



Spiritual Highlights of Ireland



11 Day Program
Escorted by Father/Pastor XXXXXXXXX

Spiritual Highlights of Ireland— Sample Itinerary 11 Day Tour—Dates To Be Determined By Client

Day 1

Departure from the U.S.A. for Dublin.

Day 2 Dublin

Welcome to Ireland.

Arrive at Dublin Airport, meeting and assistance upon arrival at Dublin Airport. Transfer by private coach with guide westward to Galway.

Please Note: The following will only be possible if the group arrive very early this day. Otherwise the clients will have to leave out Dysert O' Dea Church.

En route stop at Tyrellspass Castle for tea/coffee and scones.

Tyrell Pass Castle dates back to circa 1411. It is the only remaining castle of the Tyrrell's, who came to Ireland around the time of the Norman Invasion. The original spiral staircase and one of the original roof beams dating from 1280 can still be seen today. During the Cromwellian invasion of 1650, it is said the castle occupants suffered a great deal and many were executed as a result. After a tumultuous history of intrusion, it was extensively restored in the 1970's. During the early 1990's, the building was taken over and converted into a modern style restaurant.

Travel via County Clare.

Visit the Dysert O'Dea Church, founded by Saint Tola in the 8th century as a monastic site. The Church and High Cross " the white cross of St Tola " date from the 12th or 13th century. The cross-depicts Daniel in the lions den on one side and the crucified Christ on the other. Nestling close to a fragmentary 12th century Round Tower is the church, famous for its richly decorated Romanesque doorway of animal and human heads.

Visit Corcomroe Abbey, this well-preserved abbey sits picturesquely among the grey hills of the Burren and is close to Bell Harbor. It is best known for its lonely situation, lying close to another interesting monastic settlement, a group of three small early Christian Churches which nestle in the pass of Oughtmana and which are dedicated to St. Colman. These early monks sought out isolated areas in which to build their churches. They then set about the task of becoming self sufficient and maintained themselves free from contact with outside society. The abbey acquired the name of Sancta Maria de Petra Fertili (St. Mary of the Fertile Rock) which reflects the fertile nature of the Burren lands, which insured that here a Cistercian community could (through cultivation) provide itself with the necessary means of support. The Abbey is said to have been built by Donal Mór O'Brien, late in the 12th century. He was also responsible for several other important religious houses in Thomond which include St. Flanna's Cathedral in Killaloe, St. Mary's Cathedral in Limerick and Holy Cross Abbey. His selection of this site in the Burren appears to have been a prudent one for the abbey continued to function for 400 years. The last Abbot, Rev. John O'Dea, was named in 1628, he was a Cistercian from the Irish College at Salamanca.

Check in to the Galaway Bay Hotel.

Overnight, dinner and full Irish breakfast the following morning at the hotel.

Day 3 Connemara to Knock

Connemara is a land of lakes and rivers, bogs and mountains. A land of small villages where Gaelic is still the spoken language and where little has changed since the beginning of time. It is without a doubt the wildest and the most romantic part of Ireland. Connemara is a vast peninsula bordered by an arid and rocky coastline of Galway Bay in the south. It is a land characterized by its stone walls and thatched cottages. On its northern shore the land is harsher and more secret, with spectacular views of the ocean and the beautiful fjord of Killary Harbor. Its steep mountains overlook numerous lakes and large bog areas. Connemara is a real paradise for nature lovers and evokes strong emotions in many travelers to the region.

Visit Kylemore Abbey and celebrate mass. The abbey is located in the Kylemore Pass in Connemara. Mitchell Henry built the House in 1868, after having spent his honeymoon in the area. The architecture is best described as neo-gothic and the house still displays all the characteristics of that period. One of Kylemore Abbey's most famous features is its miniature cathedral, built in 1870, which is known locally as the Gothic church. Today, the abbey is home to the Irish order of Benedictine nuns. They bought the house in 1920, having fled their convent in war-torn Belgium in 1914. They established a private school for young girls, which today is the renowned Kylemore Abbey International School for Young Girls. The facilities at Kylemore include a visitor centre, an exhibition housed in the main reception rooms of the house and a video which takes the visitor through the history of the house and its occupants.

Continue to Knock. This little town is an important pilgrimage centre and has been famous for over a century as the site of visions, apparitions, and miraculous cures. The story of Knock began on the 21st August 1879 when Our Lady, St. Joseph and St. John the Evangelist appeared at the south gable of Knock Parish Church. Fifteen people, young and old witnessed the apparition. From this miraculous occurrence Knock has grown to the status of an internationally recognized Marian Shrine. The personal pilgrimage of Pope John Paul II in 1979, commemorating the centenary of the apparition, inspired an even greater devotion to the shrine and endorsed the indelible seal of Vatican approval. Mother Teresa of Calcutta visited the Shrine in June of 1993. One and a half million pilgrims visit the Shrine annually.

Overnight, dinner and full Irish breakfast at the Knock House Hotel.

Day 4 Knock

Today, you will spend the day in prayer and reflection at the Holy Shrine.

Time to visit Knock Folk Museum. The museum portrays aspects of rural life in Ireland at the end of the 19th Century and early 20th Century. There are more than 2,000 exhibits on display.

Overnight, dinner and full Irish breakfast at the Knock House Hotel.

Day 5 Ballintubber Abbey

This morning travel to Ballintubber Abbey for a full day retreat. Built in 1216, for the Canon Regulars of St Augustine, the abbey is the only church in Ireland that was founded by an Irish King that is still in use today. It was built next to the site of an earlier church founded by St Patrick in the 5th century. Also known as "the abbey that refused to die" due to the many changes since it was built, including burning by Cromwell's army in 1653. The abbey has remained a place of worship despite years of continuous attacks and religious repression. Ballintubber retains an air of ancient beauty and spirituality and has been restored with simple elegance. Ballintubber is one of the most impressive church buildings in Ireland today and is well worth a visit. There is an interpretative centre at the abbey and the grounds are landscaped to portray spiritual themes.

Overnight, dinner and full Irish breakfast at the Knock House Hotel.

Day 6 Knock - Sligo

After a full Irish breakfast, you will celebrate Mass in the Old Church, the Church of the Apparitions.

Afterwards, depart to County Sligo, who's beautiful scenery was an inspiration for Yeats. He is buried in Drumcliff Church yard, under a loaf-shaped Benbulbin Mountain. The lakes of Sligo, with their still waters and wooded islands, are truly spectacular, and form a striking contrast to the county's rugged uplands. The imposing Neolithic cairn on the summit of Knocknarea, known locally as Queen Maeve's grave, is a striking landmark. At Carrowmore, you'll find the largest megalithic cemetery in Ireland. Sligo's scenic coast has some excellent surfing beaches, including Strandhill, Rosses Point and Enniscrone, also popular for their golf courses. Lissadell House, once home to Countess Markievicz, lovely with its white beaches.

Visit Carrowmore Cemetery, with its 60 stone circle and passage tombs making it one of the largest Stone Age cemeteries in Europe. It is the oldest Megalithic cemetery in Ireland and is said to have had over 100 tombs of which 60 still exist today. Each tomb is numbered to facilitate the visitor and the central tomb has been restored and enables visitors to visit the interior of a court tomb and see how it was when built over 5000 years ago. The local guides are excellent and give a very interesting and detailed tour of this very ancient and interesting site. A must for visitors interested in Archeology.

Continue on to Drumcliffe where the famous Irish poet, W.B. Yeats is buried. His tomb can be found in the small, simple church cemetery. The church, in which his grandfather had been rector, was built on the foundations of St. Columba's 6th century monastery. Nothing remains of the monastic site but a magnificent high cross and the ruins of a round tower. The tombstone of Ireland's greatest poet is simple and carries the famous epitaph written by the author himself. "Cast a cold eye on life, on death, horseman pass by".

Overnight, dinner and full Irish breakfast at Yeats County Hotel.

Day 7 Sligo to Belfast

This morning visit the Marble Arch Caves, explore a fascinating, natural underworld of rivers, waterfalls, winding passages and lofty chambers. Visitors' board a boat, which meanders through the caves while the onboard local guide, points out the many interesting features of the caves.

Enjoy an orientation of Armagh. It has some wonderful pre-historic sites and more modern sites to offer its visitors. You will enjoy a bird's eye view of wildlife at Lough Neagh, Ireland's largest lake. Nature lovers will enjoy the Gosford Forest park. A trip around the Ring of Gullion is a must. In the beautiful rural setting of Slieve Gullion, you'll find the Ti Chulainn Cultural Activity Centre, close to Crosmaglen. Nearby Forkhill is home to the 1820s Slieve Gullion Courtyard. It stands in Slieve Gullion Forest Park, where you can take a scenic drive and view a passage grave, cairn and volcanic lake, against the striking backdrop of the South Armagh landscape.

Enroute visit St Patrick's Church of Ireland (Anglican) Cathedral Armagh. This cathedral lays claim to the summit of Armagh's principal hill, Druim Saileach (Sallow Ridge) and is the site where St Patrick founded his first church in 445 AD. He ordained that Armagh should have the pre-eminence over all the churches of Ireland, a position still held to this day. A series of churches has occupied the site since 445 and the core of the present building is medieval. As you enter the Church you will see the remnants of a 11th century high cross and a startling statue of Thomas Molyneux. The chapter house has a collection of stone statues including the Tandra-gee idol and a Sheila-na-gig with ass's ears. Brian Boru, Ireland's first High King and the king responsible for the defeat of the Vikings in 1014, is buried in the Cathedral.

Next, visit St Patrick's Roman Catholic Cathedral, also at Armagh.

This Cathedral was built between 1838 and 1873. It is built in the Gothic revival style with large twin towers dominating the approach up flight after flight of steps. Inside it seems almost Byzantine, with every piece of wall and ceiling covered in colored mosaics. The sanctuary was modernized in 1981 and has a very distinctive tabernacle holder and crucifix, which appear out of place with the mosaics and statues in the rest of the church

Overnight, dinner and full Irish breakfast at the deluxe Merchant Hotel in Belfast.

Day 8 Belfast to Dublin

This morning enjoy a guided city tour in Belfast. The tour will take in the leaning Albert Memorial Clock Tower (Ireland's answer to the Tower of Pisa) and the Opera House, which is one of Belfast's great landmarks. Your tour will pass by City Hall, the Opera house, the Crown Bar (dating from 1885), Queens University and the Botanic Gardens, and the Harland and Wolfe Shipyard, where the Titanic was built and launched in 1912. A visit to the Shankill and Falls Roads will help you understand how life was in Belfast during more violent times.

Continue on to Meath and the Boyne Valley, without a doubt the most historical region of the whole island. It is not surprising that here are the most important Irish monuments such as Newgrange, Knowth or Loughcrew Cairns. These are megalithic tombs, dating from 2500 BC, located along the valley of the river Boyne. The river is also known for the famous Battle of the Boyne in 1690 between the Catholic King James of England and the Protestant King William. The victory of William over James had immediate repercussions on Ireland, some of which still influence Irish History today.

Next, visit Bru na Boinne Visitors Centre and Newgrange. The Megalithic Passage Tomb at Newgrange was built about 3200 BC. The kidney shaped mound covers an area of over one-acre and is surrounded by 97 curbstones, some of which are richly decorated with megalithic art. The 19 meter-long inner passage leads to a cruciform chamber with a corbelled roof. It is estimated that the construction of the Passage Tomb at Newgrange would have taken a work force of 300 at least 20 years. The passage and chamber of Newgrange are illuminated by the winter solstice sunrise. A shaft of sunlight shines through the roof box over the entrance and penetrates the passage to light up the chamber. The dramatic event lasts for 17 minutes at dawn from the 19th to the 23rd of December.

Continue to Ireland's Capital City of Dublin.

Overnight, dinner and full Irish breakfast at the Merrion Hotel in Dublin.

Day 9 Dublin's Fair City

This morning enjoy a panoramic tour of Dublin, discovering the north side of the River Liffey. This area offers great striking monuments such as the GPO (General Post Office) on the city main thoroughfare, O'Connell Street, or the Custom House along the quays, as well as the Phoenix Park, the largest public park in Europe.

The south side appears more sophisticated with its vast Georgian squares, such as Merrion Square, where Oscar Wilde's House can still be found (today owned by an American College), its colorful doors, along with Grafton Street and its quality shops. Not so far from St. Stephen's Green, in Kildare St., you will see the house of Bram Stoker, the author of Dracula. This part of the city is also dominated by the students of Trinity College, where the famous book of Kells is permanently exhibited in its library. The university is facing the medieval district where Dublin Castle and the two Anglican Cathedrals can be found.

Celebrate Mass at Sean McDermott Street Church, which contains the tomb of Matt Talbot.

Next, visit Trinity College, founded in 1592 by Queen Elizabeth I on grounds confiscated from an Augustinian priory and the oldest University in Ireland. The Campanile, erected in 1852, was built on what is believed to be the centre of the monastery. Built to further the education of the ruling Anglo-Irish families, restrictions were imposed to prevent Catholics from attending courses. These restrictions were not fully lifted until the 1970's. Trinity, however, admitted women in 1902, earlier than most British universities. Most of the main buildings off the main square were built during the Georgian period, some of which replaced older buildings. Within its walls, you will be able to admire Parliament Square and its 18th Century edifices. Trinity College has had many famous students such as Jonathan Swift and Samuel Beckett who later became a lecturer in French at the university. The Inter-denominational Church is worth a visit, and we will plan to be there during opening hours.

Continue to Christ Church Cathedral. King Sitric Silkenbeard built Dublin's first (wooden) church on this site in 1038. He was the 1st Christian Viking king of Dublin. The Anglo-Norman Richard de Clare (Strongbow) built the current building in 1172. Ravaged by time it was almost fully restored towards the end of the 19th Century. Like St. Patrick's Cathedral, it is adorned with funeral monuments, including the reputed tomb of Strongbow, its founder and Ireland's first Norman conqueror. Unlike St. Patrick's, however, Christ Church possesses a crypt, which stretches under nearly its entire length and much of the Cathedral's memorabilia is displayed here. Attached to the Cathedral is the Synod house, which houses Dublinia an excellent exhibition of medieval Dublin.

You will end your tour with a visit to St. Patrick's the National Cathedral of Ireland and is built on the site where St. Patrick preached. There was a small church on the site which was still in existence when the Anglo-Normans arrived. This church was replaced with a stone church in 1191 and it was further remodeled in 1225 to the same design as Salisbury Cathedral. Ireland's first university was founded at St. Patrick's in 1320 and intermittently operated for 200 years. St. Patrick's is Gothic in style, its splendid interior is adorned with funeral monuments, such as the Boyle Family Memorial and the grave of Dean Jonathan Swift. Swift was dean here until his death in 1745. The Chancel has ornate stained-glass windows, and spectacular choir stalls, once used by the Knights of St. Patrick that adjoin the altar. The massive west towers house a large peal of bells whose ringing tones are so much apart of the character of Dublin.

Overnight, dinner and full Irish breakfast at Merrion Hotel in Dublin.

Day 10 Malahide and Howth

This morning travel north to the picturesque maritime village of Malahide for some time in the village or on the beach. The extensive Velvet Strand stretches to the horizon and is extremely popular with bathers and water sports enthusiasts. Malahide also boasts a marina with some three hundred berths and the only natural inlet along the East Coast.

Next, visit Malahide Castle, one of Ireland's oldest and most historic castles. The 100-hectore estate was founded in the 12th century by the Anglo-Norman Talbot family and was occupied by this family until 1976. The castle contains much of its original 16th Century furnishings, a minstrel's gallery and a unique collection of Irish historical portraits. It also houses the Fry miniature railway for railway enthusiasts.

Travel back via Howth and Dublin Bay. Howth is a fishing and yachting port, and popular suburban resort on the north side of Howth Head. Its attractions are easily appreciated, particularly at the coast. Howth Head gives fine views of Dublin Bay and the Wicklow Mountains or Boyne Valley beyond. In the bay is the rocky bird sanctuary and monastic island of Ireland's, to which boat trips may be taken in summer.

Enjoy afternoon at leisure in Dublin's City Center.

This evening enjoy a farewell dinner, time to say goodbye to old friends and new.

Overnight, dinner and full Irish breakfast at your hotel in Dublin.

Day 11 Farewell

After a final full Irish breakfast transfer to Dublin Airport for your departure flight home.

Sample Tour Only

This program is designed to give the reader an opportunity to see what the possibilities are for a religious program in Ireland. A custom designed program can be designed working with the reader. A full-color brochure will then be developed.