



The Emerald Isle 2026

Have you ever kissed a stone upside down for good luck? Or slumbered in the storied halls of an 18th-century castle? These are just some of the unique and unexpected experiences you'll relish on this Irish journey, with each encounter revealing more of the country's captivating heritage and culture. Inhale the salty sea air of the North Irish Coast, tap your toes to the ballad of Dan O'Hara and admire the intricate interiors of a traditional cottage orné. With us, you won't just discover a local way of life in the Emerald Isle – you'll become a part of it.





About your tour notes

These tour notes contain everything you need to know before your tour departs – from where to meet your fellow guests and local guide to what essentials to pack for your journey. We recommend you print this document out and bring it with you on your tour. Give a copy to loved ones at home so they can follow your adventure, too.

Important: please refresh this document as close to your departure as possible to ensure you're equipped with the latest information available.

Ashling Hotel @ 18:00

PARKGATE STREET, Dublin, D08P38N

Ashling Hotel @ 14:00

10 - 13 Parkgate St, Stoneybatter, Dublin
8



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Tour highlights

- ✓ Soak up stories of Northern Ireland's history on a tour of Belfast's street art
- ✓ Feel the solid basalt columns of the legendary Giant's Causeway beneath your feet
- ✓ Be blessed with the 'gift of the gab' while visiting the iconic Blarney Castle
- ✓ Uncover the magnificent Cliffs of Moher – an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

More inclusions

- ✓ 12 breakfasts, 6 dinners
- ✓ 12 nights in thoughtfully selected accommodation
- ✓ Luxury minicoach

Currencies you'll use

- Republic of Ireland – EUR
- Northern Ireland – GBP



Included meals

Breakfast (B) is included daily.

Some of your lunches and dinners are also included, either in hotels or local restaurants. These are indicated by (L) and (D) in the itinerary.

Please note that drinks will not always be included.

We will do our best to accommodate any specific dietary requirements you may have. Please ensure to make these clear to us before your tour begins so we can communicate them to our hotels, restaurants and suppliers.

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Your itinerary

Day 1 | Dublin (Republic of Ireland)

Where better to begin our 12-day adventure through legendary battle sites, candy-coloured fishing villages and windswept coastlines than Dublin? Say *dia duit* to your Tour Leader before settling down for a welcome meal where you'll have the chance to connect with your small group. Why not savour your first sip of velvety Guinness and say *sláinte* to the journey ahead?

Included today



Accommodation

Ashling Hotel (or similar)



Meals

+ Dinner

Day 2 | Dublin – Belfast (Northern Ireland)

Today, we'll wave goodbye to Dublin and venture north for a day full of historical intrigue. Our first stop? The Battle of the Boyne Visitor Centre where we'll uncover the fascinating facts and iconic figures behind one of Ireland's most famous – and largest – military events.

After strolling in the footsteps of Jacobite and Williamite troops on the battlefield, we'll hop back in our comfy minicoach and continue our journey – crossing over the border into Northern Ireland. Belfast is our final stop of the day. A city shaped by years of political unrest; it's now emerging from the ashes as a bustling cosmopolitan gem.

Before you enjoy some free time to soak up Belfast's modern allures, we'll delve into the soul-stirring personal stories of survival and sorrow at the Titanic Museum. This evening, you'll find plenty of options for dinner near the hotel – including cosy city pubs serving wholesome stews which you can mop up with thick slices of homemade soda bread. Yum!

Included today



Accommodation

Malone Lodge (or similar)



Meals

+ Breakfast

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Day 3 | Belfast – North Irish Coast (Republic of Ireland)

After a hearty Irish breakfast at your hotel, it'll be time to immerse ourselves in Belfast's more recent history on a guided driving tour. Hop in a local cab with a few of your fellow travellers and keep your eyes peeled for vibrant street art and political murals daubed along the city's most iconic streets.

Your Tour Leader's sure to have some recommendations for where to grab a bite for lunch (and find the best Irish whiskey!). Then, we'll hop in for our minicoach and continue our journey north – stopping off at various viewpoints along the way. Feast your eyes on the dramatic basalt columns of the Giant's Causeway. Legend has it, these 60-million-year-old stones were created by a furious giant named Finn MacCool as a path to reach his nemesis in nearby Scotland.

Camera rolls full of inspiring images and minds full of thrilling tales, we'll continue winding our way along the coast and cross back into Ireland. After settling into our next hotel and admiring even more sweeping vistas across the Lough Foyle, we'll dig into some scrumptious seasonal dishes during our group dinner.

Included today



Accommodation

Redcastle Hotel (or similar)



Meals

+ Breakfast

+ Dinner

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Day 4 | North Irish Coast – Derry – North Irish Coast

Did you know that Derry is the oldest continuously inhabited city in Ireland? This morning, we'll be exploring its old city walls – which are remarkably still intact – with a friendly local guide. History seeps from every stone and we'll encounter plenty of fascinating narratives as we stroll.

The rest of the day will be spent discovering even more of the spectacular North Irish Coast. We'll meander our way along the Wild Atlantic Way towards Fort Dunree. Standing tall on the cliffs of the Inishowen Peninsula, it's witnessed over 200 years of military tales and countless atmospheric storms – and we'll soak all of it up as we explore its batteries, walls and underground bunkers.

Ready for a free evening to relax and reflect on the day's stories? Our route back to the hotel will take us past Malin Head – the most northerly point of mainland Ireland. Step out of the minicoach and stand tall against the bracing wind to gaze out across the craggy cliffs and undulating white-capped waves of the Atlantic.

Included today



Accommodation

Redcastle Hotel (or similar)



Meals

+ Breakfast



Day 5 | North Irish Coast – County Roscommon

Our historical pilgrimage across the North Coast continues, beginning with a stop at the Ulster American Folk Park. Nestled within the rolling hills of County Tyrone, this open-air museum features over 30 charming heritage buildings – from rustic farmhouses and pioneers’ cabins to a replica of the Brig Union passenger ship – all of which paint a vivid story of the brave people who emigrated to North America in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Feeling crafty? We’ll be moving on to the Belleek Pottery Centre for a lesson in traditional Irish pottery techniques. Watch expert local craftspeople at work before tracing your fingers over exquisite Belleek China in the showroom. There will be time to grab a bite in the tearoom before we venture onwards to County Roscommon and our next enchanting hotel: Kilronan Castle!

This majestic castle sits within the emerald countryside of County Roscommon, with the shores of the shimmering Lough Meelagh just a stone's throw away. The rest of today is yours to indulge. Follow hidden trails through sun-dappled glades in the castle’s ancient woodland or glide through the deliciously warm waters of the spa’s heated 15-metre pool. Tonight, we’ll dine like royalty together in the castle’s exquisite award-winning restaurant. *An chuid is fearr de* as the locals say!

Included today



Accommodation

Kilronan Castle (or similar)



Meals

- + Breakfast
- + Dinner



Day 6 | County Roscommon – Galway

What could be better than waking up in a castle? Tucking into a hearty full Irish breakfast in its wood-panelled dining room, of course! Once our bellies are full of crispy rashers, rich black pudding and eggs, we'll take one last lingering look at Kilronan as we glide slowly back up the driveway in our minicoach.

Not to fear, though – our next overnight destination is equally as captivating. But first: a brief stop at the idyllic seaside town of Westport. Hear the Carrowbeg River babble as you wander across the cobblestone Doris Brothers' Bridge and discover why the town's Art Deco clock is nicknamed 'The Four Faced Liar'...

Next, we'll uncover the joys of Connemara at the homestead of Dan O'Hara: a 19th-century tenant farmer. Step back in time to pre-famine life in the Irish countryside as told through the eyes of a man who forms the subject of one of the country's most iconic traditional ballads.

And our final stop of the day? The gorgeous harbour city of Galway – where brightly coloured pubs lie on every corner, and the streets flow freely with the echoes of flutes and fiddles. Our modern hotel is right in the heart of it all – plus your Tour Leader is sure to have a few dinner recommendations up their sleeve!

Included today



Accommodation

The Dean (or similar)



Meals

+ Breakfast



Day 7 | Galway

Succulent seafood, streetside singalongs, shops selling shiny Claddagh rings – Galway’s allures are as eclectic as they come! This morning, you’ll get a little taste of this bohemian city on an orientation walk. Stroll beneath the Spanish Arch – one of the last remaining sections of the medieval stone walls – and marvel the many architectural influences of Galway Cathedral.

Then, it’s up to you where your journey takes you. Saunter down Salthill Promenade in search of a plate of Galway’s famous Atlantic oysters. Snag a table outside a colourful pub on Quay Street and treat your ears to some of Ireland’s finest street tunes. Your path may even lead you to the plunging cliffs, windswept pastures and ancient stone settlements of the Aran Islands. All three are accessible via a guided tour from Doolin Harbour – just ask your Tour Leader to help you arrange it in advance.

Included today



Accommodation

The Dean (or similar)



Meals

+ Breakfast

Day 8 | Galway – Cliffs of Moher – Dingle Peninsula

Toes still tapping to yesterday’s Galway melodies, we’ll hop back in our luxury minicoach this morning and set our sights on the Burren National Park. You’d be forgiven for thinking we’d landed on the moon in this rocky karst landscape that’s been shaped by thousands of years of coastal and glacial erosion.

We’ve got a second natural wonder in our sights this afternoon: the iconic Cliffs of Moher. These jagged – and entirely vertical – series of coastal cliffs will take your breath away. Stand near the edge (but not too close!) and feel the boom of the waves crashing against the rocks below. There’ll be more chances to admire this region’s captivating scenery as we trace our way down the coast, hopping across the Shannon Estuary on the local ferry.

Soaking up all that natural beauty is hungry work, so we’ll no doubt be ravenous for our group dinner at our hotel in Dingle. Afterwards, the town’s welcoming local pubs beckon if you fancy rounding off the day with a whiskey nightcap.

Included today



Accommodation

Dingle Benners Hotel or
Dingle Skellig Hotel (or
similar)



Meals

+ Breakfast
+ Dinner



Day 9 | Dingle Peninsula

Is it an upturned boat or is it a chapel? We'll play a game of guess-who this morning at the Gallarus Oratory – which is, in fact, a centuries-old stone place of worship with mysterious origins. Feel the temperature dip as you step inside its tiny chamber and take a moment to soak up the oratory's enchanting rural backdrop which is crisscrossed with ancient dry-stone walls.

Humbled by Ireland's beauty and mystery, we'll continue to revel in our surroundings as we meander along the Dingle Peninsula – pausing at the Blasket Centre to uncover the secrets of the most westerly isles in Europe. Get lost in unbelievable tales of the Blasket Islands' fishing heritage and traditions, all of which inspired a whole generation of writers and poets in the early 20th century.

Our path back to Dingle will take us along the Sleat Head Drive – perhaps Ireland's most photogenic coastal route where the road clings to plummeting cliffs, and there's views of craggy rock formations and hidden coves at every turn. If all that sea air has you working up an appetite, you'll be spoilt for choice by local eateries along Dingle's quaint harbourside.

Included today



Accommodation

Dingle Benzers Hotel or
Dingle Skellig Hotel (or
similar)



Meals

+ Breakfast

Day 10 | Dingle Peninsula – County Cork

We might be bidding a fond farewell to the Dingle Peninsula this morning – but the equally as breathtaking County Cork awaits. En route, we'll stop off in Killarney and fill our lungs with the sweet perfume of spring azaleas and summer lilies while we stretch our legs in Muckross Gardens.

Then, it's time to meet a true Irish icon – the legendary Blarney Stone. This unassuming block of limestone lodged inside the battlements of Blarney Castle supposedly gives those who kiss it the 'gift of the gab'. So, if spinning wonderful words of wit and wisdom like James Joyce or Samuel Beckett has always been a dream of yours, it's time to pucker up! Why not test out your newfound eloquence over tonight's group dinner? We'll be tucking into some seasonal delights at our next hotel – a family-run country house enveloped by County Cork's dramatic Glanmire Peaks.

Included today



Accommodation

Vienna Woods (or similar)



Meals

+ Breakfast

+ Dinner

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Day 11 | County Cork – Kinsale – County Cork

You'll think you're seeing in technicolour at our next stop! Kinsale is famed for its rainbow-hued buildings – many of them hosting some of the best culinary treats in the region. We'll catch our first glimpse of this picture-perfect port after our minicoach tackles the lofty roads of the Old Head of Kinsale. The coastal outcrop is the closest point to the wreck of the *Lusitania* passenger liner that was tragically torpedoed by a German U-boat in 1915.

Ready to get a closer look at Kinsale itself? Delve deeper into the town during a one-hour walking tour through its storybook streets, stopping off at the Tourist Office to pick up a map of the region which you can personalise with all the stops along our tour. It's the perfect souvenir! Afterwards, you'll have some free time to wander – including seeking out a melt-in-your-mouth lobster roll or a silky seafood bisque for lunch. You are in the 'seafood capital of Ireland', after all.

This afternoon, we'll try another Irish delicacy – a glass or two of whiskey at the Jameson Distillery. Close your eyes and savour its sweet yet smoky notes as it slips easily down your throat. Feeling a little merry, we'll make our way back to our hotel for a little downtime. Why not head out onto the terrace and swap stories of the day with your group while the sky turns pink and purple above the tumbling Glashaboy River?

Included today



Accommodation

Vienna Woods (or similar)



Meals

+ Breakfast



Day 12 | County Cork – Kilkenny

Today marks the penultimate chapter of our tour – and it's destined to be full of thrilling plotlines and unique characters. First up: we'll hop back in time to the early 1800s at Swiss Cottage and learn about its eclectic array of visitors. The traditional cottage orné – which looks just like an alpine lodge – was once a famous retreat and it's easy to picture guests lounging around on picnic blankets on its lush lawns or attending soirees in its stylishly decorated music room.

Then, we'll swap Regency fancies for medieval masterpieces in the nearby town of Cahir. It's home to an immense 12th-century castle – which you could choose to explore during our lunch break. Or why not grab a picnic lunch from one of the town's many bakeries and wander alongside the serene waters of the River Suir?

Finally, we come to our third – and last – stop of the day. Kilkenny has gained a reputation for being Ireland's 'most perfect' medieval city and your Tour Leader will show you exactly why during a leisurely walk around its narrow twisting lanes lined with dramatic grey buildings made from a mix of local limestone and crushed seashells. Afterwards, our final group feast will undoubtedly be bittersweet – and bursting with tales of everything from lucky stones to late-running clocks.

Included today



Accommodation

The Hibernian (or similar)



Meals

+ Breakfast

+ Dinner



Day 13 | Kilkenny – Dublin

Our Irish story may be drawing to a close – but you'll leave with plenty of mesmerising memories to take home in your suitcase. To quote Oscar Wilde: *It's beauty that captures your attention and personality which captures your heart*. Ireland is a place that has plenty of both in droves.

Soak up every last drop of Kilkenny's charm – from its fairytale castle to its treasure-packed Medieval Mile – this morning before we board the minicoach for Ballykilcavan Farm and Brewery. During a guided tour, you'll learn all about this 13-generation-run family farm and the ales, lagers and stouts they currently brew. Then, it's onwards to Dublin.

We'll arrive in the afternoon, but we recommend you book a few extra nights to experience the Irish capital's infectious energy and rich history before heading home. Before you go, bid your new friends a fond goodbye and don't forget to whisper *slán go fóill* to the Emerald Isle. Its meaning? Goodbye – for now.

Included today



Meals

+ Breakfast



Travel advice

Finances

Changing money

Cash: Foreign money can be changed at banks, airports, some railway and tube stations, and at major hotels (though at a less favourable rate).

Credit cards: Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted. American Express is only accepted in some larger establishments.

Cash machines: ATMS are widely available.

Tipping

Tipping is entirely at your discretion. If you feel you have received exceptional service, it is recommended that you tip £1-2/€ per day for Drivers and £4- 5/€ per day for Tour Leaders.

Insurance

Before travelling with Back-Roads Touring, it is compulsory for all guests to take out comprehensive travel insurance. Please ensure your insurance covers medical expenses (including repatriation), cancellation cover, loss or damage to baggage and personal effects, money and personal liability.

We recommend you carry your insurance details with you at all times. You may be asked to provide details of your medical insurance or a payment guarantee in some countries before medical assistance can be provided.

For more information, please see our [FAQ page](#).

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact our friendly Customer Service team [here](#).

Passports and visas

Please ensure your passport is valid for at least six months after the last day of your tour. Some countries will refuse entry if you do not have at least six months validity remaining on your passport after your departure date. Depending on your nationality, you may require a visa to enter certain



countries.

It is your responsibility to obtain visas prior to your tour's departure. To determine which visas you'll need, you can consult either your own government's website or the government websites of the countries in which you will be travelling.

Please note: Some visas can take up to six weeks to acquire, so don't leave it until the last minute. Also, bear in mind that the validity of a visa often runs from its date of issue rather than the date of entry into the country. Please check with the appropriate embassy/embassies prior to departure as requirements do change periodically.

We advise you to either carry a photocopy of your passport (and visa, if applicable) with you while abroad, or to ensure that you leave a copy with relatives back at home. This will enable the local embassy or high commission to arrange a replacement if the original should be lost or stolen. If you do take copies with you on your tour, please ensure that you keep these separate from your original documents.

Medication and mobility

Whilst on your tour, we want you to have the smoothest journey possible which requires x mobility conditions:

- You must be fit enough to get on and off the vehicle on a regular basis, and to walk around towns and villages or to attractions.
- You must be able to walk up and down stairs and use a shower over the bath.

Please note that, unfortunately, we are unable to accommodate mobility scooter or wheelchair users as we frequently stay in traditional-style hotels and the majority do not have lifts or ground-floor rooms.

If you take medicine for certain conditions, such as diabetes or heart problems, please carry it with you at all times.

Please declare any medical conditions you may have in advance of your tour. If you are in any doubt as to whether our tours are suitable for you, please contact our friendly Customer Service team [here](#).



Mental health and wellbeing

Culture shock, homesickness and periods of feeling down happen regardless of age. Be rest assured that if you're feeling low, your Tour Leader and Driver will do their utmost to make you smile.

Measures you can take to look after your mental health and wellbeing while on the road with us are:

- Call loved ones. Hearing a familiar voice whilst in an unfamiliar destination can help ground you and remind you you're not alone.
- Eat well. Nobody feels their best when they're hungry. There are plenty of nutritious culinary delights to be savoured along the road!
- Integrate with your fellow guests. The more you socialise with the group, the less likely you'll feel homesick.

Transport

We travel in premium mini-coaches equipped with comfortable seats, air conditioning and large windows for enjoying the view.

With far more flexibility than a standard-size coach, we're able to take the scenic route – winding through beautiful countryside to the heart of tiny villages and coastal towns.

Will I have regular access to Wi-Fi?

Most accommodation we stay in will offer free Wi-Fi as well as many restaurants and cafes you may visit. If you would like more regular internet access without large roaming fees, you can purchase a Back-Roads Touring eSIM [here](#).



What to Pack

Based on our experience, the following items are essential.

Please note, this is a general packing list for Back-Roads Touring tours. What you pack will depend on the countries you're visiting as well as the time of year you plan to travel.

Clothing

- | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ✓ Sun hat | ✓ Long-sleeved tops | ✓ Light jacket |
| ✓ Sunglasses | ✓ Short-sleeved tops | ✓ Waterproof jacket |
| ✓ Sleepwear | ✓ Shorts/skirts | ✓ Trousers |
| ✓ Warm jacket | ✓ Socks | ✓ Swimwear |
| ✓ Underwear | ✓ Smart casual evening wear | ✓ Walking/comfortable shoes |

Other essentials

- | | | |
|---------------------------|--|--------------------|
| ✓ Multi-use adapter plug | ✓ Toiletries | ✓ Camera |
| ✓ Batteries | ✓ Sunscreen | ✓ Towel |
| ✓ Umbrella | ✓ Reusable water bottle | ✓ Insect repellent |
| ✓ Any personal medication | ✓ Basic medical kit (paracetamol, aspirin, plasters etc) | |

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How much luggage can I bring

As we travel in mini-coaches, luggage space is limited. Here's what you can take with you on tour:



1 x suitcase



1 x small carry-on bag
(backpack or handbag)

If you have more luggage, please make arrangements to store it prior to joining the tour. **We are unable to carry extra luggage on the mini-coach.**

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FAQs

Will we visit the Ring of Kerry?

This tour explores many of Ireland's captivating coastlines but not the Ring of Kerry. You can, however, experience sections of that breathtakingly beautiful route on our [Corners of Southern Ireland](#) tour – which can handily be combined with The Emerald Isle for an even longer Irish adventure.

What essentials should I pack for Ireland?

Ireland's weather is famously unpredictable (even in summer!), so we suggest packing plenty of layers and bringing a trusty raincoat. You might also want a pair of sunglasses and some sunscreen for those days when the sun does decide to shine.

That's everything!

We can't wait to welcome you on tour.

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