

## NORTHERN IRELAND HOLIDAY

If you think of iconic places in Northern Ireland, what comes to mind? In my case it is the dock area with the Harland and Wolff Cranes and the Titanic Museum, Stormont Castle for all the Northern Irish politics, and The Giants Causeway. And on this trip we visited all of these.

Monday 4th                      Travel to Dumfries              Weather: Good all day

We departed WCH at 0955 and travelled non-stop to Ferrybridge Services at the junction of the A1 and M62 to change drivers. With several alternative routes that we could have travelled, we continued up the A1 to Scotch Corner and took the A66 across to Penrith to join the M6 northbound. This part of the A66 follows the course of the original Roman Road across the North Pennines. Plenty of local wildlife to be seen including Highland Cattle and yes, Camels and Llamas. We continued to Dumfries for our hotel for the night and arrived at The Holiday Inn in the grounds of the Crichton Estate where a modern hotel has been blended in with the original country house. The 85-acre grounds house businesses and colleges of Glasgow University.

Tuesday 5th                      Ferry To NI                      Weather: Good all day

At 0800 next morning we set off to Cairnryan to catch our ferry to Belfast, arriving around 1400. A tour guide had been arranged to join the coach and for two hours we toured the city. We had stops at City hall and Queens University and passed through both Catholic and Protestant areas including the Shankhill and Falls Road areas to look at the wall art on those structures originally built to keep the two communities apart. They are no longer separated communities, but the walls are still in place as it is not economical to try and take them down.



After the tour we continued our journey to our base for four nights, the Dunadry Hotel near Antrim.

Wednesday 6th                      Antrim Castle and Gardens

This was a more relaxing day with a local visit to Antrim Castle and Gardens, and a look around the town of Antrim before returning to our hotel early afternoon.

Thursday 7th                      Giants Causeway and Whitehead Railway Museum                      Weather: good in the morning with rain in the afternoon with sharp showers at Whitehead and more steady rain as we drove back from Whitehead.

At 0915 we headed off north towards Bushmills, famed for its Irish Whiskey, and the Giants Causeway. We arrived at 1030 and most of the party headed down from the Visitors Centre down to see the fascinating Basalt rock structure of the causeway. It was a fifteen-minute walk or a regular bus service for those who would have struggled with the walk which was quite steep in places.



After lunch in the visitor's centre the coach set off at 1230 and headed for the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland (RPSI) Museum at Whitehead on the east coast. It was an amazing journey through the Antrim Mountains to Larne before following the coast road to Whitehead. Here we had a guided tour of the museum and its artefacts with the history of the railways in Northern Ireland.

Friday 8th                      Stormont Castle and Titanic Museum                      Weather: good all day

We left the hotel at 0915 and headed to Stormont Castle, the seat of Northern Ireland politics. Even though the parliament is not sitting we underwent a full security check before being allowed to enter. We had the benefit of a tour guide for an hour explaining the history of Northern Ireland politics and the current problems of why there is not a working parliament at the moment. We also learnt the official political description

of the difference of lying, and not telling the truth, and why politicians touch the red boxes of state as they speak. These boxes used to carry a religious book of the person's faith, as in swearing on the bible to tell the truth.



After a quick lunch we then travelled to the Titanic Museum at the waterfront. This was an amazing museum telling the history of shipbuilding and other associated businesses, and of course the history of the Olympic class liners built between 1908 and 1915, including the Titanic. It created the dark and noisy atmosphere of building the Titanic but made reading some of the information quite difficult. It continued through its fitting out, sea trials, and fateful maiden voyage. It went into great detail of what went wrong leading up to the iceberg incident concluding there were several major factors coming together to create the situation. We then returned to the hotel for our last evening meal and to pack our bags.



Saturday 9th                      Ferry to Cairnryan and onto Stockport                      Weather: good all day

We departed at 0900 for the thirty-minute trip to the Stenna Line ferry terminal at Belfast and finally set sail around 1130, and arrived in Cairnryan at 1345, and back on the road again towards England and the M6 around 1400 hrs. We crossed the border into England at 1625 and arrived at our Holiday Inn in Stockport at 1945. This holiday Inn was a bit different to the Dumfries one and was right next to the railway station in the town.

Sunday 10th                      Hardwick Hall and return to Wymondham                      Weather: rain on way home

Our originally planned trip to Hardwick Hall on the way back to Wymondham had been cancelled. We left Stockport at 0900 and arrived back in Wymondham at around 1445.

With the exception of Hardwick Hall on the way home all our visits were very successful. And of course we have to thank our weather goddess, Vivienne, for:

Providing two smooth sea crossings and only permitting rain when we were either inside a museum or on the coach. To keep us dry in Ireland must be close to miracle proportions.