

## IRELAND

Given last week's blog had us venturing around Northern Ireland, we thought we'd continue our Irish travels. The chance to re-live them is enough to keep us interested. My family roots are in Ireland, as is my heart, and our travel there have been nothing but joyous on every occasion.

Ireland is one of our favourite destinations and fits in snugly between the Paris and London Marathons.

I find the Irish so warm, welcoming, jovial, always on for a laugh and downright friendly. They love a chat and are happy to yarn away, irrespective of where you happen to meet them.

### MONDAY – DAY 1

A leisurely 1hr 30m flight sees us in **Dublin**. To be sure, to be sure.

We are collecting a Sixt rental car which isn't without a wee bit of drama over one-way fees, being for a pickup at the airport and a drop off in Dublin. Despite my emails confirming there is no one way fee, if we want the car we pay the fee..... pick your battles. The one-way fee is more that what I've paid for the whole week's rental but there you go. The staff member is very pleasant though, it's not her fault, and we move on.

We take a shuttle to the depot and it is an absolute fiasco. Luckily, our car is ready and we don't get caught up in the chaos. We have a Renault Captur - nice vehicle with only 637km on the clock.

We set off for **Galway** - our first stop in Ireland. The drive is easy and we find our hotel, the **Park House Hotel**. We have a lovely 'upgraded' room which is comfortable and very roomy. We don't bother unpacking much as we're only here for 1nt. The internet is bad and terribly slow!

We go for a walk into town and it is absolutely delightful. The buildings are brightly coloured and there are people everywhere. It's a bustling city (pop. 79,000) with a great atmosphere. The night is chilly (9 degrees) but dry.





We seek out **Dock 1** for dinner as I've read excellent reviews on the place. It is on the docks and is a cosy place, with a lively feel to it.

We both order chowder and it is excellent. I have mussels done in white wine and they are both plentiful and sensational. The place is busy and the staff super friendly. We have a pint of Galway Hooker.... when in Galway!



We walk home through the town and stop at **Murphy's Ice Cream** shop for dessert. We called in here on the way out for dinner and sampled some of their flavours which are a bit different to your normal ice cream shop. Like Gin – tastes just like Gin and the lass tells us if you have two large servings you'll go over. We sample Sea Salt and it is fantastic - not salty but more like vanilla without the overpowering sweetness. I have Irish Coffee and Sea Salt. Yummo.

## TUESDAY – DAY 2

We go for a walk around town. It is quiet as we walk along the river. The day is overcast but still dry and still 9 degrees.

Breakfast is lovely and we have a full Irish, complete with black and white puddings.

We pack and head out for **Clifden**, along the **Wild Atlantic Way**.

We stop at a wee craft village in **Spiddal**. We are on the Wild Atlantic Way and it is. The scenery is harsh and littered with limestone rocks.

We stop at **O'Dowds** at **Roundstone** for lunch of seafood chowder. Once again, excellent.



**Clifden** is gorgeous and our B&B, **Buttermilk**, is on the edge of town which isn't far from the centre of town. Our room is lovely, the bathroom is smallish, but all in all extremely comfortable. €80pn. Our hosts are Patrick & Cathriona.



We have a cup of tea in the lounge and meet Brad, an American who is travelling around Ireland for 6 weeks.



We settle in before walking into town where we have dinner at **O'Malleys**. The walk is all if about 5mins and it is still cold as the temp has been steady on 10 degrees all day. We share panko crusted calamari which is tender and enjoyable. We both have Irish Stew with mashed potatoes. Again, excellent. We enjoy a couple of pints of Guinness and have a good chat with the waitress while we're sitting at the bar after dinner. She is a local lass and her grandparents on both sides live in Clifden. Tonight is her first night.



We order Irish Coffee made with Baileys and it is quite the treat. Tommy is the hotel manager and he's a nice guy; runs a good operation.

We walk back through by the town. It is quiet bar a few of the pubs which have live music.

### **WEDNESDAY – DAY 3**

We enjoy brekkie at our B&B. It has been raining but only just. Still 10 degrees.

We set off to drive the **Connemara Loop**. We take the **Sky Road** and hug the coast. It's drizzling and freezing cold on the hills when we get out to look at the views. We stop to have a look at **Clifden Castle**, built by John D'Arcy and now in ruins.



We get to the point where you can cross to **Omey Island** at low tide. It is recommended that you check the tides before undertaking the crossing. We do and it is about a minute away from low tide - perfect timing. You can walk or drive - given we are on a bit of a schedule we drive. Omey is small and littered with farmhouses. Takes about 10min to see everything and we're on our way again.



We stop at the **Seafarer Inn, Letterfrack**, for lunch. Dave has fish and chips and I have Cleggin crab claws in garlic butter. Excellent!



We call into the Visitor Centre at the **Connemara National Park** - it's a great Centre and we learned a lot about bog. We could hike up Diamond Mount but it's clouded over and I also want to get to **Kylemore Abbey**.



The Abbey is only a few kms up the road and was built by Mitchell Henry after he and his new bride fell in love with the area while on their honeymoon in 1850. It was completed in 1867. He and his wife had nine children before she sadly died in 1874 when she contracted dysentery while on holiday in Egypt. The Abbey is now managed by the Benedictine nuns, who ran an international girls' boarding school up until 2010 when the last student sat her leaving certificate.

The Walled Garden is beautiful and still a working garden. We can see in some of the rooms of the Abbey and they are furnished with the most expensive decorations. There is a lovely portrait of Margaret Henry hanging in the Drawing Room.



Further along is a church, which Mitchell built in memory of his wife. A mausoleum contains both their remains, as well as those of a grandnephew.



We drive the remaining part of the Connemara loop back to Clifden.





We decide we will have dinner at O'Malley's again as it was so good last night. We both order Fish Pie and it is again fabulous- it has potato on top (as opposed to pastry) and is delish.

Once again, we retreat to the bar for a Bailey's Coffee. There are a few locals in the bar and one is particularly loud - an American who has been living in Ireland for 17 years and is now facing deportation. When the guys with her leave she collars us and talks our ears off. We just wanted a quiet night but that's not going to happen.

We get Sam's life story. Many times. And it differs each time apart from the fact she is being deported. Her claim to fame is she has a goat called Go who she saved when its leg was bitten off by a dog. Go now has a prosthetic leg, courtesy of a French doctor who came to visit, and apparently she is world famous. The story goes on... escape is difficult but we manage to inch towards the door .....and bolt.

We check out Lowrys pub across the road – they have live music but the crowd is way too old for me! We trek home.

#### **THURSDAY – DAY 4**

We enjoy another lovely brekkie and chat with Brad again. He is off to Westport today, as are we. He is staying in a B&B on the edge of town - so are we. Might see him again!

We enjoy a fun chat with Cathriona on the way out. She vaguely knows about Go after prompting and we have a bit of a chuckle. On our way again.

We take the coast road, once we are past **Leenane** - the day is brighter today so the scenery and water are more colourful.

We pass **Croagh Patrick** and call in to see what the walk involves. There is a 5km loop, so we decide we'll dump our gear and come back to do the walk.

We check into **Hazelbrook House**, a purpose built B&B a short walk from the city (€66pn). The room is ok size wise; a bit hard to get around once the ports are open. The bathroom is small but workable. Our host, John, is an absolute delight and makes sure we are comfortable and have everything we need.



Off we tootle to CP. It looks like a hell of a long way up! We take it easy as we clamber up the very rocky and slippery slope. We pass a woman who has had a fall and she is immobile as her husband calls for assistance. Behind us an older lady slips on her backside. It's fairly treacherous and blowing a gale.





The walk flattens out a bit as we go behind another mountain but the final ascent is very steep and very challenging. We chat with a few people along the way. We are not far from the top when the cloud closes in and we can see no more than a few metres ahead. Onward and upward we go, into the cloud... no point throwing in the towel now.



I had two slides on the descent and the second one felt like it was going to get ugly very quickly. Luckily, I was able to get my balance without any damage being done. I comment to Dave that this is the advantage of having a low centre of gravity! The weather is still lousy and wet - not exactly raining but wet air.

The descent is nearly as slow as the ascent - we are careful and agree that we will take it really easy on the way down.

We pass the lady that was on the ground on the way up. She has been there for nearly 2hrs, waiting for help. Further along we pass three women in rescue clobber on their way up to provide assistance. There is no way they'll get her down unless they have really something special in their backpacks.





At the exit to the walk there are two ambulances and quite a few people with some serious rescue equipment. I ask a lady how many times they are called out and she says this is the fourth call out since Monday. Dave is chatting to one of the guys about golf and it turns out he is from the same area (Adelaide) as Dave and they are talking about the Hahndorf golf club no longer being there. He is one of the rescue crew and says they are all volunteers, which probably explains why it has taken so long for them to arrive. We wish them well.

We call into the pub at the foot of the mountain for a Guinness and find some of the people we were chatting with along the way. There is a cosy fire.

Back at the ranch and we shower and walk into town for dinner.



**O'Malley's** gets good reviews so we head there. We arrive at 8pm and are told the first table is 9:30. So we sit..... and have a coupla Guinness'. At 9:20 barman tells us our table is being set. Hugely disappointing when we get the menu to peruse, within minutes of 9.30 and it is very American.... Philadelphia this, Gettysburg that, best ribs, pizzas and a Texas looking dude in the arrivals' hall of the restaurant upstairs. The food better be damn good. It's not so we'll leave this misadventure right there.

We walk home in light rain.

### **FRIDAY - DAY 5 - GOOD FRIDAY**

Not a good night as I spend most of it fighting the urge to throw up. I have a piece of toast and a cup of tea for brekkie and Dave enjoys the full Irish, sans the black pudding.

We hit the road at 10:20, destination Dublin. It is raining lightly.

We arrive at our boutique hotel I, **Ariel House**, and our room is lovely. A Superior room with heaps of space. We seem to have a double bed (rather than a queen) plus a single. The bathroom is pokey but we've come to expect this. The room is at the back of the hotel and incredibly quiet.



We phone Sixt and ask if we can keep the car until Sunday. No. We drive to the rental return and ask the same question. Yes. But it will cost €293. Given our 5d rental cost AUD \$60 we decline their generous offer. The guys at the counter are helpful and think this is as outrageous as we do.

It's raining lightly so we figure we'll have early dinner as soon as we find somewhere suitable. We come across **Madigans** and agree it will be fine. It is dry and cosy - the menu is restricted but still nice and they have roasts available. Perfect. While pubs are open on Good Friday, they can't serve alcohol.

We order carrot and coriander soup - Dave orders roast beef and turkey for me. The soup is lovely. We wait and wait and wait but our roasts don't come. Eventually we ask the waiter. He has clearly forgotten and is most apologetic. The meal is great and he gives us extra roast potatoes.

We walk through the city and the main pedestrian mall is busy. We stop to enjoy the buskers along the way. Everyone in Ireland can sing! And play an instrument.



We walk home - about 2km - and it is a pleasant walk. Back at the guesthouse we take our books downstairs and settle in for a read in their comfy lounge room. The man on the desk brings a cup of tea. Life is good!

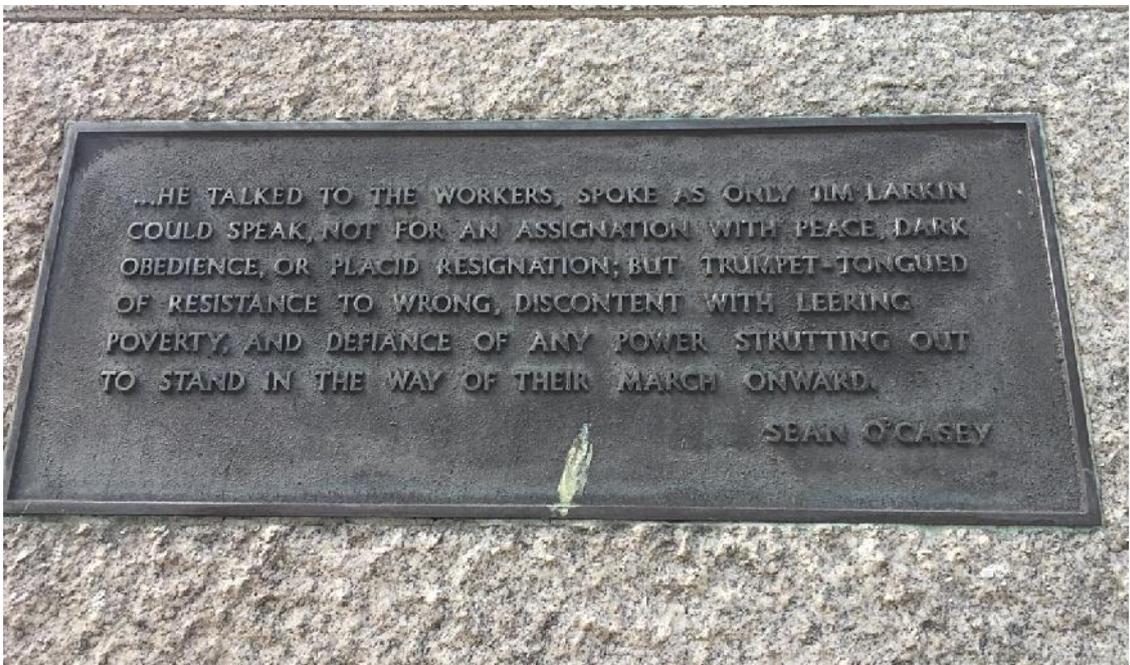
We return to the room and I have a soak in the bath. Sheer bliss. We settle down to watch bad British TV. It's great.

## **SATURDAY – DAY 6**

We take the train into the city - the station is only 50m down the road.

We are doing the **1916 Rebellion Walking Tour** with local historian, **Lorcan Collins**. We meet at the **International Bar** and have an Irish Coffee while waiting for the tour to start. We have a chat with Lorcan and he is a very funny guy. This will be a lot of fun.

We have 20 in our group and start with a briefing downstairs. Lorcan's knowledge and delivery are superb and he's not afraid to have a poke at everyone - the seppos, the Aussies, the Canooks. He is passionate about the cause (of the Nationalists). He walks us around town to a few of the important places in the uprising. He shows us bullet holes in the front of the post office and has some samples of the ammunition for us to inspect.





His quote of the day was: "No, I'm not a member of Sinn Fein, in case you're interested. They are far too conservative." The walk was the best tour we've done and we spent time afterwards talking to Lorcan and Rory, our second guide.



We had planned to go to the Guinness factory but a chat with Rory put us off a bit. The afternoon was also wearing on. We go upstairs and had a Guinness and Irish Stew - €6.50 for the Stew and it was a meal in one.



We go for a walk about town. Temple Bar is an absolute zoo - an obvious haven for bucks' and hens' nights and most are rolling drunk mid afternoon. It's gonna get ugly.



We walk up to St Patrick's Cathedral and there is a beautiful garden adjacent. The church doesn't appear to be open so we just enjoy the gardens. The sun is shining and it's a beautiful afternoon – we sit and enjoy.



We stroll through the pedestrian mall and once again stop to enjoy the music.

**St Stephens Green** is where most of the fighting went on in 1916 and there are many memorials in the park. It is late afternoon and the park is busy.





As we exit the park we are approached by an obviously drunk guy - he asks where we are from and when we say Australia, he says he loves Australia. Then he starts making Skippy noises - seems to be the sub total of his Australian love affair. He's a nice guy but absolutely pole axed. He likes kissing Dave. Funny encounter.

Nearer to home we stop for an Irish coffee and again the locals are friendly.

Back home around 8:30 – on our last night. What a fabulous stay in Dublin.

### **SUNDAY – DAY 7**

The day is overcast as we pack and make our way to breakfast. I enjoy a small serving of porridge which has fruit and cinnamon - divine. Followed by potato cakes and smoked salmon. This guesthouse is right up there with Market House (Tel Aviv) in terms of comfort and all round quality. The staff are great, the breakfast so fresh and well presented and the location excellent. Central Dublin is a bit noisy (for us) but our hotel here is a quick train trip or leisurely walk away, which suits us perfectly.

We taxi to the airport and our driver is a lovely guy too. Ireland is full of such wonderful people .... who can all sing! I am sad to leave and will be back soon.