E-BOOK - 3RD EDITION

IRELAND
-PUB CRAWLS-

HOW TO:

TRAVEL IRELAND LIKE A CHAMPION

BY OWEN SARTORI & ELSA LEE

A GUIDE TO MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR IRELAND ADVENTURE

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This E-book was created and published as an informational guide for participants of tours created and operated by Ireland Pub Crawls LLC.

For more information about us, please visit:
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"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime." - Mark Twain

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prologue	5
Chapter 1: The Traveler's Mindset	7
Chapter 2: Pub Culture	11
Chapter 3: Packing Tips	14
Chapter 4: Money	20
Chapter 5: Shopping	23
Chapter 6: Transportation	25
Chapter 7: Food	28
Chapter 8: Communication	30
Chapter 9: Health	32
Chapter 10: Summary	36
About the Authors	37

PROLOGUE

Ireland Pub Crawls™ was originally a group of friends and family called “The Ireland Pub Crawl” or IPC. Our first official trip was in 2007, although I’d personally visited Ireland twice before: once on a six-week backpacking adventure, and once with my mother, brother, our spouses, and a few friends. It turns out, if you can make travel plans for one or two people, six is easy. When you’ve done six, 14 is easy. We went from 14 to 42 travelers in two years, and nothing has been the same since.

This is how my passion for crafting exciting, fulfilling, worthwhile trips for my friends was ignited. And I LOVE IT. I absolutely love it. Because this isn’t really about travel at all. It’s about growing and fortifying your circle of loved ones. And as with so many things in life, there is no better place in the world to accomplish this than in Ireland.

Why? Because of Ireland’s “Pub Culture.” In Ireland, the pub has always been a center of conversation, music, and fun (they call it “craic”). Buying a round is a gesture of friendship, one that is and should be reciprocated as its own gesture of appreciation. How great is that? The point is, I’ve never felt that kind of kinship anywhere else in the world, so I made it a central part of my life to share this experience with the people I love.

And so, the IPC was born.

For over 20 years, I’ve been researching, planning, and executing large-scale trips to Ireland (and several other places) for groups from 6 to 46. It’s one of my three big passions: music (my profession), cooking (my hobby), and the IPC (my life’s work).

Over the years, my Irish friends and vendors have been telling me that keeping this to myself is borderline selfish; there are people all over the U.S. who might find the same value in what I do as my friends and I have. With the help of my friend, colleague, and partner, Elsa Lee, I have decided to make this service a reality for people like you - friends I have not yet met.

If you're reading this, however, it's entirely likely that we have met, and better yet, that we're going to be spending time in Ireland together! If it's your first time, there are some things that would be helpful for you to know. That's what this book is for. Let's prepare you for the Pub Culture experience of your life.

Sláinte!

Owen



1.
THE TRAVELER'S MINDSET 

You want to go to Ireland, huh? We do, too. All the time. My obsession with bringing Americans to Ireland started 30 years ago. Elsa's is a new one, but it's every bit as strong as my own. The moment we decided to deliver the best of Ireland to the public, we began feverishly jotting down things we've learned in hopes that they could be helpful to people like you.

Let's get started, shall we?

WE ARE GUESTS IN THEIR HOME

There is a particularly unflattering image that arises when we hear the words 'ugly American.' It is, sadly, an earned reputation. Americans tend to be boisterous, loud, and, as well-meaning as we may be, we also tend to lack self-awareness in public settings. The first couple of IPC trips really shed light on this for me. This is why we came up with the '3 Tenets of the IPC.'

1. **Happy drinking.**
2. **Respectful traveling.**
3. **No drama.**

It's not a perfect system, of course, but it helped set expectations in a way that everyone understood, and it kept us from earning a bad reputation in our favorite place. (We do have a reputation, one that traveled between Visitor Offices on the west coast that may have spared Dingle the fate that Clifden endured two years prior. Stories explained upon request.)

Needless to say, the best experiences tend to go to the best guests. The Irish are fun-loving and high-energy people, and they generally love Americans, especially in the pubs. But a few small considerations will go a long way.

Read the room. Say please. Say thank you. Be patient. When things don't go your way, don't get upset. When you're in the care of the Irish, you are among the friendliest people on the planet, who, when treated well, will treat you to experiences that most tourists never see. That's the real Ireland, and that's what we're here for.

LUCK FAVORS THE PREPARED

Ireland offers a wealth of opportunities for the flexible traveler, which is another way of saying that you never know what's going to happen. For example, in March of 2011, a significant number of our crew got sunburned. In March of 2013, it snowed three days in a row. A person who had never had an allergic reaction in his life got one from a piece of artisan cheese. (Spoiler: it was me.) Another got a piece of chicken stuck at the base



of his esophagus and had to go to the ER to have it pushed into his stomach. (Not me.)

The likelihood of any of these events was exceedingly rare. But knowing that the unusual is always a possibility, we recommend small bits of preparation for unlikely scenarios. We have a packing list prepared for later on, but here are some tips to get you started:

- **It rains in Ireland (gasp). Bring an umbrella.**
- **It rains in Ireland. Bring waterproof shoes.**
- **It rains in Ireland. Bring a deck of cards.**
- **Irish food can be tough on the stomach. Bring antacids.**
- **Irish beer can be tough on the colon. Bring wet wipes.**
- **Irish weather can be unpredictable. Bring layers.**

You get the idea. Moments when you really wish you had [insert item you really could use at the time] could feel unlucky. But if you're prepared, you'll feel like you have the luck of the Irish.

WE ARE FAMILY

In the Book of Genesis, after doing away with his brother, Cain gets asked by God, "Where is your brother, Abel?" To which he clapped back, "I don't know, am I my brother's keeper?" CAN YOU IMAGINE the nerve of that guy? Now that's chutzpah!

I don't anticipate that kind of dynamic with any of our travelers (no biblical violence of any kind, please and thank you) but I've always thought of this passage to mean, "do I have a responsibility to be considerate of and to care for my family?"

Our answer is a resounding YES.

You (we) are a travel family. How one behaves can affect the entire group. And so, the best way to have a stellar group vacation abroad is to look after one another. The care and consideration we show each other is evident to everyone, including the locals. Let's strive to be outstanding guests and a great family.

2.
PUB CULTURE



There is a kind of mythology that surrounds Irish pubs. You can go nearly anywhere in the world and find one. There is a reason for that, and it's not *just* about the Guinness. It's about what the Irish pub represents. And that, my friends, is called Pub Culture.

HISTORY

Drinking at home isn't nearly as common or as popular in Ireland as it is in the States. There, enjoying pints or spirits is largely the domain of the pub. In fact, there are really three main centers of social interaction in Ireland: the church, the football match, and the pub. When you're done with the first two, it's time for number three.

The pub (short for public house) is a center for conversation, warmth, music, and good will. It has that name for a reason. The pub is a home away from home, and a place to spend quality time with friends and family. And just as with any home, there are rules and traditions of which Americans should be aware. Some of it is body language, some of it is in what we say and do. All of it boils down to the concept of pub etiquette.

PUB ETIQUETTE

The bulk of what I have learned about pub etiquette happened during my first trip. I was a recent college graduate with a large backpack, staying in hostels and learning everything I could about this beautiful country and its people. Most of that happened in the pubs. I will spare you the details (unless it's entertaining), but a lot of it was through trial and LOTS of error. Here are some things every American should know when enjoying the pubs in Ireland.

- **Ordering pints takes time.** A perfect pint should take between 2-3 minutes to pour. It's worth the wait, fear not.

- **Put it on your tab?** Nope. Unless you're ordering food at the same time, buying drinks is a pay-as-you-go situation.

- **A pint means different things in different places.** Normally, if you're in a pub and order a 'pint,' you will get a Guinness... unless you're in County Cork, where you might hear the phrase 'a pint of here, or a pint of there?' 'Here' means Murphy's Stout, and 'there' means Guinness. Just to be safe, it's best to order your drinks by name.

- **Whiskey & Coke?** Sure. You'll get a shot of whiskey and a small bottle of Coke, and it will be expensive.

- **Sit or stand?** It makes a difference. In general, standing sends a message that you are open to conversation with the other folks at the bar. Sitting says that you would prefer a more private evening.

- **The round system.** It's customary to buy rounds for your group, and the implied response is that the people in the group will return the favor.

- **Splitting checks is a no-go.** Especially for larger groups, servers don't generally split bills for you in Ireland. Being clear up front who is on what tab is crucial.

- **Tipping?** It is not expected in Ireland. But a small tip for great service is still appreciated. That goes for servers and drivers alike.

- **Where is the bathroom?** Well, they don't say bathroom there since there is no bath in there. So when you need to go, the question is "Where is the toilet?"

- **One last thing.** If you're ordering two pints and using a hand gesture to signify the number 2, position your hand like a peace sign, not with your palm facing you. That's the two-finger version of a common one-finger salute here in America. It's best to avoid the confusion. And yes, this lesson comes from personal experience.

3.
PACKING TIPS

Packing can be fun... or a pain. It's an exciting last step before your trip, but there are so many things to consider. Where are you going? What is the weather going to be like? How close are supplies if you forget something? Are you bringing things home? Will you have a chance to do laundry? What is the airline policy on baggage? Exactly how many bottles of whiskey can you fit in a bag before you get pulled aside at customs or searched by the TSA? These are the important questions, so let's talk about packing smart.

START SMALL

Most Ireland adventures involve some degree of walking. Almost everything worth seeing is a 'good stretch of the legs,' so unless rucking is part of your new workout routine, you may want to consider your luggage choices carefully.



Try limiting your luggage to a carry-on suitcase and a personal item, like a backpack or a large purse. That's it. It may sound impossible for a 7-10 day trip, but if you prepare properly (and don't plan to bring a lot of souvenirs home), your body - and wallet - will thank you.

Find out if there are laundry services available mid-trip. Avoid purchasing and packing things you can easily acquire when you arrive. If you plan on adding some local pieces to your wardrobe, pack items you'd be comfortable donating and leaving behind. One year, an absolute LEGEND packed everything he needed for his entire IPC trip into his winter jacket and a personal item. Not kidding.

IT'S ALL ABOUT LAYERS

There is an old saying that goes, "If you don't like the weather in Ireland, wait 30 minutes." The result of these rapid weather changes is some of the greenest, most beautiful countrysides you'll ever see. To the unprepared traveler, it could mean waterlogged shoes, a ruined hairdo, and a wasted day.

Although it can get hot in Ireland, that's not the kind of weather you need to be most concerned about. Even if you're traveling in the summer, bring a pair of good wool socks, maybe even some thermal clothes if you'll be there in the shoulder seasons. A weather-resistant jacket, a sweater, a zip-up hoodie, maybe a warm hat and light gloves. These are things you can put on in a pinch, don't take up a lot of room, and you really only need one of. Things that can be quickly put on and taken off can make your day-to-day outdoor time much more enjoyable.

BRINGING THINGS HOME

Assuming you have heeded our advice on packing light, now you're probably coming to the realization that you will never be able to make your souvenirs fit in that tiny bag. And if there are liquids involved, well, that's also going to be tough. Here are a few things to keep in mind as you're planning for the return trip home.

The benefit of a checked bag. I know what I said. A carry-on and a personal item. But if you have a free or inexpensive checked bag included in your airfare, you can use this to your advantage. Your carry-on will likely fit *inside* your suitcase, so packing the right items in your personal item means an entire full-sized suitcase for bringing things home at no extra cost.

Bringing home spirits, explained. You can't bring large quantities of liquids in your carry-on, but that checked bag we just talked about can carry up to 5 liters (that's 6 full-sized bottles and then some) inside. If you pack wisely and safely, and stay under 50 lbs, a checked bag is a great way to get those hard-to-find elixirs home to the States. Alternatively, if you just want to hit the Duty Free store on your way out of the country, they'll bag it and you can carry it on.

Shipping your goods may be best. Depending on what you purchase, it might be smarter to just have the retailer send it to you. Bulky things are no fun to cart around, and trusting delicate things to the "throwers" (baggage handlers) can be a risky proposition. There could be a cost benefit as well. Some retailers can remove the VAT (value added tax) if it's going overseas. Others like the Woolen Mills chain ship free with orders over a certain amount.

Still not sure where to begin? Elsa put together a checklist that you can use to get started. Let's get packing!

WHAT SHOULD I BRING TO IRELAND?

CLOTHES

In the blank, fill in the number you think you will need.

- ☐ ___ Underwear
- ☐ ___ Socks / Wool Socks
- ☐ ___ Bras / Undershirts
- ☐ ___ Pajamas
- ☐ ___ Shirts / T-Shirts
- ☐ ___ Jeans / Pants
- ☐ ___ Layers (Vests, Fleeces, Sweaters, Hoodies)
- ☐ House Shoes / Slippers
- ☐ Sneakers / Walking Shoes
- ☐ Additional Shoes
- ☐ Rain / Waterproof Boots
- ☐ Bathing Suit (Never know!)
- ☐ Rain Jacket
- ☐ Warm Jacket
- ☐ Hat
- ☐ Gloves
- ☐ Scarf
- ☐ Jewelry
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
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TOILETRIES

- ☐ Toothbrush
- ☐ Toothpaste
- ☐ Floss
- ☐ Mouthwash
- ☐ Shampoo
- ☐ Conditioner
- ☐ Body Wash
- ☐ Face Wash / Products
- ☐ Hair Products
- ☐ Deodorant
- ☐ Shaving Cream
- ☐ Razor
- ☐ Contacts / Solution
- ☐ Glasses
- ☐ Lotion / Moisturizer
- ☐ Makeup / Remover
- ☐ Comb / Brush
- ☐ Mouth Guard / Retainer
- ☐ Feminine Products
- ☐ _____
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MEDICINALS

- ☐ Personal Prescriptions
- ☐ Pain Reliever
- ☐ Antacids
- ☐ Dramamine
- ☐ Imodium
- ☐ Hydration Multiplier
- ☐ Benadryl
- ☐ Band Aids
- ☐ Vitamins / Supplements
- ☐ Hangover Remedies
- ☐ Nail File
- ☐ Chapstick
- ☐ Wet Wipes
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

FLIGHT

- ☐ Book(s)
- ☐ Snacks
- ☐ Ear Plugs
- ☐ Eye Mask
- ☐ Phone
- ☐ Tablet / Computer
- ☐ Charger(s)
- ☐ Water Bottle
- ☐ Hand Sanitizer
- ☐ Passport
- ☐ Wallet / Cards / Cash
- ☐ Driver's License
- ☐ Ticket / Itinerary
- ☐ Headphones
- ☐ Compression Socks
- ☐ Emergency Contacts
- ☐ Lodging Contact Info
- ☐ Neck Pillow
- ☐ Gum
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

MISCELLANEOUS

- ☐ Travel Journal
- ☐ Copy of Travel Documents
- ☐ External Battery
- ☐ Sunglasses
- ☐ Reading Glasses
- ☐ Umbrella
- ☐ Outlet Converter
- ☐ Curling / Flat Iron
- ☐ Deck of Cards / Games
- ☐ Bluetooth Speaker
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WHAT SHOULD I BRING TO IRELAND?

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MONEY €



Money. Unless you're somehow part of a barter economy (which sounds kinda cool in principle), money is how we pay for things. The question is, what's the best way to handle money in Ireland? Here are some best practices on how much to bring, how to spend it, and how to make it stretch.

HOW CURRENCY EXCHANGE WORKS

We are so proud of our Dollars, aren't we? There are three main differences between our paper currency and theirs. Our bills are all the same size. Theirs get bigger as the bill gains value. Ours are the same color. Theirs are different colors. The biggest difference between Dollars and Euros? You can actually spend Euros there.

So how do we get Euros here in the U.S.? From least to most favorable options, you can:

- **Exchange Dollars for Euros at an airport kiosk.** The rates and fees aren't great, but if you're in a pinch, they are always there.

- **Order Euros from your bank.** You will need to give your bank enough notice (we recommend two weeks) to get you the right amount, but the rates are generally better than at a kiosk.

- **Use an ATM when you get to Ireland.** Again, while it's best to have some Euros on hand before you arrive, ATMs are everywhere. There are definitely going to be fees, but the rates are about as good as you'll find. If you can, take out the maximum allowed to get the best value per transaction.

Oh, and one last note. Euro coins are actually valuable. They don't waste paper on the small stuff, so you'll find 1 and 2 Euro coins filling your pockets as you make purchases. Keep the heavy stuff handy. It spends just like anything else.

CASH, CREDIT, OR TRAVELER'S CHECKS

Let's cover the last one first. Traveler's checks used to be a safe way to carry money. It required signatures and the money was guaranteed by your bank, so the chances of them being used fraudulently were low. However, today's credit and debit card security measures and fraud protection services are worlds beyond what they used to be, so let's say "bye bye" to bringing traveler's checks.

Cash is best for small purchases. You may need it for cabs, and you may not want to get out a credit card every time you buy a pint at a pub (especially if you have foreign transaction fees), so keeping cash on hand is smart. We recommend safely and separately carrying between 100 and 200 Euros. This way, if something happens (like a lost wallet), you're not out a lot of money. Or if your credit cards aren't working, you can still eat, drink, get transportation and, if need be, emergency lodging.

Credit card use is ubiquitous in Ireland, so get yourself a travel card with no foreign transaction fees and have a blast. Most debit cards also work just fine. Most places use the "tap" system, which is quick, easy, and safe. Keep in mind, however, that while Visa and MasterCard are accepted almost everywhere, American Express is still hit or miss. Lastly, although it's largely an outdated practice, it might be a good idea to let your bank know when you'll be out of the U.S. You don't want to have your new Aran Wool sweater purchase get stopped because your bank thinks you're a scammer.

5.
SHOPPING

Why is it important to have a whole chapter devoted to shopping? We all know how to shop. You want a thing. They tell you how much a thing is. You pay for the thing. They give you the thing. Well, that's mostly true, except for one very important piece of information. We need to have a talk about the VAT.

THE VAT

Value Added Tax. Think of it as a universal goods and services tax that applies to almost everything. Hotels, merchandise, even beer. The percentage varies, but in Ireland it's somewhere in the area of 23%.

There are two things you need to know about the VAT. First, unlike in the U.S., that tax is included in the advertised price of what you're buying, not added after. Second, as a non-resident, you can GET SOME OF IT BACK.

This is amazing! It's like you're getting a massive discount on everything you buy, right? WRONG. You need to know what to look for, what to buy, and how to spend that money in order to get that refund.

What is eligible for a refund? Even though you're paying a VAT on nearly everything, only goods are eligible. Think "souvenirs" when you think about a VAT refund. Rugby uniforms? Yes. Hotel stays? No. Sheepskin rugs? Sure. Rounds of pints? Sorry, no.

How much do I have to spend? This is the thing that most people overlook when thinking about the VAT refund. You need to spend at least 75 Euros *in a single purchase* in order to receive a refund from that purchase. That puts a damper on diversifying your gifts (to yourself and others), but that discount might be the reason you can afford even more stuff!

How do I get my refund? This is also tricky but worth it.

1. Confirm with the store that they are giving you the VAT refund paperwork when you buy your goods. If they don't have the VAT refund paperwork, you can still get your refund. More on that in a moment.
2. Keep your receipts.
3. Complete your refund voucher, which is part of the VAT refund paperwork you received from the store. If you didn't receive it, forms are available at Customs.
4. When you're at the airport and on your way home, it's time to visit the VAT refund agent. (Located after security but before you get to US Customs or the gates.)
5. Complete and present your paperwork to the VAT refund agent and follow their instructions carefully. Be patient and polite. If everything is in order, they will stamp your forms and a credit for your VAT refund will appear on your credit card.

What's better than a refund? Not paying the VAT at all. Some stores will refund you on the spot. Some will offer free shipping with certain purchases, which is the holy grail of goods shopping. No VAT, and no carrying it around with you. You just have to be sure to ask!

6.
TRANSPORTATION

Most of our trips involve organized transportation throughout your time here. That usually involves private coaches, minibuses, or public trains. But you may want to go off on your own. You may want to extend your stay or come back and bring your own friend-family to experience what you have. That's fine. But I have a few rules to live by when it comes to transportation in Ireland, and they go something like this.

DON'T DRIVE YOURSELF

As talented a driver as one might be, if you don't have experience navigating traffic from the other side of the road, don't pretend that it's going to be easy. It isn't. And just when you think it will be, remember that you'll be driving from the other side of the car. Add on to that the fact that most rental cars in Ireland are still manual transmission. See the price tag to make that driving fantasy come true and that dream quickly becomes a nightmare.

Real talk. When you take on unnecessary risks, you put yourself and the people with you in danger. You put the locals in danger. You risk ruining the trip for everyone in your travel group. The Irish know what they're doing. Let them drive.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Ireland's public transportation options can take you virtually anywhere you want. They're safe and comfortable, and mostly reliable (some more than others). Best part? They're cheap. Surprisingly cheap.



Iarnród Éireann (Irish Rail) - There are several services being run simultaneously. The DART (Dublin Area Rapid Transit) serves the greater Dublin area. But you can take any of a number of lines from Dublin (or other big cities) to all corners of the island. It's fast, safe, clean and almost always ON TIME. But since Covid, we've had to say goodbye to the drink and food car (rip).

Bus Éireann (Irish Bus) - For the places you can't get to by rail (and most places you can) there's the bus. It's also safe and clean, and even cheaper than the train. Plus, every little village and big city has them. They aren't quite as reliably on-time as the train, but hey. You get what you pay for. Enjoy the ride.

TAXIS

Taxis are a temporary solution to a temporary problem. You need a quick ride somewhere, and there are usually taxi services to get you there, even in the small towns. But they're not as regulated or as predictable as they might be here at home. The key with taxis is asking prices up front, and making sure you have cash. You don't want to, for example, take a taxi to the airport and realize they don't take cards. One of my more embarrassing moments, to be sure.

To avoid all of that, download the FREENOW app. It works much like Uber or Lyft, and it's used in most of Ireland's midsize to large cities.

PRIVATE COACHES

Group travel poses a unique set of challenges and opportunities. It's tough to coordinate travel for a dozen or more people at a time, but a private coach is one of the absolute best and most affordable ways to make it work. That is, if you take the time to get to know your drivers. Many of the drivers we've become friends with over the years are knowledgeable about the country and its history, they are engaging storytellers, and they have been adopted into our travel family year after year. Drivers like Tony and Jerry and Gene and Austin and Kevin and Jonathan and Jackie and Peter have been the key to timely travel, reliable day trips, and experiences that many tourists never have.

7. FOOD

Many Americans prepare for their St. Patrick's Day celebrations by serving the most iconic of Irish meals: the traditional plate of corned beef and cabbage. Except there is one problem. Corned beef isn't Irish. It's delicious, sure, but you'll be hard-pressed to find it on any menu in Ireland. The point is, you should be prepared for a wide array of offerings that you might not expect. Let's dig in.

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF IRISH CUISINE

Let's talk about Irish food. It's likely that many of your meals will take place in pubs, which means fish & chips, bangers & mash, Guinness stew, shepherd's pie, or a full Irish breakfast (see below). It's a lot of fried food, lots of root vegetables, and an unnecessary amount of brown gravy. And most of the time it's delicious.



But there are some hidden gems on those menus, and some surprises to be had.

Simple - Irish soups are simple blended vegetable soups, but paired with some soda bread, you have a cheap, filling meal. And if you can find yourself a toasted special (grilled cheese with tomato and onion), it's peasant food perfection.

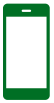
Mid-range - Among the best food items in Ireland are the choices that are not Irish. England's occupation of India brought incredible curry dishes to Ireland. And, I can personally attest to the fact that the best Chinese meal of my life was served in Dingle, Ireland.

Upscale - Ireland's restaurant scene went through quite an overhaul about 20 years ago. There were very few high-end dining options at the time, and today there are over 100 Michelin rated restaurants around the country. Local lamb. Mussels. Scallops. The list is impressive. Just reserve your tables way in advance.

SELF-CATERING

If you want your money to stretch, there are smart ways to eat. Local markets and chain supermarkets are everywhere. When we stay in self-catering houses and lodges, my groups usually hit the market for basics like bread, bacon, eggs, coffee, snacks, frozen pizzas, beer, etc... And here's why.

As much as traveling brings people together, sharing meals does it better. People go to Ireland to get closer to the people that they're with. It's one heck of a side benefit to saving money by making your own food.

8.
COMMUNICATION 

Communication! It's how we, you know... talk to people. Things have really changed since my first time in Ireland. There wasn't social media, and we didn't have our own phones. It was all about pay phones, prepaid calling cards, internet cafés, AOL, and postcards. Today, you can geotag your location, use a "find my" thingy, or snappy chat your instant cramps all over the Facebooks.

I'm showing my age, as if the hair didn't do that already. The point is, knowing how to use your phone in Ireland isn't as easy as one might think.

PHONES AND HOW TO USE THEM

Even if you have an international phone plan (a good idea, if even temporarily), your phone is still an American phone with an American SIM card. Some people purchase Irish SIM cards when they get there, but that sounds like too much work to me. I like to keep it simple. Changing your SIM card, which changes your phone number, doesn't seem simple. Plus, I don't think I'd know how to change it on my phone if I tried.

Calling your fellow travelers or the people back home is the same as calling them here. Calling Ireland? That can get confusing. Here's how you do it.

Step 1: **Dial 011** (The Exit Code for the USA)
Step 2: **Dial 353** (The Country Code for Ireland)
Step 3: **Dial the area code** (It will be 1-2 digits)
Step 4: **Dial the phone number** (Usually 7 digits)
Step 5: **Listen carefully** (They speak English, but it sure doesn't sound like it sometimes.)

WIFI

This used to be a sore subject for me, and I'll explain later. As a modern country with all of the technological advances that go with that distinction, Ireland is ready to handle your wireless needs. Well, most of the time. The cities are well-equipped, generally speaking. But the farther you venture into the rural areas, the more difficult connectivity can be. That is true for WiFi, but especially for cell service.

Most hotels and rental houses have WiFi available as well, and at times you'll be paying an extra fee for that luxury. That said, WiFi calling can still save you some money over roaming charges.

And now, a tiny bit of whining. You've spent a considerable amount of time and money making your way onto your IPC adventure. One of my pet peeves is sitting in a comfortable pub next to a peat fire, a pint in hand, music in the air, and friends all around... and someone in the group is mindlessly scrolling through social media. *sigh* I guarantee you, when you look back at your trip, you won't be fondly reminiscing about that meme you saw on your socials. So forget about the phone. Remember the experience.

WHATSAPP

Now that I just got done complaining about WiFi, it's time to talk about the most common communication app in use in Ireland. WhatsApp. You can call and text just like with any other service, but this is free. And what do you need to be able to use this remarkable tool? WiFi. UGH.

9.
HEALTH

When I happened upon an artisan cheese shop in Dingle one year, I thought to myself, 'I'm from a cheese family, so let's try that stinky seaweed cheese that looks like it was aged under a pile of rocks. I am not afraid!' So I did, and minutes later, I had my first actual allergic reaction. Heart racing, hives, nothing super serious, but it was enough to worry everyone around me. And one thing I did not pack was Benadryl. Luckily, one of our travelers rushed straight to the chemist (pharmacy) to save the day.

It was closed for lunch.

Even MORE luckily, at that moment, a local woman happened to be walking by and noticed my friend in distress. She asked what my friend was looking for, who responded with 'Benadryl.' The woman reached into her purse and pulled out two pills and handed them to my friend. You guessed it. Benadryl.

This should be an illustration of just how selfless and thoughtful the Irish are, and it is. But it also lays out an important lesson. If you don't have your health, you don't have anything. So let's talk about keeping yourself healthy on an Ireland adventure.

LET'S KEEP THIS PARTY GOING

Hangovers. Never had one? Let me explain. When you drink too much alcohol, you become dehydrated. Your blood sugar drops. Your stomach lining can become inflamed. Your blood vessels expand. The resulting lethargy, headache and nausea is what we in the drinking community call a "hangover." If the Guinness, Smithwick's, Bulmers, and Jameson calls your name (and it will), there are some tried and tested ways to minimize your hangover and maximize your good times.

- **Drink water.**
- **Eat well before drinking.**
- **Limit brown liquors and sugary drinks.**
- **Get good sleep.**

These are obvious to most people, but it's a good reminder. Of course, there are other ways to preempt a hangover. Check with your doctor before doing any of these as we are not medical experts, but we have used these methods with some success.

- **Take Ibuprofen before bed.**
- **Drink Pedialyte / Liquid IV / Emergen-C.**
- **Put on a vitamin patch before drinking.**
- **Eat a raw potato.**
- **Have a little "hair of the dog."**
- **Sleep in.**
- **Stop being such a baby.**

It should be obvious that I am not a doctor and you should take no health-related advice from me. Just know that I've had vacation days ruined by hangovers and it's no fun. Take care of yourself and make the most of your time in Ireland.

WHEN THE BIG STUFF HAPPENS

In the 20+ years that I've been leading trips to Ireland, we have had precisely TWO trips to the hospital. And one was in Scotland, so maybe it doesn't count. That's not to say people haven't gotten sick or hurt, but a sinus infection, a rolled ankle, or a gluteal contusion aren't generally cause for alarm. That said, when the serious stuff happens, it helps to have a plan, and a little information.

Ireland has comprehensive public health care... for residents, not for us. If we go to a hospital there, we'll still be glad to have insurance coverage. At the same time, as their government-sponsored, not-for-profit health care system tends to have much lower costs than our private, for-profit system, even if you had to pay out of pocket for emergency care, it could be less than your normal insurance deductible here at home.

Tell someone if you need help. There are plenty of hospitals and clinics in Ireland, and we'll always be relatively near one. So tell a friend. Tell the bus driver. Call the front desk at the hotel. Like I said, it's exceedingly unlikely that the big stuff will happen, but the Irish are ready to help if it does.

TRAVEL INSURANCE IS A GOOD IDEA

While travel insurance doesn't cover everything, it does cover things like trip cancellation or interruption, lost baggage, emergency medical costs and emergency evacuation. You may already have good health insurance, which might be helpful in Ireland, but for the $20-$30 a day that decent travel insurance costs, it's a smart move to cover your posterior.

10.
SUMMARY

Ireland is awesome. I think we've established that. I've made so many guides over the years that prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that this is the case. But you know what the guides also prove? They prove that NOBODY READS THE GUIDES. Sure, there are a few exceptions, and those people have earned my love and appreciation. For the rest, a Cliff's Notes version of the book is often required. Let's review.

- **You are a guest in their home.**
- **Luck favors the prepared.**
- **Take care of your travel family.**
- **Follow pub etiquette.**
- **Pack light, but pack well.**
- **Get a couple hundred Euros before you travel.**
- **Use ATMs for the rest.**
- **Visa & MasterCard good, American Express bad.**
- **Keep receipts for your VAT refund.**
- **Let the locals drive.**
- **Try all the foods.**
- **Get an international phone plan.**
- **Less social media, more social interaction.**
- **Download WhatsApp.**
- **Stay hydrated.**
- **Get travel insurance.**
- **Remember the experience.**

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Owen Sartori has been a travel leader and planner of small and large-scale trips to Ireland for friends and family since 1997. He is also a professional musician, songwriter, music producer and studio owner. In 2021, he turned his decades of experience and passion for all things Ireland into a travel business called Ireland Pub Crawls.

Elsa Lee is also a professional musician, engineer, songwriter and performer. She performs under the stage name ELSKA, and has made it a goal in her life to tour Ireland as long and as often as humanly possible.