

Kings Hill U3A Trip to Ireland



Sunday 19th May 2019 thirty seven members of Kings Hill U3A met in Asda car park in Kings Hill at 09.30 hours to meet the coach which would drive them to Heathrow Airport to catch a plane to Cork for the five day planned trip to Ireland.

The journey to the airport was done in good time as it was Sunday morning on the M25 and therefore not as busy as during the week. On arrival at the airport all travellers had to remain with the group organiser, June, as the seats were booked on a group basis. Once all had checked in and were through passport control, it was a case of waiting to be called for boarding. The walk to the terminal was short and our Aer Lingus plane took off on



time at 13.50 hours. It arrived in Cork on time and the coach with Bernard, who would be our driver for the next five days, was waiting for us once through passport control and in the arrival lounge.



The hotel destination for the holiday was in Tralee at the Meadowlands Hotel, and the journey from Cork to the hotel took about two hours. On arrival, rooms were allocated to us and details of meal times were given. Dinner that night was at 19.30 hours, but prior to that many met in the bar for drinks. It had been a long day, and after dinner most retired to bed.

Ring of Kerry

On Monday morning 20th May after a good early breakfast we began our first full day tour to the spectacular Ring of Kerry around the Iveragh Peninsular. The circular tour has 180km of coastline. The coach with our driver Bernard was waiting for us in the Hotel car park, along with our wonderful tour guide Dora, who would be with us for the next two days, an amazing lady who knew all of the history as well as beautiful sites and interesting places to see and visit on our tour. These included the magnificent Coomakista Pass, the Black Valley and the Skellig Islands. There on the island is Skellig Michael's Early Christian Monastery which dates back to the 6th century, and the Skellig lighthouses established in 1826. Dora pointed out that many of these locations were used to make films and one of the major films made in this region was Star Wars, The Last Jedi.



Our first stop of the morning was to a Heritage Award Winner The Kerry Bog Village. This unique village is made up of six dwellings with thatch roofing restored to their original setting. The village provides an insight into how the Kerrymen and their families lived and worked in the 18th century. On the same site as the village stood The Fox Inn, which is famous for Irish Coffee and Bailey's Coffee, of which most of our tour group sampled a glass as it was included with the entrance fee to the village.

We continued our journey around the Ring of Kerry to lovely Waterville and its beautiful seaside bay where we stopped for lunch. We then took a stroll along the seafront and took the chance to have a picture taken with a bronze statue of Charlie Chaplin who had a house overlooking the bay. The house is now a ruin but is being rebuilt by the Chaplin family.



Once everyone was back on board the coach after their lunch, we headed off to see more wonderful coastal views whilst being entertained by Dora singing some well known Irish songs and we all joined in.

The roads around the Ring of Kerry are quite narrow in places, which is why coaches are only allowed to go one way around the ring.

Unfortunately whilst on a narrow road we encountered a problem with a farm tractor that was coming towards us and instead of waiting in a wide driveway to a house, the tractor kept on coming and damaged all down one side of the coach. The tractor, driven by a young man

who was unwilling to declare his name, his age or place of work to coach driver Bernard, inevitably resulted in a call to the local Garda. The Garda took around 2hrs to deal with the problem; the road was blocked both ways during this time with other coaches and cars unable to move. Finally we got underway and continued our journey back to the hotel who had to be told we would be late back and could they make the evening dinner time a bit later. However, apart from the minor tractor problem, no injuries occurred and our Kings Hill U3A members were blessed with a wonderful first day of beautiful sunshine touring the amazing Ring of Kerry.

Dingle Peninsula

We set off for the third day of our holiday around the Dingle Peninsula - the sun was shining and we stopped in a pretty village by a 'babbling brook' where the air was so pure and clean. We were here to visit the Statue in honour of Tom Crean, an Irish seaman and Antarctic explorer who had completed 3 major expeditions to the Antarctic and was awarded the Albert Medal for Lifesaving. Ironically, he died in hospital after an operation for a burst appendix, just after his 61st birthday. Apart from the statue, there is a Pub in the village named after him where they serve Tom Crean's Beer. Sadly, it was too early in the morning to sample some!



Our next stop was in Dingle, our tour guide Dora had got up early that morning and made some scones which we had as a snack with gorgeous Irish butter and jam before splitting into two groups to visit the Dingle Distillery.

This is an Irish Whiskey Distillery established in 2012 and described as an 'Artisan' distillery located in a converted sawmill in Milltown on the outskirts of Dingle. It was established to produce Whiskey but



as this takes a long time to complete, they now make Gin and Vodka which is quicker and can reach the shops with 1-2 weeks. The Dingle Gin has just been awarded the top prize at the World Gin Awards in London, of which they are very proud. We thoroughly enjoyed all the tastings and the tour and several of us bought a bottle to bring home. Shopping and lunch were on the agenda in Dingle and I enjoyed some wonderful crab for



my lunch that day. Dora advised us all that we should not miss a Murphy's ice cream in Dingle and the coach waited for those that had not tried it so that they could. The Baileys Irish Cream flavour was particularly delicious.

The sun was still shining and we all really liked Dingle – a harbour town with a statue on the waterfront of Fungie, the resident dolphin who is often seen swimming in the bay. Ryan's Daughter was filmed here as the scenery is so rugged and long sandy beaches are plenty.

It was now early afternoon and we set off for our next destination to Inch Beach (we found out this was where Dora lived). This was a long sand spit, backed by a dune system reaching into Dingle Bay, which is popular with surfers, anglers and swimmers. There were several

‘sand surfers’ on the beach and many of us took time here to have a very bracing walk along the beach.



It was time to set off for our return journey to Tralee, having seen some most spectacular scenery imaginable on the coach trip around the Dingle Peninsula. Before we returned to our



hotel there was just time to visit the Rose Garden in Tralee Town Park, which is one of the largest urban public parks in Ireland. This famous Rose Garden has a statue commemorating the original Rose of Tralee – Mary O’Connor who was immortalised in the famous ballad by William Pembroke Mulchinock. The music and words of this song are inscribed on the glass statue and it was an opportunity to share the song with Dora, our guide, who often sang to us during our coach journey around the area.



Back to our hotel for a quick change and an early dinner. 25 of us were going to visit a local bar – Sean Og’s for some Irish music. The bar was packed with people from several different nationalities, apart from the locals – Spanish, German, American were a few I spoke to. The music and the atmosphere were great and we were disappointed not to stay longer but it had been a long day and we had another one to look forward to tomorrow.



Events on Day Four

It was ‘all change’ on the fourth day: Dora our guide was no longer with us, the temperature fell and the skies clouded over. The emphasis was now on events rather than the magnificent scenery. We were off to Killarney ‘the land of lakes’. At Muckross House we were conducted around the former home of the Herbert family by a local guide and heard how, after centuries of occupation, the family went bankrupt as a result of entertaining Queen Victoria and her Court for a couple of days. (Social Climbers Beware)



Next, we had the opportunity to tour the Muckross Traditional



Farms. Three farmhouses (complete with animals) demonstrating three levels of social standing and prosperity. We were assured that local people lived in these properties, without electricity and running water, as recently as the 1960s.

On the way back to our coach some of us had the great good fortune to encounter a group of young dancers. It was only after they had been persuaded to perform for us that they revealed that they were members of the cast of ‘Riverdance’ and on their way to shoot a promotional video for their world tour.

Then it was off to Ross Castle, ancestral home of the O’Donnahues, where we enjoyed a tranquil hour cruising the lake and hearing even more about the folly of the Herberts.

Finally we were driven, in convoy, through the National Park and on several miles of public roads in horse-drawn Jaunting Carts. Each cart carried about eight passengers and throughout the trip, we were entertained with a non-stop string of jokes.





Last Day

Thursday 23rd May and the holiday was almost over. The flight was at 16.00 hours, and after consultation with Bernard, our driver, it was decided that on the way to the airport we would visit Blarney. The lovely weather had deserted us and it was raining heavily when we went down to breakfast.



Once all the bills were paid and all luggage in the coach, the group left the hotel for the journey to Blarney which took about 1



hour 30 minutes. The rain had just stopped when we left the coach and the majority of the group headed for the restaurant where they could get a drink and, in some cases, delicious pastries.

The main attraction of course in Blarney is the castle and the Blarney Stone. Some of the U3A members did climb up the 100 steps to see it, others saw the castle from the road.

By 13.30 hours it was time to return to the coach and head for the airport in Cork. Once again it was a group ticket, but no problems were encountered getting through the check-in and passport control. Cork airport is very small but for those who wanted there was plenty to buy in duty free. The flight took off on time and landed early at Heathrow. Then the problems started...

The majority of our group came through without any problems. It was while we were waiting for about eight of our remaining travellers that it was discovered they were waiting for their luggage, which as it turned out, had been taken to another part of the terminal. After about an hour they were able to join us, complete with luggage, and we went to meet the coach which was waiting to drive us back to Kings Hill. Everyone had enjoyed a very successful holiday.