



ST. MARY'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS RETIREES ASSOCIATION PRESENTS:

An Ireland/Northern Ireland Adventure

DELUXE CUSTOM IRELAND PROGRAM W/CASTLE STAY

SEPTEMBER 13 – SEPTEMBER 27, 2017 ~ 15 DAYS / 14 NIGHTS

Day 1 - Overnight Flight to Ireland

Day 2 - Arrive Dublin



Upon Arrival in Dublin Airport you will be met at the airport by your friendly Irish Tour Director and transferred to your local accommodation for the next two nights. We take a short panoramic tour of the city before checking into our hotel. After check-in you are free to relax or head out and explore this lively city. Perhaps you want to stroll around Stephens Green, shop on Grafton Street or check out the scene in Temple Bar. This evening enjoy a real Irish experience with dinner and entertainment at the Brazen Head Pub. This well-known spot claims to be Ireland's oldest Pub dating back to 1198, a meeting place for historic rebels, this brass-filled, lantern-lit pub is the perfect way to kick off your tour. **Overnight: Dublin Dinner at the Brazen Head**

Day 3 – Dublin Sightseeing

This morning after a leisurely breakfast we take a panoramic sightseeing tour of Dublin's Fair City. As we drive through the main thoroughfare we see historic buildings like the GPO (General Post Office) on O'Connell Street and we see the vast Georgian Squares, such as Merrion Square where Oscar Wilde's house can still be found (today owned by the American College). We will stop and enjoy a visit to St. Patrick's Cathedral. We also see the Phoenix Park, the largest public park in Europe and home to Aras an Uachtairin (the Irish President's Residence) as well as the American Ambassador's Residence. We end our tour with a visit to **Trinity College**, which houses the treasured **Book of Kells**, a 9th century Gospel manuscript famous throughout the world. This evening, we enjoy dinner and entertainment at an Irish Night. **Overnight: Dublin Dinner and Entertainment at the Irish Night**



Day 4 – The Viking City of Waterford and the Garden of Ireland.....



This morning after a hearty breakfast, we travel to **County Wicklow**, known as the 'Garden of Ireland'. As with many parts of Ireland, Wicklow is drenched in history and heritage and one of the most famous examples of that is the Monastic Settlement of Glendalough. Also on this site you will find a Celtic High Cross. There will be time for you to walk around the settlement and take in the wonder that is Glendalough before moving on to the Meeting of the Waters. We will then make our way to the delightful village of Avoca that has long been known for its famous copper mines. It is also well known as the location for the recording of the BBC TV series Ballykissangel. This little village is well known throughout the country and the world. On top of everything else, it is home to **Avoca Handweavers**. Avoca is home to Ireland's oldest weaving mill

founded in 1723. We stop to visit **Mount Usher Gardens**, with over 5,000 species of plants and shrubs from all over the world. We continue our journey onto the Viking City of Waterford, Ireland's oldest city dating back to the 9th century. We check into our hotel and enjoy dinner together this evening. **Dinner & Overnight: Waterford**

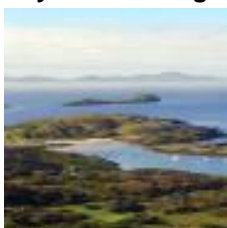
Day 5 – A wee bit O'Blarney and Killarney.....

This morning after a hearty Irish breakfast, before we bid farewell to Waterford we will visit the new home of the House of Waterford Crystal, where we feel the heat of the furnace and marvel at the skills of the craftsmen. We then make our way west to the Kingdom of Kerry. A special photo stop will be made in Cork today. On route, we will visit the historic port town of Cobh. It is from this town that over 2.5 million Irish people emigrated. Many would have attended mass at the beautiful Cathedral overlooking the port prior to their departure. Cobh was also the last port from which the Titanic left on April 11th, 1912. We enjoy a visit to the **Cobh Heritage Museum** before visiting the village of Blarney and **Blarney Castle**. Climb the winding stairs of this nearly impenetrable fortress, kiss the Blarney Stone and be granted the "Gift of Gab". Explore the beautiful grounds and gardens that lead to Rock Close, Blarney Castle's secret treasure. Once you have walked up an appetite for shopping, head inside the "Blarney Woolen Mills"—30,000 square feet of retail space within one of Ireland's oldest and most authentic woolen mills. We travel on then through West Cork to Killarney, famous for its lakes and scenery. Tonight we enjoy dinner together at our hotel.



Dinner and Overnight: Killarney

Day 6 – The Ring of Kerry



This morning after a leisurely breakfast we are going to explore the beauty of an area that has attracted visitors for centuries. We will see countryside surrounded by mountains, lakes, woods and rugged coastline as we meander around the 110 mile route of the Ring of Kerry. We will drive through and stop in some of the many picturesque villages such as Glenbeigh, Waterville and Sneem. Our return to Killarney is via Molls Gap and Ladies View, a spot that derives its name from the pleasure expressed by Queen Victoria's Ladies-in-Waiting on their visit here in 1861. This afternoon upon your return hop on a **jaunting cart ride** that takes you in and around the National Park. Tonight we enjoy dinner together at our hotel. **Dinner & Overnight: Killarney**

Day 7 - The Cliffs of Moher



This morning we continue our venture with a ferry ride across the River Shannon into County Clare where we visit the magnificent Cliffs of Moher. The Cliffs are over 700 feet high at the highest point and range for over 5 miles over the Atlantic Ocean. O'Brien's Tower stands proudly on a headland of the majestic Cliffs. On a clear day you can see the Aran Islands, Galway Bay, as well as The Twelve Pins, the Maum Turk Mountains in Connemara and Loop Head to the South. We continue via the town of Ennis to our next overnight stay in the area and later this evening, we set off for a dinner to remember, as we recapture the lifestyle of medieval Ireland in a local Castle. We enjoy quality food and entertainment, once the preserve of the nobility who resided in these fortresses.
Overnight: Shannonside Area **Dinner at Medieval Banquet**

Day 8 – Galway City.....

This morning after breakfast we travel to Galway, known as the City of Tribes after the 14 merchant families that prospered here in the middle ages. En route we will stop at the Burren Birds of Prey Center for an hour show. Upon arrival, we enjoy a panoramic sightseeing tour and note this is a very lively cultural city with lots of music, drama and the arts, street performers (buskers), unique shops and pubs. We check into our hotel and enjoy dinner together. **Dinner and Overnight: Galway**



Day 9 – Connemara.....



After a leisurely breakfast, we set out today to visit Connemara, a unique and very special part of County Galway. Once home to over 2 million Irish speaking people, it still retains its regional heritage as you will discover while we ramble around its lakes, mountains and bog lands. As we journey through this spectacular area we arrive at Ireland's only **Fjord** and board our boat to tour Connemara by water. As we enjoy lunch on board we take in the dramatic sweep of landscape as we may pass between the Twelve Bens and the Maam Turk mountains to the South, in



County Galway; and the Mweelrea mountains to the North in County Mayo, as well as, the views out to the Atlantic at the mouth of the fjord. The views of the surrounding landscape are beautiful. We then continue to visit **Kylemore Abbey**, a former girl's boarding school that is now in the care of the Benedictine nuns and is one of the oldest Abbeys in Ireland. Its Gothic Church built in 1881 is beautiful and interesting with its Crypt and carved angelic gargoyles. This evening we return to Galway and enjoy dinner in a local restaurant. **Lunch on boat; Dinner & Overnight: Galway**
Dinner in Local Restaurant

Day 10 – WB Yeats, Sligo, & Donegal.....

This morning after a full Irish breakfast we bid farewell to Galway as we travel northwards to County Donegal. A short stop is planned at the **Knock Shrine**. This national shrine is visited by over 1.5 million people a year and is the site of an apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1879. We will drive through an area known as 'Yeats Country' in County Sligo after the Irish poet **W.B. Yeats**, who spent large parts of his childhood in this area. After enjoying time for lunch, we will stop in Drumcliffe, set against the striking backdrop of the Benbulbin Mountains and found in the churchyard, is the grave of W.B Yeats. We continue to Fermanagh where we will stop and enjoy a visit to **Belleek China** – we take a step back in time, as the museum contains pieces of china dating back to 1857 it is now what it was then, Belleek's reputation has been built on product excellence. Any piece with even the slightest flaw is destroyed – hence the product's perfection. We arrive in Donegal and have dinner together this evening. **Dinner and Overnight: Donegal**



Day 11 – The Giants Causeway.....



This morning after breakfast we depart Donegal and travel to the **Giant's Causeway** an amazing geologic formation of approx. 40,000 basalt stone – some as tall as 130 feet, and mostly hexagonal in shape. This is Northern Ireland's Premiere landmark and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We continue our journey via the **Dark Hedges** – this beautiful avenue of trees was planted



by the Stuart family in the eighteenth century. It was intended as a compelling landscape feature to impress visitors as they approached the entrance to their Georgian mansion, Gracehill House. Two centuries later, the trees remain a magnificent sight and have become one of the most photographed natural phenomena in Northern Ireland. In fact, the iconic trees have been used as a filming location in HBO's epic series Game of Thrones, representing the King's Road. We travel on towards Belfast via the **Glens of Antrim**, known locally simply as 'The Glens'. It comprises of nine Glens (Valleys) that radiate from the Antrim Plateau to the coast. We arrive in the city of Belfast and check into our hotel. We enjoy dinner together this evening. **Dinner and Overnight: Belfast**

Day 12 – Belfast City..... This morning after breakfast, we enjoy a panoramic sightseeing tour of this fascinating city, where the peace process has brought a revival of optimism to this city rich in Victorian elegance and blossoming with culture. We'll see Belfast's compact center on Donegal Square, which is dominated by the elaborate City Hall, which was officially reopened in October 2009 following its £11m, two year refurbishment. The US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton performed a ribbon cutting ceremony and unveiled a plaque to mark the reopening. We'll drive through West Belfast's Protestant neighborhood of Shankill Road and the Catholic neighborhood of Falls Road, where **large vivid murals painted** on the sides of buildings express the feelings that still run deep on both sides. Though the names of these areas were much in the news during 'The Troubles' the gate in the **Peace Wall** between them now stands open. This afternoon we take a visit to the **Titanic Belfast**, a state of the art interactive museum provides an unforgettable visitor experience. It tells the story of RMS Titanic, from her conception and launch into the River Lagan in 1911, to the tragic end of her maiden voyage a year later. It was here at Titanic Quarter (the former Queen's Island) in Belfast Harbor, the ship was built. Enjoy the exhibits at your own pace. We enjoy dinner together this evening. **Dinner and Overnight: Belfast**



Day 13 – Archery at Winterfell & live like Royalty.....



After enjoying breakfast we set out this morning to '**Winterfell Castle**' where we dress up in authentic Game of Thrones 'Stark Family' costumes and we'll receive instructions from 'Jon Snow' as we stand exactly where 'Jon Snow', 'Rob Stark' and 'Bran' stood and shoot medieval arrows using ancient bows (1 target between 2 people). We'll also enjoy a set tour on the estate. We then continue our journey to the 100 acres of beautifully manicured gardens and parkland – the setting for tonight's 19th Century Castle stay – **Cabra Castle**. Once we arrive at our Castle, enjoy your surroundings, whether it is a 'tea' on the terrace or a round of golf on the Castle's own 9 hole golf course, before enjoying a special dinner together this evening. **Dinner and Overnight: Cabra Castle Hotel**

Day 14 – The Boyne Valley and Prehistoric Newgrange.....



This morning after a leisurely breakfast at our castle surroundings we discover an area known as the Boyne Valley. This is without doubt Ireland's most historic area and contains some of Europe's most significant and spectacular prehistoric sites. The area is a World Heritage Site. The Neolithic passage tombs of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth are older than the pyramids in Egypt and pre-date Stonehenge by 1000 years. We enjoy a visit to the **Newgrange visitor's center** and an onsite visit to the passage grave of **Newgrange**. We continue on to the **Hill of Tara**, where it is said that a quarter of the landscape of Ireland can be seen from the hill. It is important as the traditional inauguration site of the ancient High Kings of Ireland. Although few of its monuments survived the test of time, it is an evocative place, much celebrated in Irish myth and legend.

From here we travel to the historic ruins of **Monasterboice**, an early Christian settlement that was founded by Saint Buite in the 5th century. It was an important center of religion and learning until the founding of nearby Mellifont Abbey in 1142. We make our way to Dublin for our final night and tonight we celebrate our trip by attending an Irish night with quality food and entertainment. **Overnight: Dublin Dinner Irish Night**

Day 15 - Homeward bound.....

This morning after breakfast pack your bags and head for Dublin airport where you will board your flight for home. Carry on your photos and memories and bring a bit of the Emerald Isle home with you. 'The Land of One Hundred Thousand Welcomes' will be expecting you again soon! *Slán leat!* (Goodbye in Irish)



Deluxe Ireland Adventure!

Accommodations – 13 Nights Hotels / Castle

- o 2 Nights Dublin The Grand Canal Hotel – or similar
- o 1 Night Waterford The Tower Hotel Waterford – or similar
- o 2 Nights Killarney The Killarney Towers Hotel – or similar
- o 1 Night Shanonside The Inn at Dromoland – or similar
- o 2 Nights Galway The Ardilaun House Hotel – or similar
- o 1 Night Donegal The Abbey Hotel – or similar
- o 2 Nights Belfast The Europa Hotel – or similar
- o 1 Night Kingscourt Cabra Castle Hotel or similar
- o 1 Night Dublin The Grand Canal Hotel or similar

Tour Inclusions:

Roundtrip non-stop Airfare from Dulles and airport transfers including transportation to/from St. Mary's County Meals:

- 13 Full Irish breakfasts daily (except morning of arrival)
- 13 Dinners – 8 hotel Dinners at your hotel/Castle, 1 Dinner and Entertainment at the Brazen Head Pub (Dublin's Oldest pub), 2 Dinners & Entertainment at Irish Night, 1 Dinner at local restaurant in Galway, 1 Dinner & Entertainment at Medieval Banquet
- 1 Lunch aboard the Killary Fjord boat cruise

Sightseeing, Entrance Fees, Transportation, and other:

- Driver/Guide & Coach for 14 days touring
- All tips for driver and guides
- One piece of luggage handling/person
- Sightseeing tour of Dublin, including entrances to St. Patrick's Cathedral and Trinity College; Sightseeing to Glendalough Monastic Site & Mount Usher Gardens; Full Day Sightseeing on the Ring of Kerry; Galway City Panoramic Sightseeing; Panoramic Sightseeing Tour of Belfast with step on guide; full Day Sightseeing in Connemara
- Visit to the House of Waterford Crystal, Cobh Heritage Museum, Blarney Castle and Gardens, Titanic Belfast – a Titanic visitor experience, the Cliffs of Moher & the Burren, the graveside of WB Yeats, Belleek China, Visit to the Giant's Causeway (a UNESCO World Heritage site) and the 'Dark Hedges' (Game of Thrones); Visit to *Brú na Bóinne* Visitor's Center and Newgrange-a UNESCO World Heritage site, to the Hill of Tara and Monasterboice
- Jaunting Cart Ride in Killarney; Ferry across the River Shannon
- Photo stop in Cork, Rock of Cashel, the Knock Shrine
- Killary Fjord boat cruise
- Enjoy 'Archery at Winterfell' (Game of Thrones)
- Optional tour of Guinness Storehouse in Dublin on Day 2, \$20
- **Fine print:** You are responsible for the cost of your drinks, snacks, and free-time sightseeing.



This is a **custom deluxe tour** of Ireland.

\$5.979 per person, double occupancy

Single supplement is \$865.

Optional Trip Insurance is available.



An initial deposit of \$450 per person is due along with your deposit form to hold your space.

Final balance is due June 14, 2017.

FOR RESERVATIONS OR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

GRAND AMERICAN TOURS ~ 1-800-423-0247

(Talk to Stephanie)

LONNA SISKIND ~ 301-862-1315 ~

trips@smcpsra.org or smcpsra@gmail.com

