

TIPS AND TIDBITS

A fact sheet about your

Emerald Isle of Ireland

Adventure

Walking Adventures International plans and guides walking adventures that combine international travel with walking. Our itineraries blend historic, cultural, and scenic highlights of the regions we're traveling through with walks in the area. Our trips are fast-paced; they are designed as overview tours to expose travelers to as much of the region's significant highlights as we can manage, and still maintain a reasonable daily schedule. Even though most walkers find it easy and natural to enjoy our style of travel, we want to ensure that we've afforded every opportunity for travelers to know what to expect, in advance! Listed below are a series of questions and answers to help you develop accurate expectations of this Adventure and make plans to maximize your enjoyment. Please feel free to call us with any additional questions you have.

Questions & Answers

Q: Do you have more detailed information than is available in the Adventure brochure?

A: About three weeks before departure, a final packet will be mailed to each participant. This packet will include:

- *Hotel listing (including address and phone information of all hotels)
- *Traveler list
- *Daily schedule
- *Adventure t-shirt & nametag
- *Reusable luggage tags for first-time travelers
- *Adventure map

Q: Do I need a passport, visa, or shots?

A: The only thing needed to enter Ireland is a valid passport. **Be advised that many countries now require that the passport be valid for at least six months after the date of departure from that country; Ireland also holds this requirement.** Passports can usually be obtained by applying at your town's main post office. They generally take at least six weeks to process, however, so don't delay! No visa's are required and no shots are recommended.

IMPORTANT: Please make a copy of your passport and birth certificate and keep them in your luggage separate from where you keep your passport. In case your passport gets lost, having these copies really speeds up the replacement process.

Q: How is airfare arranged?

A: **By now your flights to Ireland should be booked. If you have not yet booked your flights, we strongly suggest that you do so as soon as possible. WAI is not a travel agent, and we don't have the authority to make individual bookings or print airline tickets. We recommend that you contact the travel agent that we work with, Debbi Custer:**

Phone: (888) 276-0925 -OR- (503) 231-9507

Email: debbi@wtpdx.com

Debbi knows our program and would be glad to assist you in finding a competitive fare.

There are many other sources for airfare, including AAA, if you are a member, and a host of internet web sites. To start your planning, www.kayak.com is a good site to find which flights are available on the days of travel. For the best fares, we've found it's better to go to the web site of the specific airline serving your home and destination. Often you can leave your e-mail address and they'll contact you when they have specials flying to cities that interest you most. Other sites to check out include:

Airline sites:

www.continental.com
www.southwest.com
www.united.com
www.aa.com (American)
www.alaskaair.com
www.usairways.com
www.delta.com

Planning sites:

www.travelocity.com
www.expedia.com
www.orbitz.com
www.onetravel.com
www.bestfares.com
www.priceline.com
www.qix.com

A word (or two) on jet lag: Much has been theorized about the best way to fight jet lag. One small booklet we've added to our library is *Jet Smart* by Diana Fairechild. An oversimplified summary of her book would suggest that you:

- 1) eat as little as possible while in transit and eat high carbohydrate foods if you must eat,
- 2) get up and walk around the plane when you can,
- 3) do isometric exercises (flex and relax your muscles) occasionally,
- 4) adjust your sleep schedule to the local time as soon as possible (we'll help you with that).

We particularly recommend no.'s 2 and 3. Over the years, we've had several travelers who have experienced circulation problems during the trip after long flights.

Q: What type of hotels will we be in?

A: We use good quality, tourist class accommodations. In Europe, **double rooms usually have two twin beds placed side by side; double or queen-sized beds are generally not available.** In addition, single rooms are normally smaller than double rooms. The single supplement entitles single travelers to their own room but not to a double-sized room.

Though we attempt to work with hotels in good locations, it's not always possible to predict how quiet a given hotel

NOTE: Some information is generally true for most of our Adventures. Text in bold represents information that is specific to this Adventure only.

will be. European hotels often have lively restaurants and/or bars which provide a good percentage of their income. If you're a light sleeper, we recommend a supply of earplugs to help you get a full night's sleep in those situations.

When making reservations, we request non-smoking rooms and as many rooms on the ground floor as possible. Because the non-smoking mentality is still catching on in Europe, non-smoking rooms are often not available, but due to standards of cleanliness, we have seldom had complaints in this regard from prior travelers.

Some of our hotels are Old World vintage. As a result, it is not uncommon for rooms within the same hotel to differ widely in spaciousness, décor, and view. It is not practical or even possible for us to anticipate these differences and fairly assign rooms throughout the program. Room assignment is entirely at the discretion of the hotels, so we can take neither the credit for a great room you were assigned nor the blame for the mediocre room you received on the night your neighbors have more interesting rooms. Hopefully, things will balance themselves and you will enjoy the variety of hotels we have selected.

Q: What are the walks like in Ireland?

A: Our walks have been routed to take advantage of some of Ireland's most beautiful scenery. Nature and the wonders of the Emerald Isles' many outstanding archaeological monuments are the focus of most of the walks. Only one is routed in a city. We'll have all day to explore Dublin on a 10-kilometer walk starting from our hotel.

Walks in Ireland are planned as guided walks. In some cases, maps and directions will be available, allowing walkers to strike out at their own pace. We try to allow a minimum of three hours for each route, sometimes more when time for lunch is included in the walk, but timing depends on the group and other activities for the day. We will do our utmost to ensure that you do not feel rushed. However, in order to feel comfortable with our pace, we recommend that travelers be able to walk a fairly level 10 km (6.2 mile) walk in 2½ hours or less.

Of course, none of the walks are mandatory and we encourage travelers to pace themselves. Take a day off or do a partial walk as necessary. Just let the guide know your needs, and we'll help you make adjustments.

We expect to have IVV-sanctioning by the volkssport authorities in England for this series of walks. Volkssport is not well-established in Ireland, however, so there will be little, if any, contact with local clubs. If you are walking for IVV credit, you may use the same event and distance books in Europe that you use in the States.

Many walkers are accustomed to walking on trails in North America near their homes where lightweight walking shoes are sufficient. Many of us come from northern latitudes where excessive direct sunlight is not a problem. A shift in perspective is necessary when walking outside your own "backyard." Please prepare for your walking adventure by bringing a hat that will shield you from the sun, and be prepared to carry water on all walks. If you often use a walking stick here at home, we advise that you also make

plans to have your walking stick with you in Ireland.

Q: What is a volkswalk?

A: Volkssport is a club activity that began in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland in 1968. There are four primary activities: walking, biking, swimming, and cross country skiing. Walking is, by far, the most popular and well developed. A volkswalk is a steady walk through a scenic and/or historic area over a pre-marked route (usually 10 km, which is 6.2 miles). It is noncompetitive and aims to involve people of all ages. Everyone who participates is declared a WINNER! Presently, there are walks in all 50 states and more than 30 countries worldwide.

Using the AVA's difficulty rating system of 1 to 5, with 1 representing flat, smooth walk routes and 5 representing difficult hikes, these walks fit mostly in the 1 to 2 range. Here is the description of ratings used by the AVA:

1. An easy walk on pavement or well-maintained trail with no significant hills. Probably suitable for wheelchairs and strollers.
2. A moderately easy walk, may be on pavement or on trails. No significant difficulty with hills. May not be suitable for wheelchairs and strollers.
3. A moderate walk in any setting with some difficult terrain, one or two substantial hills and/or steps. Strollers and wheelchairs questionable.
4. A more difficult walk. Most likely in a natural setting with poorly maintained paths and steeper or hilly inclines. Not likely to be wheelchair or stroller accessible. Participants with certain health problems should take caution.
5. A very difficult walk. All in rough fields or woods. Many steep hills or high altitude trails, or very rough uneven terrain, steep or unstable inclines. Not suitable for any person who is not in good health

If you are walking for IVV credit, you may use the same event and distance books in Europe that you use here in the States.

Q: What type of footwear should I bring?

A: Two pairs of walking shoes or boots are recommended. The first pair may get wet or muddy and need a day off. Plan to pack an extra pair of socks with your extra shoes in a plastic bag (good for wet gear), and have a spot for them right on the bus with you. The increase in the number of light-weight hiking boots is making them a more attractive and practical option. We strongly recommend investing in a sturdy pair of light-weight walking boots.

Q: Is the water drinkable in the countries we're visiting? Are there any health precautions I should take?

A: Technically, water from the tap is safe to drink in all the places we'll be traveling, and we have not experienced any illness or ill effects during prior trips that can be tied to drinking water. However, it is also true that Europeans do not generally use tap water as a source of drinking water. If you want to give your system one less difference to adjust to, drinking bottled water is recommended.

Colds: One of the realities of group travel is that we share a lot of things — including germs. As a result, cold nasties can quickly travel through the bus looking for weak immune systems to attack. There are several supplements and behaviors that can make a significant

difference in your ability to resist these bugs and preserve a healthy Adventure, including the following:

- * Use Vitamin C and Echinacea beginning a week before the trip and during the trip to boost your immune system (check with your doctor for possible allergies to Echinacea).
- * Maintain the use of a good multi-vitamin both before and during the trip.
- * Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently (carrying a waterless hand cleaner is highly recommended).
- * If/when you cough, cover your mouth as completely as possible to avoid the spread of germs in consideration of fellow travelers.
- * Avoid touching your face and rubbing your eyes.
- * Be sensitive to your health and particularly your need for rest. Guard against fatigue by monitoring your participation in activities and allowing yourself necessary "down time."

Prescriptions:

Though we have not had problems with prescription drugs at customs before, we recommend that you bring a note from your doctor verifying your need for any prescription drugs you will bring on the trip.

Q: How many people do you accept on an Adventure?

A: We prefer to take no more than 30 people. Often, however, our groups are smaller than that. The European motorcoaches we use carry 46 to 50 people, so we like to keep at least 25% of the seats empty.

Q: What is the average age of your groups?

A: Most of our travelers fall between 50 and 70 years of age. This seems to be the age bracket that has the time and means to travel. However, we always have travelers that fall outside that range, from the 20's up into the 80's. Walkers are characteristically great traveling companions — positive, cheerful, and appreciative of the opportunity to see the world.

Q: What is the split between men and women?

A: One of the realities of life is that there are more women on the planet than men. Another is that they tend to outlive their spouses. As a result, we do have more women on the trips than men. The percentage of women on the trip can run anywhere from 60 to 80%. We have quite a few couples, a lot of women traveling together or singly, and the occasional single male traveler. We like to see this ratio as even as possible and are always looking for a few more good men!

Q: What if I don't have a roommate?

A: It's always best to register for the trip with your own roommate, but we do offer to help match travelers up with others needing roommates. We provide contact information for potential roommates and allow travelers to contact each other and make their own decisions.

Q: What will the motorcoach be like?

A: We are committed to finding quality buses and drivers. The bus will be air conditioned, will be equipped with a toilet, and will have 46 to 50 seats. We employ a seat rotation system to assure everyone equal time in the best seats and a chance to get acquainted with all their

fellow travelers. Rest stops are spaced every 1½ to 2 hours; the toilet is therefore limited to emergency use as finding dumping stations is difficult to impossible.

Q: How much money should I take along?

A: Ireland and Northern Ireland have modern banking systems and a wide network of ATM's (automatic teller machines). Credit and debit cards are widely accepted. Debit cards and ATM's have become the most practical way to manage cash needs when traveling in most parts of the world. This applies in Ireland and Northern Ireland as well. Quick and easy access to your bank account alleviates travelers from the need to carry excessive amounts of cash that can be lost or stolen. If your debit card is lost or stolen, most banks have protections that limit your losses to a nominal amount. Ask your bank about their policy.

If hesitant, consider AAA's (Automobile Association of America) credit/debit card designed for travelers. You can load the card with a specific amount of cash in advance, further limiting your losses should the card get lost or stolen. Log on to www.aaa.com/prepaidcards or call your local AAA branch for more information. We're coming out pretty strong in favor of using debit cards at ATM's. If you don't have one, consider getting one from your bank now. If you prefer not to use one, that's okay too; but you'll need to plan your cash needs more carefully and be willing to carry more cash on your person.

AAA is also a good source of foreign currency (cash). Other sources include your own bank, Thomas Cook, or internet outlets like www.travelex.com or www.oanda.com.

We do not recommend traveler's checks for this type of travel. Though they are sometimes available in foreign currencies from AAA or a bank, you can expect to pay significant fees for having them cashed. In addition, it is sometimes difficult to find a bank when you need to convert them, and you cannot count on using them like cash as you can in the USA. Traveler's checks have become practically obsolete for the 21st century traveler.

The most practical formula seems to be a combination of foreign currency (cash!) and credit or debit cards. We therefore suggest that you buy a nominal amount of foreign currency at your bank before leaving home, take your debit and credit cards, and get a money belt to store your money under your clothes.

A **minimum recommended budget** for the full Adventure which should cover only your lunches and beverages at dinner is:

200 Euro's (Ireland)

**\$200 USD as backup in case you can't find ATM's
\$40 in British Pounds (Northern Ireland)**

This recommended amount is the minimum, no-frills amount you would need if you intended to do no shopping. Many travelers plan to spend double or triple this amount.

Recommended Strategy: Obtain a starter amount of Euro's here in the US (50 or 100). Then use your debit card en route to restock as the need arises. Take along about \$200 US in \$10's and \$20's as backup in case

you can't find an ATM and need to exchange dollars for Euro's. We would expect that you will be bringing this money home with you—it is only intended for emergency purposes. Make sure you contact your bank in advance to inform them that you will be in Ireland and verify that your ATM card works there (most do).

Alternative Strategy: If you just can't bring yourself to use an ATM, your situation will be a little more complicated. We suggest that you purchase all your Euro's in the US before departure. Another option is to purchase a starter amount of Euro's and be prepared to exchange currency at the airport in Shannon. We do not recommend that you arrive in Ireland with no Euro's.

In all cases, we strongly recommend that you use a money belt, and carry your money and credit cards underneath your clothes.

Be sure to make photocopies of all the credit/debit cards you intend to take. These photocopies should, of course, be kept separate from the cards themselves.

If you are having trouble getting cooperation from your local bank, try Thomas Cook, AAA, or some of the new internet outlets (www.travelex.com). A last resort would be to buy some in the airport on the day of departure, but airport rates are almost always less than favorable.

The rate is generally 2-3% less favorable for selling the foreign currency back to the bank when you get home than for buying it. All things being equal, it's better to spend the money overseas than to bring it home and exchange it back into dollars.

Q: What type of clothing is appropriate?

A: Europeans tend to dress more formally than Americans. Fortunately, tourists are given plenty of latitude in this area. While on tour, there is no need to feel obligated to dress like the locals; tourist attire is acceptable almost universally in Europe. Most of the time, we are dressed in our walking clothes. You may wish to bring along a set of casual non-walking clothes for the odd occasion when you feel like dressing just a bit more formally. If you would like to be a little less conspicuous when out wandering on your own, we suggest that you wear long pants as opposed to shorts and something besides a t-shirt for a top. Also, dark shoes or sandals will be less conspicuous than white walking shoes. And it goes without saying that wearing patriotic clothing overseas is a luxury of the past. Be proudly, but inconspicuously American!

As always, be prepared to layer your clothing to provide maximum comfort and protection. Bring along a good sunscreen and hat. And always be prepared for rain.

Weather:

Average low temperatures are generally in the mid 40's and 50's. High temperatures, on average, range from the low 60's to the 70's. However, this can vary dramatically from year to year. Compact rain gear is always recommended.

Q: Do you have a suggested reading list for this trip?

A: Yes, below we have compiled a list of suggested reading materials. Having historical background information on

the areas you will visit will greatly enhance your experience.

- * [Black Potatoes](#) by Susan Campbell Bartoletti
- * [A Traveller's History of Ireland](#) by Peter Neville
- * [In Search of Ancient Ireland: The Origins of the Irish from Neolithic Times to the Coming of the English](#) by Carmel McCaffrey & Leo Eaton
- * [The Penguin Book of Irish Fiction](#) by Colm Toibin (*a compilation of stories from Irish writers*)
- * [The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1996 and the Search for Peace](#) by Tim Pat Coogan (*written from the Catholic, Unionist viewpoint and should be balanced by an understanding of the opposing perspective such as Mr. Foster's book below*)
- * [Modern Ireland](#) by Roy F. Foster

Other Important Information

SHOPPING:

Most European countries will charge you a value-added tax (VAT) on all purchases. Since foreign governments generally want to encourage tourism, most provide a way to get the tax refunded when you leave the country, provided the total purchase from a single merchant is greater than a pre-determined amount (usually about \$75). It is necessary to ask for a Tax Free Cheque from the shop owner at the time of purchase. There are over 3,000 refund points throughout Europe where you can present the validated cheque, including some border crossings and most major airports. Some refund points require that the cheque be stamped by customs when you leave the country where the purchase was made, though rules on refunds seem to change each year. It is important for you to keep all receipts; and be prepared to show the receipts and the merchandise at the point of refund. If you spend a significant amount of money (over \$800), you may also need to show your receipts when you clear U.S. customs as you return home.

MEALS:

All breakfasts and most dinners are included in the trip price (except for the beverage for the evening meal). Since we are not always in a convenient location for extended lunch stops at noon, we suggest you maintain a supply of fruit and snacks as you have opportunities to visit grocery stores. Please understand that we are not encouraging you to take extra food from the breakfast buffet; this can damage our efforts to maintain good relations with our hotels.

CALLING/MAILING HOME:

Calling home from overseas can be expensive. It is usually less expensive to give a copy of our itinerary to your friends and relatives and have them call you. Travelers have also had good luck with pre-paid phone cards purchased here in the States or overseas; if you use these, remember to bring along the list of in-country toll-free access phone numbers issued with the card. Also, remember that each country has its own postal system and stamps. Be sure to use postage stamps that match the country from which you're mailing postcards and letters.

LAUNDRY:

Europe generally doesn't use our self-serve laundromat

concept. As a result, having laundry done is very costly. We recommend one of two approaches: 1) pack a few feet of clothes line and do your laundry in your room, or 2) pack tightly and bring enough essentials so that you don't need to do laundry until you return home.

Be advised that foreign hotels usually do not provide washcloths (the locals don't use 'em), so take your own if this is something you would miss.

ELECTRICITY:

Household current in Europe is 220 volts. Travel transformers for the current and adapters for the plugs will be necessary to convert the current for your shaver, hair dryers, etc. These can be obtained from most AAA offices or anywhere travel accessories are sold.

GRATUITIES:

Gratuities for meals and lodging are included in the cost of the Adventure. The Adventure price also includes the tip for the driver and any local guides that serve us.

LUGGAGE:

As you will notice in the General Tour Conditions, we request that you limit your luggage to one suitcase per person plus carry-on type luggage. We recommend that you pack a collapsible piece of hand luggage to relieve you of having to carry your main suitcase to your hotel room every night. In some cases, we may require that all luggage be removed from the bus at night for security purposes, or because we will be using a different coach the following day. But often you can pack your hand luggage for the following night and leave your suitcase in the storage compartment of the bus. **NOTE:** Due to the increased cost of fuel, please be aware that most airlines have implemented new policies on checked baggage. The new policy reduces the international weight restriction from 70 to 50 pounds.

NOTE –Please check with your airline for their current policy.

Hotels in Europe often have undersized elevators incapable of transporting more than 2 undersized walkers with 2 undersized suitcases. Porterage is not provided, but we do have a system of getting everyone quickly to their rooms in such cases. Though we want to be certain it is clear that your luggage is your responsibility, we will not abandon you to a long set of stairs or a long line at the elevator.

Checking luggage at airports: Is it a good idea to check luggage through to your final destination to avoid all the hassles of herding your bags through layover airports? It all depends. On the return trip home, we almost always recommend checking through to your final destination. Even if the luggage doesn't arrive home when you do, at least you are home and have all the comforts therein. On the outbound trip, the answer is not as clear cut. If you decide to check through to Shannon, consider these factors:

- 1) Beware of checking through if you have multiple layovers en route to Shannon; the more layovers, the more chances of the luggage getting lost;
- 2) More red flags go up if you are using multiple airlines to get to Shannon — better to claim your bags and re-check them—if your layover allows enough time. The multiple airlines you are using may not have luggage-handling agreements with each other so the option to check through becomes moot.

- 3) If your itinerary is all on one airline, it is safer to check through; and
- 4) Pack a day or two of necessities in your carry-on luggage to offset the possible loss of luggage.

TRAVEL INSURANCE:

Walking Adventures International strongly recommends travel insurance. Many years of helping travelers deal with unexpected circumstances that require cancellation of their travel plans, or expensive special flight arrangements to return home have made us believers in the benefits of this form of insurance. WAI now offers Preferred Benefits™ through USI Travel Insurance Services as part of the Adventure registration process.

There are two primary reasons we recommend travel insurance:

- 1) trip cancellation coverage which reimburses travelers for the cost of the tour if they are unable to participate due to a "covered reason" (e.g. their illness or the that of a close family member) before or during a tour, and
- 2) medical expense and evacuation. Many medical insurance policies cover travelers overseas. Not many, however, will cover medical evacuation, which can be extremely expensive even for non life-threatening injuries which require first class or business class seats for a flight back to the USA.

Please call our office if you have questions on how to purchase travel insurance.

TRAVELER'S PERSPECTIVE:

As with most things in life, the benefit you receive from this experience will depend to a large degree on the frame of mind you have at the outset. If you've not traveled outside the U.S. before, here are a few things to be aware of:

- Though we attempt to eliminate it as much as possible, travel always contains an element of uncertainty. Being ready to adjust will enhance your travel experience.
- Hotels, food, and local customs and standards differ from country to country. This can be both uncomfortable and exciting, depending upon your perspective.
- Though we continue to look for ways to slow the pace of our Adventures, we still believe in providing a full day of travel opportunities for our travelers. On some days, we will spend a significant amount of time en route from one activity or location to another.
- Group travel, by its nature, involves relinquishing a certain degree of individual convenience. Though we continue to look for ways to add flexibility for the individual, much of the time we all need to be "*headed in the same direction.*"

We hope we've covered your questions. If not, feel free to contact us and we'll be glad to fill in the gaps. We look forward to walking the Emerald Isle of Ireland with you!

