every step of the way.

There are also a wide choice of rail tours offering the perfect alternative for travelers who prefer not to drive in Ireland, but want to see as much of the Emerald Isle as possible. Sit back and relax, taking in the beauty of the Irish countryside as you let the train take the strain. The choice is yours between an independent package with the freedom to travel as you please, or departures that include local guides.

Rail tours range from 1 to 5 days in length, starting from Dublin. Examples include a 5 day tour that covers a large part of the Wild Atlantic Way, a two day tour to Belfast City and The Giants Causeway and a 1 day tour including Cork and Blarney Castle.

Royal Irish small group sightseeing tours have a maximum of 16 people and take you along the back roads and off the beaten path. The 5 day Northern Ireland & Atlantic Coast tour includes Belfast and the Titanic Experience as well as the stunning Atlantic coast.

If you want to travel more independently – with unbeatable value and choice – Royal Irish have 14 self-drive itineraries. This is a great way to meet the friendly Irish people. Royal Irish take care of the car rental arrangements for you – plus you can select accommodation from self catering cottages and B&Bs to chic city centre hotels and Irish Manor Houses and Castles. And if you don't want to do the driving – Royal Irish even have the option for chauffeur driven tours.

And lastly Royal Irish have city stay options in Dublin, Belfast, Killarney and Galway. Short Rail Tours and city breaks are great options to

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	combine with other Royal Irish Tours – you can “mix and match” to make your vacation exactly as you wish it to be.
Why Royal Irish Tours?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Value: Royal Irish offer more inclusions, meals and admissions than other vacation companies - Expertise: Ireland is their business and they are specialists in their field with friendly and knowledgeable agents who have a wealth of personal experience of travelling in Ireland - Choice: From B&B driving holidays to first class coach tours, rail tours to castle adventures and luxurious chauffeur drive vacations, Royal Irish offer a range of options to suit everyone. - Security: Royal Irish are registered with TICO, the Travel Industry Council of Ontario - Commitment: The Royal Irish team is passionate about what they do and driven to giving you the holiday of a lifetime.
Coach Tours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality and Reliability: All tours are exclusively designed by Royal Irish and combined with all the inclusions and low price airfares, these tours represent the best value in first class touring - Driver Guides: Their guides are friendly and knowledgeable, true professionals who will ensure that you have a great trip - Delightful Hotels: All their hotels are carefully selected to ensure highest standards of accommodation, dining and service - Leisurely Paced Tours: There are plenty of stops on the tours so you never feel rushed, plus many tours feature two night stops - Delicious Fine Dining: Days start with a hearty full Irish breakfast and most evening meals are included in your tour, featuring local dining at its best - Modern Touring Coach: Spacious deluxe coaches with panoramic windows provide the most comfortable way to see the Emerald Isle
City Tours	<p>Dublin Delight 3 nights in Ireland’s capital. Your choice of hotel, hop on hop off tour, breakfast daily. Visit St Patrick’s cathedral, Trinity College, writer’s museum and much more.</p> <p>Combine this with a trip to Belfast for 3 nights. Only a short train ride away you can follow in the footsteps of your favourite game of thrones character or trace the story of the Titanic, there is something for</p>

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	<p>everyone.</p> <p>Royal Irish have also included Killarney, Galway and Cork into their city stay packages. All are available year round.</p>
Trip Showcase	<p>Here are just three of the popular Royal Irish Tours available to Ireland.</p> <p>Irish Twist - Pub and Heritage Tour</p> <p>The Irish Twist - Pub and Heritage Tour is a different take on the traditional tour with more free time and plenty of opportunities for dinners with Irish music and dancing in the evenings. It combines Ireland's magnificent beauty, music & folklore on this lively 7 night tour. Explore the famous Guinness storehouse, the mighty Cliffs of Moher; enjoy the views of the wild Atlantic Way. Wander the cobblestone streets of Galway by day and take in some Irish song and music by night. The Twist will leave you with the spirit of Ireland for years to come.</p> <p>Your 8 day tour includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motor coach transportation and services of an experienced driver & local touring guide • 7 nights first class ensuite accommodation in feature hotels with baggage handling included • Full Irish breakfast daily • 4 table d'hôte evening meals • Farewell Irish evening with dinner & entertainment • Lunch at Nancy Hands - a classic Irish bar in Dublin • An evening of music, song and dance at 'Trad on the Prom', Galway • Tour and tastings at the following: Guinness Storehouse, Midleton Distillery & Franciscan Well Brewery • Visits and admissions to: Rock of Cashel, Cobh Heritage Centre, Cliffs of Moher <p>Manor Royal – Deluxe Coach Tour</p> <p>The NEW and improved Manor Royal tour still has all the same luxuries as in past years - however there are some fantastic new additions. This exclusive tour is now capped at a maximum of 26 Passengers. It includes accommodations at some of the finest hotels in Ireland as you stay at some signature and unique locations including 5 star hotels and castles. This relaxed, deluxe vacation now arrives earlier so you can enjoy what the hotel has to offer such as spa treatments, country walks or reading by the fire. This is truly one of the most luxurious, deluxe, first</p>

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class coach tours Royal Irish has ever offered.

Your 11 day tour includes:

- Motor coach transportation and services of an experienced driver & local touring guide
- 10 nights accommodation in superior first class hotels with baggage handling included
- All rooms ensuite
- 10 full Irish breakfasts in hotels
- 6 table d'hôte evening meals
- Farewell dinner & entertainment in Dublin
- Signature dinner at famous traditional Belfast pub
- Admissions to: Parke's Castle, Foxford Woollen Mills, Cliffs of Moher & Atlantic Edge Exhibition, Dunbrody Famine Ship, Powerscourt House, Florence Court, Giant's Causeway
- Light lunch in a traditional pub
- Tickets for Shannon Estuary ferry
- Music session at Marine Bar
- Tour and tasting at the Old Jameson Distillery, Dublin

Shamrock Royal – Coach Tour

The Shamrock Royal coach tour is a perfect introduction to Ireland. It allows you to relax with two and three night stays in first class hotels. Enjoy a hearty full Irish breakfast daily, as well as 10 evening meals. Discover the traditional yet cosmopolitan cities of Dublin, Cork and Belfast. Be inspired by the magical landscapes and quaint fishing villages. You will truly enjoy the best of Ireland on the delightful fully inclusive tour.

Your 15 day tour includes:

- Motor coach transportation and services of an experienced driver & local touring guide
- 14 nights accommodation in first class hotels with baggage handling included
- All rooms ensuite
- 14 full Irish breakfasts
- 8 table d'hôte evening meals in hotels
- Welcome drink on arrival
- Visit the top voted tourist attraction in Europe - Titanic Experience in Belfast

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dinner and entertainment at Quill's farmhouse, Muckcross Park • Farewell dinner and entertainment in Dublin • Admissions to: Saint Patrick Visitor Centre, Belfast City Hall, Titanic Belfast, Giant's Causeway Centre, Belleek Pottery, Kylemore Abbey, Cliffs of Moher, Kingdom of Kerry Museum, Cahir Castle, Dunbrody Famine Ship, Waterford Crystal Centre, Irish National Stud & Gardens • Walking tour of Derry City • Jaunting car ride through Killarney
Food and Drink	<p>The Irish Twist Coach Tour will take you a wonderful selection of Irish offerings:</p> <p>Visit the Guinness Storehouse, Midleton distillery and New this year Franciscan Well Brewery.</p> <p>The Franciscan Well Brewery was founded in 1998 on the North Mall in Cork City and is built on the site of an old Franciscan Monastery and Well, dating back to the year 1219. Legend has it that the water from the well has miraculous and curative properties and people would come from afar to drink from it.</p> <p>Dine at Nancy hands a classic Dublin eatery for a taste of all things Irish.</p> <p>Visit the English Market. Cork's award winning food market since 1788</p>
Contacts	<p>Website: http://ritvacations.com/</p> <p>Online Brochure: http://ritvacations.com/ireland/view-brochure/</p> <p>Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/irishtours</p> <p>Twitter: https://twitter.com/RITvacations</p>

IRELAND	<p>It has never been easier to get to Ireland from Canada with year-round direct flights from Toronto, now is the time to tick Ireland off your bucket list! Well over 200,000 Canadians visited Ireland from Canada in 2016, a record year</p> <p>Ireland is waiting to be discovered – with breathtaking landscapes and rural idylls, buzzing urban hubs and amazing festivals. Plus you will be made welcome by some of the most charming and friendly people anywhere in the world.</p> <p>The verdant green island of St Patrick is caressed by the warm waters of the Gulf Stream, so don't be surprised to see palm trees in the South West of the country. Yet some of its coast has a wild, raw beauty ...</p>
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where huge Atlantic rollers crash and churn, shaping jagged ocean crags, archipelagos and inlets, and the sheer granite walls of Europe's tallest sea cliffs.

But there is more to Ireland than its spectacular scenery. Dublin and Belfast are vibrant and fascinating cities to visit – and can be a great idea for a shorter city break during the hard Canadian winter. And don't forget Cork, Galway, Killarney and some of Ireland's other up and coming cities.

Here are some of the many reasons to visit Ireland in 2017!

Choice and competition on flights to Ireland

Getting to Ireland has never been easier with year round direct access in Canada offered by Air Canada rouge and Aer Lingus and it is just a short 6 hour flight and the closest European hub. There is also seasonal service with Air Transat, WestJet and ASL airlines formerly Europe Airpost.

The awe-inspiring Wild Atlantic Way

The Wild Atlantic Way, stretching all the way from the Inishowen Peninsula in Co. Donegal to Kinsale in Co. Cork is amongst the world's best driving tours. It stretches along 2,500 km of the wildest, most captivating scenery found anywhere - with lots to do and see along the way. Go whale watching and then enjoy an amazing seafood dinner in County Cork; take a walk along the dramatic Cliffs of Moher and stop for homemade ice cream. Or see the Northern Lights along the Donegal coastline.

The World's longest defined coastal touring route features the Coolest Place on the planet according to National Geographic - Donegal.

<http://www.natgeotraveller.co.uk/smart-travel/features/cool-list-17-2017>

With a weather-nibbled coast spotted with sea stacks, Blue Flag beaches and offshore islands, Donegal is a land that feels undiscovered. Last summer, scenes for Star Wars: Episode VIII were filmed on the Inishowen Peninsula.

Northern Ireland's Causeway Coastal Route

As well as the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland has more than its fair share of stunning coastal scenery. In Northern Ireland the majestic Causeway Coastal Route, famed for its dramatic landscapes, is counted as one of

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the world's great road journeys.

Ireland's Ancient East

Ireland's Ancient East represents a wonderful opportunity to experience 5,000 years of European history in a compact area. The Ancient East area allows visitors to get off the beaten track to see, hear, touch and feel the imprints made over millennia by the settlers in this beautiful landscape.

Ancient Man, Early Christians, Medieval Lords, Colonial Settlers and their descendants have all been seduced by Ireland's lush, green and fertile lands. And it's easy to explore as visitors can go at their own pace to discover tombs older than the pyramids, a Viking settlement or castles and fortresses. And, as everywhere else you go in Ireland, there are stories from the friendly locals who are some of the best story tellers in the world.

Not to be missed is the UNESCO World Heritage Site at **Newgrange** - a Stone Age monument in the Boyne Valley, County Meath. Newgrange was constructed about 3,200 B.C., which makes it older than both Stonehenge and the Great Pyramids of Giza. It is a large circular mound with a stone passageway and chambers inside. The mound is ringed by 97 large kerbstones, some of which are richly decorated with megalithic art. The Boyne Valley is where you'll find the Neolithic passage tombs at Knowth, Dowth and Newgrange, together with an interpretative centre. Newgrange is the best known of the trio, famous for the spectacular shaft of light that spills through its roof-box every year at winter solstice. Amazingly, this alignment, which coaxes the sunlight 19 metres into the heart of the chamber, was engineered some 5,000 years ago. How can you see the alignment? Lady Luck has the answer. A lottery system gives ordinary folk a chance to be present in the corbelled chamber on the days around 21 December.

Take at these videos for some unique stories coming from the region:
The Black Widow - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kITS3JC8Mqw>
The Fairy Tree - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04_UjlwLOys
Pat 'The Hat' Speight tells the legend of a highwayman's riches buried in County Waterford's Comeragh Mountains - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynMIJRiatJ4>

Ireland showcased at the movies

Much of the Fantasy blockbuster TV series "Game of Thrones" is filmed on location in Northern Ireland. If you are a fan – Northern Ireland is the

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epicentre of all things Game of Thrones. Aside from the landscapes that evoke true fantasy - there's a good reason why Northern Ireland was picked by Game of Thrones location scouts. There are castles everywhere; incredible structures that catapult you right to the heart of the mythical land of Westeros.

Northern Ireland offers fans a self-drive tour through scene-stealing locations along the Causeway Coast and Glens. And the Titanic Studios in Belfast are also frequently used for filming.

Star Wars: The Force Awakens is sending the global box-office into hyper drive. Since 1977, the record-breaking movie franchise has travelled through more than a few galaxies. This time around the cast and crew jetted into a little town called Portmagee, County Kerry, on Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way, to discover a dream filming location. The heart stopping scenery of Skellig Michael was depicted as the hideout of Luke Skywalker in the movie. Skellig Michael, a remote island in Co Kerry, housed a monastery from around the 6th to the 12th century, and is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In addition the popular TV series "Vikings" on the History Channel is filmed in Co Wicklow. This is a very appropriate setting as Viking heritage runs deep in Ireland's Ancient East.

Year round festivals

St Patrick's Day is Ireland's day of pride, heritage and celebration. And while St Patrick's Day is celebrated in many other countries - if you really want to get a piece of the party, you've got to go to Ireland. Ireland on St Patrick's Day is unlike anywhere else in the world and the celebrations go on throughout the land.

In Dublin, St Patrick's Festival runs from 16 to 19 March, 2017. The four-day festival embraces everything from salsa dancing to céilís (traditional dances) and culminates in a huge parade. The oldest St Patrick's Day parade in Ireland is in County Wexford. It began in 1917 and is still going strong. For the earliest, you'll need to head out west, to Dingle. They kick things off at 6am, with the Dingle Fife and Drum Band taking to streets. While Limerick uses St Patrick's Day to host the International Band Parade and Competition.

<http://www.stpatricksfestival.ie/>

County Armagh is where St Patrick founded one of his churches, so it's only natural that they throw a week-long festival in his honour. While



	<p>Derry-Londonderry's Seachtain na Gaeilge (Irish Language Week) is a lively and linguistic build-up to the big day, with events throughout the city.</p> <p>But St Patrick's Day is only one of the far too many to mention festivals that go on year round throughout Ireland. No matter when you visit you will discover the folk in Ireland having a good time at fantastic, fun, foody, or downright frivolous festivals! Check out www.ireland.com for the full calendar.</p>
Location	Western Europe, between the UK and the Atlantic Ocean
Geography	<p>Ireland is divided into 4 provinces: Ulster, Connacht, Leinster, and Munster</p> <p>With a landmass of approximately 84,434 sq. km, it is at most 484km north to south, and 274km east to west. No point in Ireland is farther than 113km from one of its encircling waters: the Atlantic Ocean, the Irish Sea, or the St. George and North channels.</p>
Name	From Irlanda, meaning the land of Ir, who was the son of Mile, the first man of that clan to be buried on the island
Population	6.4 million, with 4.6 in Eire and 1.8 in Northern Ireland.
Language	<p>English and Gaelic; road signs are bilingual.</p> <p>One of the most important elements in Irish culture is the Irish language. Ireland's West is fortunate to have Gaeltachts, or Irish-speaking areas, in both Galway and Mayo. In these areas, you will notice the Irish language on signs and shop-fronts as well as in everyday speech. Here, people still play music, sing and dance in the old traditional manner.</p>
Currency	<p>In the Republic of Ireland the currency is the Euro; one Euro = \$1.41 Cdn (March 2017)</p> <p>In Northern Ireland, the British Pound is the currency; one Pound = \$1.64 (March 2017) that's around 20% better for Canadians over the same time last year!</p>
Tipping	<p>Most hotels and guesthouses add a service charge to the bill, usually 12.5% to 15%, although some smaller places add only 10% or nothing at all. Always check to see what amount, if any, has been added to your bill. For porters or bellhops, tip around \$1.50 per piece of luggage. For taxi drivers, hairdressers, and other providers of service, tip as you would at home, an average of 10% to 15%.</p>
Government	Republic of Ireland is a parliamentary democracy headed by President; Northern Ireland is part of United Kingdom
Documentation	A valid Canadian passport is needed to visit the island of Ireland. If travelling on a Canadian passport, no visa is required, but ensure that your Passport expiry date is a minimum of three months beyond your planned stay in Ireland.
Time zone	5 hours ahead of EST
Health	No health documents or vaccinations are required to enter Ireland or

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	Northern Ireland from Canada, but you should ensure that you have adequate travel insurance for your trip
Safety tips	Advice is standard for travel anywhere: don't leave cars unlocked or cameras, binoculars, or other expensive equipment unattended. Be alert and aware of your surroundings, and do not wander in lonely areas alone at night. Other than that, Ireland is one of the safest destinations for visitors to Europe.

CLIMATE	
General climate	January and February bring frosts but seldom snow, and July and August are very warm, but rarely hot. Summer temps are 15-20 C, with rain at any time!
Today's weather	Dublin: 17 degrees Centigrade with a sun and showers mix (18 March 2017)
Best time to visit	The shoulder season is a great time for city breaks. Whether in the vibrant city of Dublin taking in the Temple Bar Tradfest in January, visiting Trinity College and the Book of Kells, touring the Jameson Distillery or discovering a hidden gem – the Little Museum of Dublin..... In just a two hour drive you can experience Belfast with a visit to Titanic Belfast Visitor Centre or join in on the Belfast Food Trail. And you can always extend your golf season at one of the many beautiful courses in Northern Ireland. Ireland is a great year-round destination!

GETTING THERE	
Flying	First and foremost - getting to Ireland has never been easier. Aer Lingus and Air Canada route are now flying year round from Toronto to Dublin, and Air Transat will continue their seasonal service from Toronto and Montreal to both Dublin and Shannon. WestJet will also fly seasonally from Toronto/St. John's to Dublin. And ASL airlines, formerly Europe Airpost also provide seasonal service Toronto to Dublin.
Cities	<p>Dublin</p> <p>Dublin was been named one of the best cities in the world for travellers in Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2016.</p> <p>Elegant, sophisticated, historic and hip, Dublin is one of Europe's brightest capitals, with a youthful vibe and infectious energy. From its origins as a prosperous, multi-cultural modern city, Dublin's history spans more than 1,000 years. Explore its many historical and cultural hot-spots, lounge in cool bars or traditional pubs, enjoy the breathtaking scenery of the Dublin Mountains and the rugged Atlantic coastline, or transport yourself into the lively arts, music, theatre and dance scene. For the top 10 things to do in Dublin take a look at this:</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHvIQe3GZjo</p>

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	<p>Be enchanted by Dublin, a city of elegant Georgian boulevards and pulsating night life that is both cosmopolitan and intensely Celtic. Take in the Book of Kells at Trinity College, learn about the City's great literary tradition at the Dublin Writers Museum, enjoy a whiskey tasting at the Old Jameson Distillery, or sip a free pint of "Ireland's national drink" at the Guinness Storehouse which boasts one of the best panorama's of the bright city lights.</p> <p>Dublin attractions: Trinity College, Phoenix Park, Dublin Castle, Old Jameson Distillery, James Joyce Tower and Museum, Dublin Zoo, The Guinness Storehouse (in 1759 original brewery, Ireland's no 1 visitor attraction)</p> <p>With 40% of the Republic's population living within 100km of Dublin, the capital is the centre of the profound, high-speed changes that have been transforming Ireland into an increasingly European country, and it has been changed the most. Within an hour's drive of Dublin are Dalkey, Dún Laoghaire, and many other engaging coastal towns, the rural beauty of the Wicklow Mountains, and the prehistoric ruins in County Meath.</p> <p>Belfast is the capital of Northern Ireland and the north's major city. Start your travel research at the city website: www.GoToBelfast.com Belfast is now a must-see destination and has experienced a large growth in visitor numbers over the last few years; it's been voted as 'city on the rise' by Lonely Planet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Luxury Belfast hotels and restaurants • New Ulster Scots attractions • Exciting times for Belfast – historic past with a vibrant new future • New CS Lewis trail • The new Titanic Quarter is ready to receive visitors • The range and quality of accommodation, food, place to see and things to do (festivals and events each month throughout the year) is now amazing. • The two yellow Harland & Wolff cranes that dominate the Belfast skyline are nicknamed 'Samson (1974) and Goliath (1969) after the two Biblical figures – each crane has a span of 140 metres and can lift loads of up to 840 tonnes to a height of 70 metres, making a combined lifting capacity of over 1,600 tonnes, one of the largest in the world. <p>For the top 10 Titanic things to do in Belfast, take a look at this: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNjp2Wawl-l</p>
Distances	<p>Cork to Dublin: 256km</p> <p>Belfast to Dublin: 165km</p>
Ferries	Fishguard in Wales to Rosslare in Ireland is just 1hr 39min on Stena

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	<p>Lynx Fast Craft across the Irish Sea.</p> <p>Aran Islands, County Galway: Crossing the choppy waters to the remote Aran Islands by ferry is an experience in itself. Once you get there you're free to explore the island's patchwork fields, quiet pace of life, ancient monuments, awesome cliffs and crystal clear waters. Or you can marvel at the storytellers in the local pubs!</p>
Trains	<p>There are numerous trains daily between Belfast and Dublin; the express takes just 2 hours</p> <p>Irish Rover Rail Pass - 5 out of 15 days rail travel throughout Ireland Children are discounted.</p>
Car Rental	<p>All major car rental companies are represented; renting is fairly expensive as is gas.</p> <p>Driving is on the left and most cars are manual.</p>
Buses	<p>Buses link towns and cities by convenient frequent service all across Ireland north & south. The Dublin - Belfast Express coach service operates 7 times daily Monday - Saturday</p>
Passes	<p>Dublin Pass: provides discounts at 25 top attractions; cost 1 day: 52 euros adult (2017), 31 euros child plus Aircoach from Dublin Airport http://www.dublinpass.ie</p>

ACCOMMODATION TYPES	<p>This video link is a great overview of unique accommodation types: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VT4-UoqKFg</p> <p>And this one offers a great overview of some of the Only in Ireland experiences available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7oFhZE3pS</p> <p>Or, of course, you can simply let Royal Irish Tours look after all your accommodation needs!</p> <p>One personal favourite hotel of mine: Malmaison Hotel in Belfast was originally two seed warehouses belonging to two rival firms, McCausland and Lytle. Look at Lytle's (on the left) for its fantastic stonework friezes of nut-crunching squirrels, exotic birds and plants; and at McCausland's for heads illustrating five continents, Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania. Now one of Belfast's most prestigious hotels, with an inviting bar and superb French Brasserie Restaurant.</p> <p>Castle Hotels Imagine having an entire castle just for yourself and your family and friends, without having the bother of marrying into royalty. Ireland's castles can offer such an experience in sumptuously decorated places. Some even with a few ghosts roaming the corridors. Mingle with nobility at Crom Castle, which has self-catering apartments</p>
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	<p>in its West Wing and an actual Lord (Erne) living in the other wing. Lovingly restored Cloghan Castle will transport you back 800 years for a party your friends and family will never forget. What better way to spend an evening than to be wined and dined in a magical castle? Throw on an apron and cook for your guests, or be treated like royalty with a helping hand. Crack open the mead (or red wine) in Killiane Castle and party like it's 1699!</p> <p>Glin Castle, County Limerick Glin Castle, home of the Knight of Glin and his wife Madam FitzGerald, stands on the banks of the River Shannon amidst a 500-acre demesne. The castle is open to visitors from March to November and is a spectacular place to stay with seriously luxurious rooms and an authentic castle atmosphere.</p> <p>Kinnitty Castle Hotel, County Offaly Kinnitty Castle offers old world elegance, luxury and comfort. On top of that, you can enjoy friendly ghosts, a dungeon bar, hot stone massage at the first-rate spa and a spot of clay pigeon shooting.</p>
Bed and Breakfast	<p>Consider a B&B for some or your entire trip, to connect with the real Irish people and experience Irish family life.</p> <p>B&B Ireland has over forty years' experience in the promotion of bed and breakfast properties in Ireland and represent over nine hundred B&Bs throughout Ireland in urban, coastal, farm and countryside locations. Guests will enjoy comfortable surroundings, wonderful hearty home-cooked breakfasts and the opportunity to see inside an Irish home and meet the locals – your hosts.</p> <p>All B&B's offer "The Welcome" – guests staying in all family homes are greeted by their host on arrival. They are offered hospitality in the form of a cup of tea or coffee and home-baking. Their host will take time to enquire about their trip and offer tips, advice and assistance with their plans during their stay.</p> <p>You can also find Pet-Friendly B&Bs throughout Ireland - ensuring a warm welcome for your four legged best friend as well.</p> <p>www.bandbireland.com</p>

LIFESTYLE GROUPS	
Kids	<p>The Irish love kids, and Ireland is a wonderfully welcoming place to visit for families with children. Most public places and visitor attractions cater for those children, with changing facilities, children's menus, high chairs and ramps for strollers. Child-friendly activities available in Ireland's West include pony trekking, sandcastles, swimming, sailing, adventure centres, boat rides, canoeing, learning music.</p> <p>The Odyssey Complex in Belfast is great for kids and is home to W5 Interactive Discovery Centre, the IMAX Cinema, Hard Rock Café and</p>

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	<p>the Odyssey Arena – home of the Belfast Giants Ice Hockey Team. Experience exotic animals at close range in Belfast Zoo, built into towering Cave Hill, or get a more ‘hands-on’ experience at Streamvale Open Farm.</p> <p>Here’s some suggestions for Western Ireland:</p> <p>Aillwee Caves, County Clare Spooky and atmospheric, the Aillwee Caves make a great place to bring kids who aren’t afraid of the dark. Formed by the melt-waters of a prehistoric ice age, the caves are labyrinthine and dramatic.</p> <p>Ards Forest Park, County Donegal This 1,200-acre park is the perfect spot for a family outing. Situated on the shores of Sheephaven Bay on the rugged Donegal coastline, it’s filled with woodland, rivers, picnic areas, sandy beaches, and play areas.</p> <p>Atlantaquaria, County Galway Kids can explore the deep with Ireland’s largest aquarium, which houses 170 species of marine and freshwater life including stingrays, seahorses and the angel shark. There are sleepy starfish to hold, a load of fish to feed and a lot to learn about Bradán, the salmon, King of Fish!</p> <p>Birr Castle Demesne and Ireland’s Historic Science Centre Birr Castle is the private home of the Parsons family and the stunning demesne has become famous for its exotic collection of trees and plants. The Science Centre is filled with 19th-century astronomical instruments, cameras, photographs and photographic equipment.</p> <p>The Blue Flag Beaches The West enjoys a dramatic Atlantic coastline dotted with gorgeous villages and stunning beaches. The Blue Flag Award confirms good environmental standards, good sanitation and safety facilities of these beaches.</p> <p>Boat cruises on Lough Corrib, County Galway Relax with a wonderful boat cruise on the pretty Lough Corrib.</p> <p>Bunratty Castle and Folk Park, County Clare This 15th-century castle has been restored to its full glory and is one of the finest surviving examples of an Irish tower house. The Folk Park is a living museum that aims to show what life was like in rural Ireland 100 years ago, with authentic reconstructions of farmhouses, cottages and shops.</p>
Teens	<p>Lots of outdoor activities; the Clarence Hotel in Dublin – owned by U2; castles galore; and the music scene is fabulous.</p> <p>The 'Belfast Eye'. Belfast has its own ‘Belfast Eye’ giving panoramic views of the city. Operated by World Tourist Attractions (www.worldtouristattractions.co.uk) the 60m high 365 tonne observation wheel has 42 capsules seating up to 6 adults and it gives unique 360 degree views of the city, its hills and the lough. The ‘big wheel’ is situated in the grounds of City Hall and reaches over the height of its dome.</p> <p>Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge: a scary swinging rope bridge to a sea</p>

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	stack off the North Antrim coast.
Romance	A lovely people and country to spend time together...How about a horse-drawn Romany caravan along the country lanes of Ireland?
Honeymoons & Weddings	Great venues – including castle hotels and dramatic scenery – help make Ireland a good destination to make these arrangements
Genealogy	<p>Church and civil records throughout Ireland are now computerized: Irish Gen Project; Tourism Ireland: “Tracing your Ancestors in Ireland” www.irishgenealogy.ie ; for Republic of Ireland www.familyrecords.gov.uk for Northern Ireland</p> <p>Canada – Northern Ireland Connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Over 4 million Canadians have Irish ancestors, or approximately 14% of Canada's population, and of those 2.2 million have connections to Northern Ireland - Eaton’s Department Store founder Timothy Eaton was from Ballymena, County Antrim, in Northern Ireland (as Liam Neeson). In the 1850s, at the age of 20, Eaton immigrated to Canada. - Retired Canadian soldier and diplomat John de Chastelain has been involved in the Northern Ireland peace process since November 1995, and from 1997 to 2011 he was Chairman of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, which was responsible for ensuring the decommissioning of arms by paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. - First Marquis of Dufferin Memorial outside Belfast City Hall (west side); he served as governor-general of Canada from 1872 to 1878. The base of the statue is made up of a turbaned Indian astride a cannon and holding a sabre, as well as a snowshoed Canadian with a musket, sitting on a dead moose. - Connection to Toronto, Ontario - The Irish Famine (1845–1849) brought a large number of Irish into the city and by 1851 the Irish-born population became the largest single ethnic group in Toronto. By the 1920s, Toronto was called the "Belfast of Canada".
Zoomers	The gentle pace of the countryside and the easy availability of coach touring options makes Ireland a good choice for Zoomers.

UNIQUES	<p>Strangely, Ireland is the only country in the world where windmills turn clockwise!</p> <p>“Craic”, pronounced “Krak” means good music, good story telling, conversation and drink in Gaelic. Here are some very Irish blessings:</p> <p>“May the roof above us never fall in. And may the friends gathered below it never fall out”.</p>
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	<p>“May the saddest day of your future be no worse than the happiest day of your past”.</p> <p>“May you live as long as you want. And never want as long as you live”.</p>
Surprising	<p>There are several haunted castles in Ireland – here is a list for those who do not fear a spooky experience: Ballygally Castle is 32 kms from Belfast on the Antrim coast Charleville Castle in Tullamore, County Offaly Clonony Castle in Birr, County Offaly Carrickfergus Castle is just east of Belfast in County Antrim Huntington Castle in Clonegal, County Carlow Killua Castle, located in County Westmeath Castle Leslie in County Monaghan, Northern Ireland Gormanston Castle in County Meath Kinnitty Castle in County Offaly Wilton Castle in County Wexford, is in Ireland's Southeast Region. Leap Castle in County Offaly</p> <p>Green is a colour now synonymous with St Patrick's Day, as people of Irish descent all over the world wear a piece of green clothing on March 17. But the wearing of green only became a tradition in the 19th century. Up until then, the colour most commonly associated with St Patrick was actually blue. Today, it's all about jade and emerald, moss and olive, so if you're visiting Ireland on or around March 17, make sure to pack something green.</p>
History	<p>Ireland is thought to have been inhabited from around 8,000BC by people of a mid-Stone Age culture. And about 4,000 years later, tribes from Southern Europe arrived and established a high Neolithic culture. The best-known Neolithic sites in Ireland are the megalithic passage tombs of Newgrange and Knowth in County Meath. Both were built around 3,200BC, making them older than Stonehenge in England, and the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt.</p> <p>Ireland's Ancient East Ireland's Ancient East offers a wonderful opportunity to experience 5,000 years of European history in a compacted area. The Ancient East area allows visitors to get off the beaten track to see, hear, touch and feel the imprints of the millennia of settlers in this land. It's easy to take it all in.....and visitors can go at their own pace to discover tombs older than the pyramids, explore a Viking settlement or castles and fortresses. Plus hear stories from the friendly locals who are some of the best story tellers in the world.</p>

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- **Newgrange** – The Boyne Valley is where you'll find the Neolithic passage tombs at Knowth, Dowth and Newgrange, together with an interpretative centre. Newgrange is the best known of the trio, famous for the spectacular shaft of light that spills through its roof-box every year at winter solstice. Amazingly, this alignment, which coaxes the sunlight 19 metres into the heart of the chamber, was engineered some 5,000 years ago. How can you see the alignment? Lady Luck has the answer. A lottery system gives ordinary folk a chance to be present in the corbelled chamber on the days around 21 December.
- **Ancient Man**, Early Christians, Medieval Lords, Colonial Settlers and their descendants have all been seduced by these most lush, green and fertile lands.
- In the **Land of 5,000 Dawns**, you'll find the whimsical woodland trails of Belvedere House and the exceptional passage tomb of Newgrange, built way back in 3200 BC.
- **The Historic Heartlands** is much more than cosy National Heritage Towns and sleepy mirrored lakes. This is where saints converted kings at the Rock of Cashel, Kilkenny Castle changed hands for a song and Iron Age victims were surrendered to Lough Boora Bog.
- Tales continue on the **Celtic Coast**, where Vikings looted holy treasures from the monastic city of Glendalough and the light of Europe's oldest lighthouse sweeps across Ireland's story-strewn maritime history.

Take a look at this video for a sense of all this ancient history:

<http://www.ireland.com/en-ca/articles/regions/irelands-ancient-east/irelands-ancient-east/>

The **Vikings** first launched their attack on Ireland in 795AD. And in 837AD, 60 Viking Dragon warships appeared at the mouth of the River Liffey. Five years later, Dublin was taken under force, but the Vikings were attacked by the local Irish and fled. They returned 17 years later under Olaf the White and made a permanent settlement at Dyflinn (later to be Dublin). The King's Palace stood on the present Dublin Castle site and part of the town's defenses can still be seen at the Undercroft in Dublin Castle.

The latter half of the 19th century was a period of tragedy in Irish history. Ireland was struck by the Great Famine caused by a potato blight that struck crops over a four-year period from 1845-49. Over a million of the population died from starvation, with many more falling prey to diseases such as typhus. Over two million people emigrated to countries including

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	the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, and from 1848-1950 over six million Irish fled the land. Now the Irish diaspora is thought to contain over 80 million people scattered all over the globe.
Books	<p>"Ireland" by Dervla Murphy, photos by Klaus Franke</p> <p>"The Princes of Ireland" The Dublin Saga by Edward Rutherford</p> <p>Lonely Planet's Ireland is an excellent guide book</p>
1000 Places to see before you die	<p>Dromoland Castle Hotel;</p> <p>Cork Jazz Festival;</p> <p>Kinsale; Assolas Country House;</p> <p>Longueville House,</p> <p>CorkGlenveagh National Park, Donegal</p> <p>Bloomsday in Dublin;</p> <p>The Book of Kells, Dublin;</p> <p>St Patrick's Festival;</p> <p>Aran Islands;</p> <p>Connemara, Galway; Galway;</p> <p>Dingle Peninsula;</p> <p>The Ring of Kerry;</p> <p>Killarney National Park, Kerry;</p> <p>Ashford Castle Hotel, Mayo;</p> <p>Waterford Castle Hotel;</p> <p>Giant's Causeway;</p> <p>Mourne Mountains</p>
Must Sees	<p>Ireland's West is a region known as 'The Cultural Heart of Ireland'. Magical, romantic, dramatic and utterly memorable, the West of Ireland has landscapes that will be etched in your memory forever.</p> <p>People flock to Galway City to experience a slice of its magic and its festivals – including the world famous Oyster Festival at Clarenbridge. For the finest gourmet sea food, live music and the best Guinness in town it has to be the Galway Oyster Festival! This thriving city enjoys a strong artistic heritage and a flourishing arts, music, theatre and film scene. It also plays host to the renowned Galway Arts Festival. Relax in Galway's atmospheric pubs, stroll through its pretty medieval streets and soak up its lively weekend markets.</p> <p>Mayo has the dramatic splendour of the Atlantic Ocean, and boasts the glorious Island of Achill, the award-winning town of Westport and Ireland's holy mountain Croagh Patrick among its many sights.</p> <p>Unchanged for millennia the landscape of the Cliffs of Moher in County Clare will leave you awestruck. Towering 214 metres over the waters of the Atlantic Ocean - let your senses be arrested with the sheer drop of these imposing sea cliffs.</p> <p>The Ring of Kerry</p> <p>It may not fit on your finger or come in gold or silver, but this Ring is</p>

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	<p>studded with gems. Skirting Ireland's most western point, hogging an obscene amount of beauty and cute-as-can-be villages – The Ring (as it's known down there) is just a bit special. The circular loop starts and ends in Killarney (they could have called it 'The Circle of Kerry' but it wouldn't have had the same 'ring' to it!) Undisputedly one of Ireland's most scenic drives, it also provides the backdrop to the renowned Kerry Way walking trail. Pedal power will get you around the 216km too, on a wind-in-your-hair cycle route. However you travel, keep your camera handy every step of the way.</p>
<p>UNESCO World Heritage</p>	<p>There are three World Heritage Sites on the island: the Brú na Boinne, Skellig Michael and the Giant's Causeway.</p> <p>Giant's Causeway on the North Antrim Coast in 1986 became Ireland's first UNESCO World Heritage Site. It was likely molten lava, cooled during the early Tertiary period some 62 - 65 million years ago into some 40,000 hexagonals of dark stone steps, a few million years ago, which produced the famous basalt columns. But some prefer the other version of events: the one about a Celtic warrior who got too big for his boots and went a-knockin' on the wrong giant's island. Legend goes that Finn MacCool built the basalt highway to Scotland to challenge rival giant, Benandonner, to a fight. But Finn's wide-eyed glimpse of the enormous Scot sent him scurrying back to Ireland and to his quick-witted wife, Oonagh. As Benandonner thundered down the highway after him, Oonagh disguised the quavering Finn as an infant. "Don't wake the baby" she scolded the giant Scot as he burst in the door. "If that's the kid, I don't want to meet the father", thinks Benandonner, turning tail for Scotland and ripping up the basalt paving stones behind him.</p> <p>Brú na Bóinne in County Meath, is the largest and one of the most important prehistoric megalithic sites in Europe. The site is a complex of Neolithic chamber tombs, standing stones, henges and other prehistoric enclosures, some dating from as early as 35th century BC - 32nd century BC. The site predates the Egyptian pyramids and was built with sophistication and a knowledge of science and astronomy, which is most evident in the passage grave of Newgrange. The site is often referred to as the "Bend of the Boyne".</p> <p>Skellig Michael (from Sceilig Mhichíl in the Irish language, meaning Michael's rock), also known as Great Skellig, is a steep rocky island in the Atlantic Ocean about 14.5 kilometres from the coast of County Kerry, Ireland. It is the larger of the two Skellig Islands. After probably being founded in the 7th century, for 600 years the island was a centre of monastic life for Irish Christian monks. The Gaelic monastery, which is</p>

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	<p>situated almost at the summit of the 230-metre-high rock became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996. It is one of Europe's better known but least accessible monasteries. Since the extreme remoteness of Skellig Michael has until recently discouraged visitors, the site is exceptionally well preserved. The very spartan conditions inside the monastery illustrate the ascetic lifestyle practiced by early Irish Christians. The monks lived in stone 'beehive' huts (clochans), perched above nearly vertical cliff walls.</p>
Titanic Belfast Experience	<p>Belfast's notable ship-building heritage includes the design, building and launch of the most famous ship ever built – the Titanic. This April the city where she was built will mark the centenary of her tragic sinking on her maiden voyage across the Atlantic in the city's Titanic Quarter. The new Titanic Belfast experience is the world's largest Titanic visitor attraction and is twice the size of Belfast's City Hall. The six-storey attraction is filled with exhibitions uncovering the story of Titanic – its origins, construction, launch and history.</p>
South East Ireland	<p>Occasionally overshadowed by its popular South Western cousin, don't neglect the region of Ireland in the South East - comprising the five counties of Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford. It is often called the hidden treasure of Ireland, with an evocative patchwork of fertile valleys and plains contrasted by extended beaches and rugged coastlines. Down through the centuries the Celts, Vikings, Anglo-Saxons and Normans have landed and passed through these valleys, leaving behind a landscape rich in history.</p> <p>Countless castles, abbeys, fortresses and ancient settlements remain to mark their passage. And large rivers criss-cross the area, meandering under old stone bridges, around magical mountains, through picturesque villages and past neatly thatched cottages before finally entering the sea at scenic and peaceful seaside towns.</p> <p>The region not only boasts old favourites such as Waterford Crystal, Kilkenny Castle and Rock of Cashel, but also the Dunbrody Emigration Centre, Irish National Heritage Park, Kilkenny's Medieval Miles and Waterford's Viking Triangles.</p> <p>http://www.southeastirelandhotels.ie</p>

SPORTS ACTIVITIES	<p>Belfast Giants</p> <p>The Belfast Giants are Belfast's (and Northern Ireland's only) Elite Ice Hockey League team. They took the entire country by storm, and after 3 months of road games, they made history on their opening night in December 2000 by selling out the Odyssey Arena. They may have lost that first game, but they won the hearts of an entire nation and started an ice hockey phenomenon that still remains today.</p> <p>They are part of the Elite Ice Hockey League, a professional ice hockey league in the United Kingdom. Formed in 2003 following the demise of</p>
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	the Ice Hockey Superleague, it is the highest level of ice hockey competition in the United Kingdom.
Outdoors Northern Ireland	Surf the Atlantic at Portrush; canoe the rapids at Benburb beneath castle ruins 120 ft above, sailing – Portaferry in June for the red sails of the Galway Hookers in Strangford Lough; diving Rathlin Island, north coast for deep underwater cliffs; parasailing, waterskiing, rock climbing...
Boating	Shannon-Erne System, Europe's longest leisure waterway at 800 kms, takes 12 days, self-skipped cabin cruise; also the Grand Canal from Dublin to Waterford.
Golf	<p>Ireland is a natural golfing country and is recognized as a world-class golfing destination. With more than 400 golf courses to choose from, the island of Ireland offers the Canadian golfer a challenging and memorable golfing experience. Home to more than one-third of the world's true links courses, Ireland offers four distinct golfing regions which can be explored individually or as part of a more extended itinerary. All around the island, world-famous championship links courses rub shoulders with lesser-known yet spectacular hidden gems. What's more, tee times can be booked easily and green fees are moderate (from \$40 to \$185 for signature championship courses). Green fees for parkland courses are approximately £6.00 - £40.00 or €10.00 - €60.00 on weekdays and £8.00 - £50.00 or €12.00 - €80.00 on weekends.</p> <p>Green fees for links courses are approximately £40 - £95 or €50 - €150 in the winter or £60 - £100 or €50 - €240 in the summer.</p> <p>The following list highlights some of the 'must play' courses in each region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dublin area - Portmarnock, the European, the K Club (past venue of the Ryder Cup) - Northern Ireland - Royal County Down, Royal Portrush, Ardglass, Portstewart, Royal Belfast - The West - Ballyliffin, Carne, Enniscrone, Rosses Point/Sligo - The South West - Ballybunion, Doonbeg, Lahinch, Waterville, Old Head - The South East - Mount Juliet, Druids Glen <p>An excellent golfing website is www.northandwestcoastlinks.com</p>
Fishing	<p>Salmon, brown, rainbow and sea trout in Cork/Kerry – State license and day permits; Coarse: roach, dace perch, pike, rudd, bream; deep sea: Pollock, skate, ray, turbot, blue shark</p> <p>The great Western lakes of Galway and Mayo are recognised as the greatest wild brown trout fisheries in the world, while Lough Corrib in Galway is a mecca for game fishermen and is famous for its exciting Mayfly season.</p> <p>The rivers of Ireland's West offer everything from big salmon to wild browns and, in Roscommon and Galway East, some of the best coarse</p>

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	fish stocks in Ireland. Shore fishing from rock, pier or beach is second to none, and deep sea fishing around the Galway and Mayo coasts is nothing short of spectacular.
Horse riding	<p>Ireland is often called “The Land of the Horse”. Companies offering riding vacations include Bonaventure tours.com; HiddenTrails.com. There are 40 equestrian centres in Cork/Kerry alone; horse racing is part of Irish life e.g. Mallow, 35km north of Cork</p> <p>Equestrian Holidays Ireland is a selection of Ireland's top horseback riding establishments, each with its own individual character and style. Every centre is Irish Tourist Board listed and Association of Irish Riding Establishments approved.</p> <p>I recently visited the Irish National Stud near Kildare where Queen Elizabeth spent some time on her historic tour in 2011. An Irish mist made the blossoms smell more fragrantly as we met mares and their foals, the highly prized stallions and learnt about Irish Bloodstock Industry. All the horses and foals appeared to be in seventh heaven in their verdant pastures.</p> <p>Here also is a delightful surprise: the Japanese Gardens where the paths lead through grottoes besides streams and lakes to tea houses and arched bridges.</p>
Hiking	<p>Hill-walking: waymarked ways, Ulster Way – Europe's longest marked footpath at 560 miles, Wicklow Way, Dingle Way 179km – Ring of Kerry; Hollywood Hills – inspiration for CS Lewis' Narnia; Hidden Trails, Active Journeys, Bonaventure Tours.</p> <p>Long distance trails include the Foxford Way in Mayo, the Galway section of The Western Way, The Suck Valley Way in Roscommon and Galway, and the Arigna Miners Way and Historical Trail in Roscommon and Leitrim.</p> <p>Croagh Patrick, County Mayo: St Patrick spent 40 days and nights fasting on this 765-metre high sacred mountain near Westport, and banishing dragons, snakes and demonic forces from the site. Today, pilgrims follow in the footsteps of the saint and on “Reek Sunday”, the last Sunday in July, over 25,000 people ascend towards the summit.</p>
Cycling	<p>715 kms cycling routes in Cork and Kerry e.g. The Sheeps Head Way; Connemara Trail, Donegal Trail – rugged coastline and mountains. Cycle the River Lagan towpath in Belfast or the Kingfisher Cycle Trail – 370 kms through the lakes of County Fermanagh;</p> <p>Cycling companies – check out G Adventures, Randonnee Tours, Butterfield and Robinson.</p>
CULTURE	
Arts	Literary Ireland abounds in famous names: Joyce, GB Shaw, Oscar Wilde, WB Yeats, Walter Scott, Anthony Trollope, Seamus Heaney.

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	<p>Dublin – City of Living Culture Home to some of the world’s best known authors, playwrights and musicians, Dublin truly is a city of living culture. Recently voted one of the world’s top literary destinations, Dublin has so much to offer the culture-seeking visitor. With its Viking remains, atmospheric cobbled alleys and Georgian squares, it’s easy to absorb Dublin’s thousand years of history. Step back in time in this city full of literary landmarks, from the James Joyce Tower and the Writers Museum to the famous Gate and Abbey theatres and historic Trinity College, alma mater of many of Ireland’s greatest writers.</p> <p>The Saint Patrick Centre is in Downpatrick, just 30 minutes from Belfast: Ego Patricius Exhibition: new 21st century interactive experience telling story of patron saint. There is a Cathedral Garden Restaurant and Art Gallery Craft Shop.</p>
Music	<p>Two of the most enduring and internationally famed traditions are Irish traditional music, and Irish dancing. Traditional music can be heard all over the country from city centre pubs to rural festivals. The bodhrán, which is like a hand-held drum, is one of the most popular instruments in Irish music, along with the fiddle and the tin whistle.</p> <p>“Danny Boy” was a traditional street fiddle tune and was only ‘discovered’ in 1851 when Jane Ross wrote down the notes she heard in the street!</p>
Films	<p>Star Wars Star Wars – was filmed in part at Skellig Michael, Co. Kerry Star Wars: The Force Awakens is sending the global box-office into hyper drive. Since 1977, the record-breaking movie franchise has travelled through more than a few galaxies, and this time around the cast and crew jetted into a little town called Portmagee, County Kerry, on Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way, and a dream filming location: the UNESCO World Heritage Site – Skellig Michael. http://www.ireland.com/en-ca/articles/destinations/kerry/star-wars-and-the-skelligs/</p> <p>Game of Thrones Game of Thrones – Northern Ireland is Game of Thrones territory Games of Thrones chose Northern Ireland as one of its primary filming locations. Fans can now enjoy Game of Thrones tours featuring locations such as Castle Ward, Ballintoy Harbour and one of Northern Ireland’s iconic sites – the Dark Hedges of Antrim. http://www.ireland.com/en-ca/articles/game-of-thrones-locations/</p> <p>Vikings – History Channel Vikings is filmed in county Wicklow</p>

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	<p>Viking heritage runs deep in Ireland's Ancient East http://www.ireland.com/en-ca/what-is-available/attractions-built-heritage/historic-ireland/articles/viking-ireland/</p> <p>Michael Collins (Neil Jordan, 1996) is a fine biopic about the Irish rebel, filmed largely on location. Nora (Pat Murphy, 2000) is a good biographical film about James Joyce's fascinating and long-suffering wife.</p> <p>Veronica Guerin (Joel Schumacher, 2003) is a dark, fact-based film with Cate Blanchett about a troubled investigative reporter.</p> <p>Bloom (Sean Walsh, 2004) is a brave adaptation of Ulysses, with Stephen Rea.</p> <p>Intermission (John Crowley, 2003) has Colin Farrell talking in his real accent, in this Irish romance.</p> <p>Here are some interesting lists of film and TV connections to Ireland: 12 Great Irish Movie Stars http://www.ireland.com/en-ca/articles/irelands-movie-stars/ 5 TV Shows Made in Ireland http://www.ireland.com/en-ca/articles/five-tv-shows-made-in-ireland/ Films made in Ireland http://www.ireland.com/en-ca/itineraries/touring-routes/ireland-on-screen/?q=1</p>
Museums	<p>The Writers Museum and Natural History Museum in Dublin are two of my favourites in the capital. The Dublin Pass is great value (see above for details)</p> <p>Ulster Museum: a truly great museum and art gallery that deserves a full day. Rich displays of archaeology, ethnography, art, history and natural sciences. Award-winning Early Ireland gallery and the Made in Belfast exhibits are outstanding. Don't miss Treasures of the Armada, featuring intriguing and spectacular items recovered from the Spanish galleass Girona.</p> <p>Ulster Folk and Transport Museum at Cultra brings history to life, with exhibit buildings including furnished houses, mills, shops, schools and churches which illustrate how people in Northern Ireland lived in the past.</p>
Festivals	<p>From the fire of the festival to the lure of literature, the island of Ireland boasts a rich tapestry of arts and cultural activities.</p> <p>St Patrick's Day is Ireland's day of pride, heritage and celebration. And while St Patrick's Day is celebrated in many other countries - if you really want to get a piece of the party, you've got to go to Ireland. Ireland on St Patrick's Day is unlike anywhere else in the world and the celebrations go on throughout the land.</p>

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In Dublin, St Patrick's Festival runs from 16-19 March, 2017. The four-day festival embraces everything from salsa dancing to céilís (traditional dances) and culminates in a huge parade. The oldest St Patrick's Day parade in Ireland is in County Wexford. It began in 1917 and is still going strong. For the earliest, you'll need to head out west, to Dingle. They kick things off at 6am, with the Dingle Fife and Drum Band taking to streets. While Limerick uses St Patrick's Day to host the International Band Parade and Competition.

County Armagh is where St Patrick founded one of his churches, so it's only natural that they throw a week-long festival in his honour. While Derry-Londonderry's Seachtain na Gaeilge (Irish Language Week) is a lively and linguistic build-up to the big day, with events throughout the city.

But St Patrick's Day is only one of the far too many to mention festivals that go on year round throughout Ireland. No matter when you visit you will discover the folk in Ireland having a good time at fantastic, fun, foody, or downright frivolous festivals! Check out www.ireland.com for the full calendar.

St. Patrick's Festival: March

www.stpatricksfestival.ie

Celebrated all over Ireland but especially in Dublin, this festival has to be experienced to be believed – and I talk from personal experience!

Galway Arts Festival: July

www.galwayartsfestival.com

Galway, the most westerly city in Europe enjoys a strong artistic heritage and a flourishing arts, music, theatre, and film scene. Move to the beat of the Galway Arts Festival – an eclectic mixture of theatre, spectacle, dance, visual arts, music, literature & comedy involving hundreds of artists and performers.

Wexford Opera Festival: October

www.wexfordopera.com

From its early Celtic and Nordic beginnings Wexford has become a thriving cosmopolitan hub, excellent for shopping and dining out, yet steeped in heritage and history. Re-live nine thousand years of history at the Irish National Heritage Park or experience the World-famous Wexford Festival Opera this fall. Enjoy much-loved operas including Rimsky-Korsakov's 'The Snow Maiden' and Pedrotti's 'Tutti in Maschera' in one of Ireland's most picturesque coastal settings.

Belfast Festival at Queens: October /November

www.belfastfestival.com

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	<p>Belfast, Northern Ireland's capital city is steeped in culture. Find out where great ships like the Titanic were built, marvel at the architecturally impressive City Hall or take a trip around its historic pubs by joining a Baileys Historical Pub Walking Tour. Be enthralled by The Belfast Festival at Queens and immerse yourself in the best of Irish theatre, dance, music, visual arts, and literature.</p> <p>Dublin Events: Dublin's famous spirit of fun infuses over one hundred wonderful festivals and events throughout the year, from the spectacular St. Patrick's Festival to the colourful Street Performance World Championships. Events such as Bloomsday, Bloom and Festival of World Cultures are excellent events.</p> <p>In the West: Galway Arts Festival (July) Clifden Arts Week (September) Clarenbridge Oyster Festival (September) Galway Oyster Festival (September) Castlebar International 4 Day Walks Festival (June) Curragh Racing Inis Oirr (August)</p>
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ATTRACTIONS	<p>The Titanic Belfast Visitor Centre has been named the world's leading tourist attraction in the World Travel Awards: http://titanicbelfast.com/Blog/December-2016/Titanic-Belfast-named-King-of-the-World!/ With over a million votes cast from over 216 countries in the awards, known as the 'Tourism Oscars', Titanic Belfast was awarded the title, after beating off stiff competition from eight global finalists - including Ferrari World Abu Dhabi, the Las Vegas Strip, USA, Machu Picchu, Peru and Guinness Storehouse, Ireland. It is the first time an attraction from Ireland, North or South, has won the prestigious accolade. I was there for its opening and I can recommend it as a truly one of a kind experience.</p>
Beaches	<p>Beaches abound on this island – from long glorious deserted strands to the popular beaches close to Dublin and Belfast; there's a beach for everyone...even if the sea temperature may be a little chilly!</p>
Wildlife	<p>Bird watching is wonderful and in the National Parks you can see deer...but there are no snakes, thanks to St Patrick!</p>
Parks	<p>Ireland has 6 national parks: The Burren NP in Co Clare; Connemara NP in Galway; Glenveagh NP in Co Donegal; Killarney NP in Co Kerry;</p>

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	<p>Mayo NP; Wicklow Mountains NP. There are also 12 Forest Parks and 71 National Nature Reserves</p>
Gardens	<p>National Trust gardens in Northern Ireland: Gosford, Castlewellan; roses, daffodils, wild bluebells, primroses. Also: Mount Stewart (agapanthus display) and Rowallane (blue Himalayan poppies) Ardnamona Gardens, Lough Eske, County Donegal A wilderness until the 19th century, Ardnamona Gardens is now thriving with an exceptional collection of trees, shrubs and rhododendrons. In 1991, Ardnamona was declared a National Heritage Garden.</p>
Castles/Forts	<p>Blarney Castle, Cork, bestows the gift of eloquence. Dunluce, 16th century stronghold of MacDonnells, teeters on a cliff edge and has a secret entrance through a sea cave. Ennislillen was the medieval home of the Maguires of Fermanagh. Navan Centre and Fort: Armagh in Northern Ireland. This was the royal seat of the Kings of Ulster and the province's ancient capital. Start your tour in the 'Vanished World' of lost myths, travel into the 'Real World' of archaeology and then enter the 'Other World' to hear the legends of the Ulster Cycle. Visit the Iron Age/Early Christian period dwelling and, through Living History interpretation, learn about that way of life. Finally, walk the path of history to the great Ancient Seat of Kings, Navan Fort. Derry is the only walled city in Ireland and the walls date from 1613-18, with 4 original gates and bastions intact; the Tower Museum presents the city's history; St Columb's Cathedral is 17th century.</p>

OTHER ACTIVITIES	
Shopping	<p>In the west, traditional knitwear (and not so traditional high fashion knitwear too), pottery, decorative items, handmade bellows, trendy fleece-wear, musical instruments, jewellery and basketry. And of course Waterford Crystal.</p> <p>The Waterford Crystal Factory and Gallery. The tour of the factory is fascinating and yes – I fell for the gorgeous work and purchased a set of wine glasses which I keep for prized guests!</p>
Markets	<p>St Georges Market in Belfast is an over 100 years old covered market with over 230 stalls ranging from zips to shark meat. It was recently voted one of the top three markets in the UK.</p>
Arts and Crafts in Dublin	<p>If you're after modern Irish design, then try Whichcraft (5 Castlegate) in Old City, Temple Bar for a mix of Irish art and jewellery. Kilkenny (Nassau Street) shop is also a fantastic spot for Irish homeware and design, with pottery and glassware alongside jewellery and clothing. Blarney Woollen Mills (Nassau Street) and Dublin Woollen Mills (41 Lower Ormond Quay) are good for traditional sweaters, scarves,</p>

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	cardigans and gloves. Avoca Handweavers (Suffolk Street) is a good spot for designer and children's clothing with a quirk, and you can also pick up renowned cookbooks from the much-loved Avoca café.
Nightlife	<p>Everything under the sun – but perhaps the quintessential evening is spent in a warm Irish pub with the locals experiencing the camaraderie and craic that is so unique to the Irish people.</p> <p>Here's a quote from the Tourism Ireland website that eloquently pens a picture: <i>"So you're sitting on a stool, swishing your whiskey and watching the syrupy liquid run down the glass in little delicious rivulets. But suddenly, you're jerked out of your daydream by a bearded fellow in an Aran sweater sitting beside you with a guitar followed by a young woman with a fiddle and an elderly man holding a flute. Within seconds, you're front row at your first traditional music session and you didn't even buy a ticket! Hours later as you wave goodbye and shut the pub door behind you, you say to yourself – 'I'm not sure what just happened, but I liked it'. And whether your session occurred in a shibeen in Dingle, County Kerry or the Feakle Festival, County Clare, it is totally acceptable to dance all the way back to your hotel. In fact, that's kind of the point!"</i></p> <p>In Belfast, the Crown Liquor Saloon is my favourite pub: Great Victoria St. 1839-1840; The Crown is owned by the National Trust. Drinkers of the city know well its opulent marble, brilliant Italian tilework, fine glass engraving, embossed ceiling, and cosy booths bedecked with gryphons and lions. Panels in the restaurant on the first floor were meant for the Britannic, Titanic's sister ship.</p>
CUISINE	<p>Ireland is not a huge island and thus provides a great opportunity to offer extremely fresh local ingredients. Out of a landscape of lush green fields, fresh pure lakes and crystal clean Atlantic and Irish Sea waters, a distinct food culture has developed, with a focus on the very best local ingredients.</p> <p>The new strand of creative Irish cuisine fuelled by Artisan producers and world-class ingredients delivered by the warm and welcoming people creates the whole package and experiences visitors will never forget. There are many ways to explore the delicious food and drink options in Ireland on top of the traditional restaurant experience you can also take in one of our many festivals such as the Irish Craft Beer & Cider Festival taking place in Dublin in August or the vibrant Galway Oyster and Seafood Festival in September, or of course timely for right now St Patrick's Day Festival, OR join one of the food trail journeys or try your own culinary skills at one of our many cooking schools.</p>
Food	Ulster Fry: potato bread fried with local-cure bacon, Moira pork and apple sausages, free-range eggs, Almargh mushrooms, bunch of dulse

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	(edible seaweed); breads: afternoon tea: soda farls, treacle farls; pubs: locally harvested oysters with glass of Guinness; beef fillet flamed in Bushmills whiskey
Wine and spirits	<p>Irish whiskey and Guinness are justifiably world famous!</p> <p>Guinness: During the middle ages, St. James's Gate was western entrance into the city of Dublin. Later, the brewery was built at the site, and it was here at the St. James's Gate Brewery in 1759, that Arthur Guinness began brewing ale. Arthur's result is what is now known all over the world as Guinness Stout. The production of Guinness was moved to London between the 1930's to 2005, but has returned to its original site at St. James's Gate Brewery, which is also called the Guinness Storehouse and is Dublin's most visited attraction.</p> <p>Bushmills Distillery: At the top of the village you will find what Bushmills has become known worldwide for - the famous Old Bushmills Whiskey Distillery. The Victorian architecture of the Distillery dates from 1885 when it was rebuilt due to a fire. It is located on the on the banks of St. Columb's Rill and reputed to be the oldest licensed Distillery in the world - being given legal status in 1608 when King James 1st granted a license to local landowner Sir Thomas Phillips. The process of illegal distillation in the village goes back even further than 1608. Local folklore tells of whiskey being made illegally in the 1400's, there are also records of a Sir Robert Savage enjoying the 'aqua vitae' (whiskey) with his troops in 1276 and the drink is even mentioned in the Book of Leinster. The company itself was founded in 1783 and in 1800's we find records of the S.S. Bushmills, a large sailing ship own by company which transported whiskey across the Atlantic.</p>
Restaurants	<p>Ireland has an admirable range of restaurants in all price categories. The settings range from old-world hotel dining rooms, country mansions, and castles to sky-lit terraces, shop-front bistros, riverside cottages, thatched-roof pubs, and converted houses.</p> <p>The Merchant Restaurant in Belfast is a wonderful example of the resurgence of top notch cuisine in Belfast.</p>

MORE INFO	
Brochures	Call 1-800-SHAMROCK for Tourism Ireland to request brochures
Websites	<p>Website: www.ireland.com</p> <p>Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Ireland</p> <p>Twitter: https://twitter.com/search?q=Tourism%20ireland&src=typd</p> <p>For Dublin: www.visitdublin.com</p> <p>For Belfast: www.gotobelfast.com</p>

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PERSONAL EXPERIENCES	<p>Here is are some Travel Show Magic Moments from recent trips to Ireland:</p> <p><i>“We are walking through verdant landscaped grounds laced with sparkling streams towards a sturdy square tower rising 25 meters above the gardens and woodland. Ahead of us is the famous Blarney Castle and of course we have come to kiss the Blarney Stone! To do so, we have to climb up a claustrophobic circular stone tower to the top of the tower, walk nervously along the tower’s edge and then lean over the parapet backwards to kiss the stone of eloquence. A local holds on to you, so it’s perfectly safe and as you regain your feet you can feel the gift of the gab giving voice to your experience! As one notable said: “Baloney is flattery laid on with a trowel. Blarney is flattery laid on with the lips – that’s why you have to kiss a stone to get it!” “</i></p> <p><i>“It’s a typical day in Ireland: blustery showers sweep in off the coast and are gone in minutes, to be replaced by bright sunshine and scudding clouds. I am touring along the Coastal Causeway route along the Northern Ireland coast - and the road is nothing less than spectacular. Beaches, cliffs, great ocean vistas...all punctuated by memorable sights such as Dunluce Castle, perched on the cliff edge and a real-life Game of Thrones scene. Then there’s the other-worldly sight of tens of thousands of hexagonal basalt columns marching in serried ranks into the sea at the Giants Causeway. And now I am again on the ragged edge of the land at the Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge which all-too insubstantially links the mainland to an offshore island. Dare I tread this narrow, swaying skyway above the crashing ocean surf? A determined red-haired young slip of a lass races onto the bridge ahead of me...and I know I now have no choice but to follow!”</i></p> <p><i>“I am in the heart of Dublin City. I have walked through the cobbled stones of Trinity College...back in time to the 18th century, when the magnificent Old Library building was constructed. Now I am inside, waiting my turn to see one of the great cultural icons of Europe: the Book of Kells. Around the year 800 AD the four Gospels were written in Latin on calf skin and decorated lavishly to create a work of art that has no peer. Shortly afterwards, the Vikings raided the monastery on the remote Scottish island of Iona where it was likely created and the surviving monks fled with the Book of Kells to a monastery at Kells in County Meath. It has been on display here in the Old Library at Trinity College Dublin from the mid-19th century, and attracts over 500,000 visitors a year. And now it my turn to stand beside this resplendent echo of the Dark Ages in Europe, an echo that proves civilization still flickered here in Ireland. It’s important, it is beautiful and it is essential viewing on</i></p>
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any Dublin visit.”

“The Ring of Kerry is a scenic 200 kilometer drive on the southwest coast of Ireland. This is like saying that the Hope Diamond is a pretty blue stone. The Ring of Kerry is an experience of wonder, magic and myth. As I drove the narrow lanes in the recommended anticlockwise fashion, vista after vista of stunning seascapes opened up, bordered by cliffs and beaches and coves and hills that seemed creations of a wild flight of fantasy, rather than simple geology. Clouds and rain showers transformed the scenes and yet within minutes the sun came out again to illuminate the islands, rocks and inlets. Silvers, blues, greens and golds interplayed as the light changed. Rainbows flickered across the fells. I stopped at a pass over a headland and hiked to the top of hill overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Atop that outlook, with views in every direction and the wild wind taking my breath away, I understood why the Ring of Kerry is so beloved, not just by visitors, but by the Irish people themselves.”

See my Pinterest board of my photos of Ireland at:

<http://www.pinterest.com/TravelShow/ireland>

See my Travel Blogs on Ireland at:

<http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/Blog/tabid/400/EntryId/73/Ireland-with-Trafalgar.aspx>

<http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/Blog/tabid/400/EntryId/74/Titanic-Belfast.aspx>

Southern Ireland - March

Dublin: Burlington Hotel; St Patrick’s Day Parade; Ceili Mor; Luminarium; Donal Shiel interview; Literary Pub Walking Tour; Trinity College and the Book of Kells; The Writers Museum; Temple Bar Area and the Clarence Hotel (U2); St Stephen’s Green and the Georgian Squares;

The Guinness Storehouse (1759); St Patricks Cathedral; The Dublin Pass.com; double decker bus tour; Kilmainham Gaol; Natural History Museum; Custom House; Phoenix Park; O’Connell Street

South to Rock of Cashel; Old Jameson Distillery in Midelton (world’s largest pot still) 1796; Gresham Hotel in Cork; Cork walking tour; covered market; Blarney Castle (1446), kissing the Blarney Stone

Killarney: Randles Court Clarion Hotel; Ring of Kerry (166km or 5hr route), MacGillycuddy Reeks, Irelands highest peak, mountain passes,

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beaches, hikes

Northern Ireland - April

Belfast: Belfast City Hall, St Georges Market (over 100 year old covered market);

Giant's Causeway: North Antrim Coast, 40,000 stone columns

Carrick-a-Rede: rope bridge across scary gap to fishermen's island "rock of the casting"

Derry: walls of Derry, 1613-18, 4 original gates and bastions intact;

Tower Museum, history; St Columb's Cathedral

Bushmills Distillery

Dunluce Castle

Ireland Tour and Belfast – April

Dublin, Kildare, Kilkenny, Waterford, Youghal, Cork, Killarney, Ring of Kerry

Belfast: Titanic Belfast

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