



# Grand Tour of Ireland

14 days | 17 days with Glasgow & Edinburgh extension

Beyond the sheep-dotted landscapes and cliff-carved coasts that are its calling card, the island of Ireland comprises dynamic cities, cute villages, and a certain charm you won't find anywhere else. From the Ring of Kerry in the south to Derry in neighboring Northern Ireland, you'll get a proper look at life in the region. And after two weeks of exploring, you'll leave feeling like a local (if you can even bear to leave at all). Should you choose to stay a little longer, Scotland awaits on this trip's extension, showcasing another side of Celtic culture that's just as captivating.



## Your tour package includes

- 12 nights in handpicked hotels
- 12 breakfasts
- 1 lunch
- 4 dinners with beer or wine
- 12 sightseeing tours
- Expert Tour Director & local guides
- Private deluxe motor coach

## Included highlights

- St. Patrick's Cathedral
- Glendalough
- Kilkenny Castle
- House of Waterford factory tour
- Cobh Heritage Centre
- Blarney Castle
- Ring of Kerry
- Cliffs of Moher
- Titanic Belfast museum

## Tour pace

On this guided tour, you'll walk for at least one hour daily across moderately uneven terrain, including paved roads and unpaved trails, with some hills and stairs.

## Group size

15-38

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## Overnight Flight → 1 night

### Day 1: Travel day

Board your overnight flight to Dublin today.

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## Dublin → 2 nights

### Day 2: Arrival in Dublin

*Included meals: welcome dinner*

Welcome to Ireland! Meet your Tour Director and fellow travelers at tonight's welcome dinner and get familiar with the concept of craic—the lively, fun banter you'll encounter across Ireland.

### Day 3: Sightseeing tour of Dublin

*Included meals: breakfast*

Settled by the Gaels and disputed over centuries by the Vikings and Anglo-Normans, Dublin traces its history back more than 1,300 years. Today, you'll peel back some of its layers on a comprehensive tour, led by a local expert.

- Stop in Phoenix Park, the largest enclosed public park in any European capital city. First established as a royal hunting ground by government decree in 1662, this 1,750-acre greenspace today houses the country's presidential residence.
- Pass by St. James's Gate Brewery, the legendary 260-year-old brewery behind Guinness dry stout. More than 50 million barrels ship out of the plant each year, making it the world's most prolific producer of stout-style beers.
- Drive through Old Dublin, then step into St. Patrick's Cathedral, the country's largest church. Founded in 1191, it serves as the national cathedral for the Church of Ireland, and its arresting Gothic architecture befits a building of its stature.
- Traverse Dublin's city center, passing 17th-century St. Stephen's Green as you go. Afterward, take some time to admire the Georgian architecture of Merrion Square. Another garden area in the heart of Dublin, it's been called home by some of Ireland's foremost writers—Oscar Wilde and W.B. Yeats among them.

- See the dignified facade of Trinity College—Ireland's oldest university—and embark on a walking tour of its hallowed grounds.

For a walk down Dublin's (even more) festive side, spend your afternoon strolling Grafton Street or the Temple Bar. The former is the city's primary shopping boulevard; the latter, its buzzy bar district. Alternatively, wrap yourself in shades of emerald by tacking on an optional excursion to the immaculate gardens of Powerscourt Estate.

+ Powerscourt Estate & Gardens

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## Waterford → 2 nights

### Day 4: Waterford via Glendalough & Kilkenny

*Included meals: breakfast, dinner*

Leave Dublin and traverse County Wicklow, marveling at some of Ireland's wildest scenery as you go. Enter Wicklow Mountains National Park—one of six such preserves in the country—and make your way to the Glendalough Visitor Centre. After getting situated, explore the ancient abbey: Cradled in a glacial valley, this sixth-century monastery was founded by the hermit Saint Kevin and contains ruins like the Round Tower, the Gateway, and St. Kevin's Cross.

From there, you'll cross into County Kilkenny and stop at its namesake settlement. Briefly the capital of Ireland in the 17th century, Kilkenny lays claim to the country's best-preserved medieval town, put on full display along the Medieval Mile—a stretch that connects Kilkenny Castle and St. Canice's Cathedral.

Built along the River Nore in 1260 and restored more than 700 years later, the imposing Kilkenny Castle welcomes more than one million visitors inside its walls annually. Count yourself among that number today as you roam the fortress and its gardens, then pass by the Gothic St. Canice's Cathedral before heading to Waterford. Once you arrive in town, you and your groupmates will sit down for an included dinner, served with beer or wine, before ending your day.

*Please note: Between November and February, the sightseeing tour of Kilkenny may take place on day 5 due to the closure of some attractions.*

### Day 5: Sightseeing tour of Waterford & the Rock of Cashel

*Included meals: breakfast*

Ireland's oldest city is neither Dublin nor Cork—that honor belongs to Waterford, a former Viking settlement established in the ninth century. Today, a local guide will introduce you to its rich history by way of its most famous sites and exports.

- Walk through the Viking Triangle, a cultural district encircled by the remains of 1,000-year-old walls.
- Pass Reginald's Tower, the oldest civic building in the country and the lynchpin of Waterford's medieval defenses. Outside, you'll glimpse another pair of local icons: the Vadrarfjördr, a replica Viking longship, and the Dragon Slayer Sword, a hulking, 75-foot wooden sword with hand-carved panels depicting Viking history in the area.
- See the Cathedral of the Most Holy Trinity, the oldest post-reformation Roman Catholic cathedral in Ireland, before visiting the House of Waterford. You may not have heard of this famed glassworks by name, but you've almost certainly seen its work: Waterford crystals adorn the ball that drops over Times Square every New Year's Eve.

Cap your day by venturing into County Tipperary for a tour of the iconic Rock of Cashel. Home to more than 1,000 years of history, this 360-foot-tall outcrop guards a collection of Celtic, Christian, and Viking ruins and is one of Ireland's premier attractions.

*Please note: Between November and February, the sightseeing tour of Waterford may take place on day 4 due to the closure of some attractions.*

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## County Kerry → 2 nights

### Day 6: County Kerry via Cobh & Blarney Castle

*Included meals: breakfast*

From Waterford, head southwest to Cobh, a seaport town of roughly 14,000 on the other side of massive Cork Harbor. Here, you'll enter the

Cobh Heritage Centre: Learn about Irish life, emigration, and maritime tradition over the centuries. (Did you know that Cobh was the *Titanic*’s final port of call before its doomed maiden voyage?)

Then, skirt around the city of Cork to one of Ireland’s most famous tourist sites. First erected in 1210, then rebuilt in 1446 as a stronghold of the local MacCarthy of Muskerry dynasty, Blarney Castle lays claim to one legendary item: the Blarney Stone. Originally added as a defensive structure, this slab of limestone supposedly grants all who kiss it “the gift of gab.” Stretch out over the parapet and give it a smooch—then let us know how you feel!

### Day 7: The Ring of Kerry & Killarney National Park

*Included meals: breakfast, dinner*

Set out for a drive along the Ring of Kerry, a 112-mile coastal route that winds around the Iveragh Peninsula and covers some of Ireland’s most spectacular scenery. Expect your breath to catch with every rugged mile of coastal vistas and windswept beaches.

- Pass the pristine Lakes of Killarney in Killarney National Park and gaze across Dingle Bay. On a clear day, the lakes’ mirror-like surfaces reflect the surrounding forests and hills.
- Don’t blink! You won’t want to miss the ever-changing views, cycling between mountains, beaches, and the open waters of the Atlantic Ocean.
- Explore the quaint villages that line the route—places like Sneem, the “knot in the ring” replete with candy-colored storefronts. (Why the interesting nickname? Sneem’s Irish name, An tSnaidhm, directly translates to “the knot.”)

Sit down for an included dinner this evening, then prep for tomorrow’s journey to County Galway.

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## County Galway → 2 nights

### Day 8: County Galway via County Clare

*Included meals: breakfast*

Board your bus and roll north to the beautiful, lake-dotted expanse of County Galway. Before arriving in Galway proper, stop to enjoy some of the best views on the Emerald Isle.

- Redefine “taking the scenic route” with a quick detour into County Clare and a walk along the mesmerizing Cliffs of Moher. Sheer cliffs stretching into the distance, crashing waves below—you know this one.

- Drive on through the Burren. Distinct from the lush greens that typify the rest of the Irish landscape, greys dominate this limestone plateau, punctuated by bursts of wildflowers. Botanists will surely delight in this journey: More than 70% of Ireland’s flower species grow here.

Arrive in Galway, then let your Tour Director take the lead on a walking tour of the city’s highlights.

- Stroll past a trio of Galwegian icons: Lynch’s Castle, a castle-turned-bank that dates to the 16th century; the rustic home of “Ireland’s most prestigious” troupe, the Druid Theatre Company; and John F. Kennedy Memorial Park, a popular green space better known to locals (and the world) as Eyre Square.
- Get a grasp of Galway’s Norman history by viewing its medieval walls—12th-century fortifications that once encircled the city—and the Spanish Arch. First erected in 1584 as an extension of Galway’s protective walls, its name alludes to the Spaniards who moored their ships and lived in the area.
- Peruse authentic Claddagh (said “CLA-da”) rings in a local shop. Steeped in legend and symbolism, these pieces of jewelry have been produced in their current guise—two hands clasping a crowned heart—since at least 1700 and are inextricably linked to Galway.

How will you fill your evening? If you add it to your itinerary, you’ll dig into a traditional dinner, served with a rousing step dance show.

*Please note: On some departures, the Traditional Irish Music & Dance Show with Dinner excursion will be offered on day 9.*

+ Traditional Irish Music & Dance Show with Dinner

### Day 9: Free day in Galway

*Included meals: breakfast*

Up next: a full day in Galway, all to yourself. Early risers should head for the Long Walk, a not-so-long row of color-blocked houses just past the Spanish Arch. Their seaside location and vibrant aesthetics make for a great photo op—especially at sunrise.

Then, enjoy the freedom of an unstructured schedule, or build out your day with an optional excursion. For architecture and vistas plucked out of a fantasy novel, you’ll want to take up our visit to Kylemore Abbey and Connemara National Park. Keep your cameras handy: You might catch some of the latter’s famous ponies trotting about.

+ Kylemore Abbey & Connemara National Park

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## Sligo → 1 night

### Day 10: Sligo via Glen Keen Farm

*Included meals: breakfast, lunch*

Back on your bus, drive up through western Ireland and make a stop at the Glen Keen Farm, one of the nation’s largest working sheep farms. You’ll learn about tending sheep during an interactive herding demonstration before sitting down for a traditional lunch—complete with dessert, coffee, tea, and the serenity of County Mayo’s countryside.

Then, continue to the coastal town of Sligo, where you’ll spend the night before rolling on to Northern Ireland.

*Please note: Vegetarian options are available for the included lunch.*

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## Belfast → 3 nights

### Day 11: Belfast via Derry

*Included meals: breakfast*

Bid the Republic of Ireland slán go fóill (“goodbye for now” in English) at the hypnotizing Glencar Waterfall, whose wooded surroundings and tiered cascade inspired the poetry of Nobel Prize-winning poet William Butler Yeats.

After, cross the border into Northern Ireland—a separate nation and a constituent country of the U.K.—and stop in Derry for a quick guided tour. As you go, you’ll see its 17th-century walls; more importantly, you’ll get a primer on the long history of tension between Derry’s Protestant and Catholic residents, something that has impacted the city for hundreds of years.

### Day 12: Sightseeing tour of Belfast

*Included meals: breakfast*

Northern Ireland’s largest city, seafaring Belfast possesses a long, proud history—one that you’ll dip into today. With help from a local guide, take a tour and get to know the Northern Irish capital from a unique perspective.

- Glimpse the patinated domes and sculpted walls of Belfast’s City Hall, where local leaders have met since the beginning of the 20th century. Then, move on to the Grand Opera House. Completely restored in the early 2020s, the almost 130-year-old building still hosts an assortment of performances, from ballet to comedy.
- Walk Belfast’s streets and let your guide

educate you on the city's past. Learn about everything from its Bronze Age origins and rise as an international seaport to its role in the vicious sectarian conflict known around the world as “the Troubles.”

- Enter the Titanic Belfast museum. The infamous vessel was built in the city's shipyards by local manufacturers Harland & Wolff, and this exhibit highlights its history, from hopeful conception to tragic sinking.

To see a bit more of the Northern Irish countryside (and sip a spot of tea), add this afternoon's excursion to Hillsborough Castle. If you'd rather enjoy some alone time, pop into St. George's Market—the last surviving covered Victorian market in the city—and browse the wares of more than 300 vendors.

+ Castles of Northern Ireland & Afternoon Tea

### Day 13: Free day in Belfast

*Included meals: breakfast, farewell dinner*

Catch a glimpse of geometric perfection today by adding an outing to the Giant's Causeway. Stepping down into the sea, this UNESCO World Heritage Site consists of some 40,000 interlocking basalt columns, the supposed remnants of an encounter between two mythical giants.

Or, choose to spend the day how you like. Pushing up against the edge of the Queen's University Belfast campus, the 19th-century Botanic Gardens boast a glass conservatory, an open-air rosarium, a museum, and more. You could roam its elegant paths for hours!

This evening, celebrate your trip with your group at a farewell dinner, served with beer or wine.

+ Giant's Causeway

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## Flight Home

### Day 14: Departure

*Included meals: breakfast (excluding early morning departures)*

Transfer to the airport or trade a flight home for a ferry to Scotland by booking this tour's extension. Glasgow, Edinburgh, and more wait in the wings—with so much so close by, why wouldn't you dive deeper into Celtic culture?

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## + Glasgow & Edinburgh extension

The Scottish cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh illustrate two sides of the country they call home—the former its bohemian heart, and the latter its regal pedigree. Your Tour Director will guide you through both with a local's eye,

relaying the stories behind their landmarks and sharing recommendations for your free time. And don't forget your medieval history, courtesy of a visit to Stirling Castle.

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## Glasgow → 1 night

### Day 14: Ferry to Glasgow & sightseeing tour

*Included meals: breakfast*

Board a ferry in Belfast and cross the Irish Sea, docking in Cairnryan, Scotland—a hamlet of just 142 residents on the shores of Loch Ryan.

Then, continue to Glasgow and set off on a sightseeing tour of “the Dear Green Place” (a sobriquet drawn from the direct translation of the city's Gaelic name) with a local as your guide.

- Walk around 18th-century George Square, admiring the craftsmanship of the adjacent City Chambers and the various statues erected around the city's main public plaza. From there, head south through the posh Merchant City district to the banks of the Clyde, Scotland's second-longest river.
- Admire the buildings of the University of Glasgow: Founded in 1451, it's the fourth-oldest in the English-speaking world and one of four Renaissance universities still operating in Scotland today.
- Stop outside the city's medieval cathedral—the oldest cathedral on the Scottish mainland and the oldest building in all of Glasgow—for photos of its Gothic spires and facades.
- Visit the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum. Opened in 1870 as Glasgow's first municipal museum, it features substantial exhibitions of everything from European portraiture to Egyptian antiquities.

After your tour, settle into your hotel and get some rest. Tomorrow, you'll be heading to Edinburgh!

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## Edinburgh → 2 nights

### Day 15: Edinburgh via Stirling Castle

*Included meals: breakfast*

En route to the Scottish capital of Edinburgh, detour northeast through picturesque countryside to visit Stirling Castle. A fixture in the Wars of Scottish Independence, this 12th-century fortress saw the coronation of Mary, Queen of Scots, and still stands proudly atop its rocky perch.

After touring the castle, continue to Edinburgh.

For a little levity, add tonight's excursion and jump into a cèilidh. (Pronounce the name of this traditional party “KAY-lee”). If you'd rather slow things down, take to the streets and find dinner on your own time.

+ Scottish Cèilidh

### Day 16: Sightseeing tour of Edinburgh

*Included meals: breakfast*

Nestled between the rivers Almond and Esk, Edinburgh emerges from a series of hills and rocky ridges, earning its nickname “the Athens of the North.” Get to know the city in all its medieval beauty on a tour led by a local expert.

- View neoclassical and Georgian architecture in the New Town. The ornate sandstone and granite structures surrounding oasis-like gardens and green spaces became a model for European urban planning.
- Contrast the New Town's grace with the Old Town's rustic Royal Mile, which runs between Edinburgh Castle and the Palace of Holyroodhouse—the official residence of British monarchs in Scotland. Here, you'll cross moody, narrow streets and alleys, known as “closes,” flanked by brooding stone buildings and timeworn cathedrals.
- Pass the towering Sir Walter Scott monument—paying homage to the *Ivanhoe* and *Rob Roy scribe*—one of the largest sculptural tributes to an author in the world.
- Ascend Castle Rock and enter Edinburgh Castle. Standing on an extinct volcano at the top of the Royal Mile, it houses the Scottish crown jewels and Stone of Scone—a block of sandstone that has played a central role in coronation ceremonies for centuries.

Looking to be swept away by the wild romance of the Scottish Borders region? Add an outing to your itinerary and join fellow literature lovers for a quest to the home of Sir Walter Scott and the Gothic ruins of Melrose Abbey.

Prefer to see more of Edinburgh? Use your free afternoon in the city to go back and wander the winding streets of the Old Town. If you're feeling adventurous, perhaps consider a spooky stroll through the tunnels that weave underneath the city. Of course, there's always tucking into a booth in a cozy cafe and lingering over tea and shortbread.

*Please note: The order of today's activities is subject to change.*

+ Abbotsford House & Melrose Abbey

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## Flight Home

**Day 17: Departure**

*Included meals: breakfast (excluding early morning departures)*

Transfer to the airport to board your flight home.

# Customize your experience

Customize your tour by adding excursion options. Excursions offered on the same day will occur at different times, so there's no need to choose. Save \$10 when you book your excursion up to three days before your tour departs.\* Excursions requiring advance reservation only list this discounted price. Call or go online to customize your tour: [goaheadtours.com/LSS](https://goaheadtours.com/LSS) | 1-800-597-0350

## Day 3: Powerscourt Estate & Gardens

\$59/\$69\* (5 hours, departs in the afternoon)

Named the third most beautiful in the world by National Geographic, the Italianate gardens of Powerscourt Estate rival even the immaculately manicured flower beds of Versailles. Spend time wandering its sprawling grounds and exploring the Palladian-style country house that lies at the heart of the property. Once a 13th-century castle, this opulent home underwent extensive renovations in the 1700s to transform it into the grand hall it is today.

## Day 8: Traditional Irish Music & Dance Show with Dinner

\$109/\$119\* (5 hours, departs in the evening, dinner included)

Enjoy a three-course dinner, served with beer or wine, at a restaurant in Galway. Then, watch "Trad on the Prom" at a local venue. The show is filled with live music and performances by world-champion step-dancers who have featured in notable productions such as "Riverdance," "The Chieftains," and "Lord of the Dance." Sit back and listen to Gaelic tunes as you take in this mesmerizing performance. Please note: This excursion is seasonal and runs from May 1 through September 30. Additionally, it's only offered on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays.

## Day 9: Kylemore Abbey & Connemara National Park

\$89/\$99\* (9 hours, departs in the morning)

Make your way to the island village of Cong, situated on the border of counties Galway and Mayo. Stroll through the town's charming streets, catching glimpses of nearby Ashford Castle. Then, continue to Kylemore Abbey, a Benedictine convent founded in 1920 on the grounds of Kylemore Castle. Here, you'll have time to explore the abbey's interior and its walled Victorian gardens. After free time for lunch on your own, take a scenic drive through the Irish countryside, passing Connemara National Park. Make photo stops in the Inagh Valley and at the Maam Cross before returning to Galway.

## Day 12: Castles of Northern Ireland & Afternoon Tea

\$129 (5 hours, departs in the afternoon)

Travel outside of Belfast to Hillsborough Castle for a guided tour of its State Rooms and gardens. The property, which was built in the 18th century, sits on 100 acres and is a paradigm of Georgian-style architecture. Then, sit down to a traditional afternoon tea, complete with sweet and savory pastries—and the region's renowned scones, served with clotted cream and jam. Please note: This excursion requires advance reservation and must be booked at least 20 days prior to departure. This excursion requires advance reservation and must be booked at least 20 days prior to departure.

## Day 13: Giant's Causeway

\$95/\$105\* (6 hours, departure time varies)

Pay a visit to the rugged Giant's Causeway, a series of naturally formed basalt columns. The hexagonal pillars, which you can walk on, are 60 million years old and originated as volcanic lava. A colorful local legend says that the mythical giant Finn McCool built the walkway so that he could cross the sea to Scotland. Please note: Rain gear is recommended for this excursion.

## Extension excursion options

### Day 15: Scottish Cèilidh

\$129/\$139\* (4 hours, departs in the evening with dinner)

Enjoy a special evening of Scottish tradition as you witness an authentic cèilidh, an age-old Scottish celebration. Sit down to an included dinner and be serenaded by a band playing Scottish folk tunes while you dine. As the evening winds down, dancers take to the stage to perform a series of traditional dances. Then, cap it all off by joining the company on stage to try the steps for yourself.

### Day 16: Abbotsford House & Melrose Abbey

\$109/\$119\* (5 hours, departs in the afternoon with lunch)

Travel through the Scottish Borders region to Abbotsford, where you'll enjoy an included lunch. Then, continue to Abbotsford House, the 19th-century estate of Sir Walter Scott. The author designed his home in the Romantic style to imitate the elaborate baronial estates of British aristocrats. Today, it serves as a museum for Scottish memorabilia and artifacts that Scott collected throughout his lifetime. Later, visit the ruins of Melrose Abbey, one of the most impressive of the four Borders Abbeys. Please note: Due to renovation projects, groups will visit Dryburgh Abbey through the end of 2024. Dryburgh is regarded as the most peaceful of the four Borders Abbeys, thanks to its location within the woods along the River Tweed.

\*Optional excursions may be purchased up to three days prior to departure or while on tour. Pre-purchased optional excursions cannot be canceled within three days prior to departure or while on tour. Select optional excursions require advance booking and cannot be purchased or canceled after the advanced reservation deadline. GAT accepts payment by cash, Visa or MasterCard for optional excursions purchased on tour. Additional fees may apply for optional excursions purchased on tour. Excursions require a minimum number of participants to operate. Details and prices are subject to change. Due to seasonal hours of operation and availability, some excursions may not operate. If this occurs, you will be refunded any payments made for that excursion post-tour. Learn more at [goaheadtours.com/terms](https://goaheadtours.com/terms)