

Frequently Asked Questions: Ireland Castles Tea Tour

Most of the questions you have regarding your tour can be answered by reading through this material; however, the terms and conditions of your travel arrangements are controlled by the 'Tour Contract'.

Knowing as much as you can ahead of time will enable you to enjoy your tour experience to the fullest. For these reasons, it is necessary that you read the FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS and the TOUR CONTRACT prior to reserving a spot on the tour. Our tours are limited to 10-12 participants, so we suggest sending in your application as soon as you have decided to join us.

Will the hotel rooms have private bathrooms?

Yes, we select accommodations that offer rooms with a private bathroom with sink, toilet, and shower and/or bathtub.

What is the difference between a double and a twin room?

A 'double' room consists of one double bed. Often the European 'twin' accommodations consist of two twin size beds made up separately, placed side by side sharing the same headboard. In some hotels it may not be possible to separate these twin beds. The Secret Garden can request 'twin' or 'double' accommodations, but at some hotels there will not be any choice or participants may not receive their preferred choice due to limited allotments. Twin rooms will be given to single travelers sharing a room first and then to tour participants who are traveling together.

Can I join the tour if I do not have a roommate?

Yes. We will have other single travelers on the trip, so we will pair all singles with a roommate of the same sex. In some locations, single rooms are available at a premium price. If you would prefer a single room when available, indicate this on your tour reservation application and we will email you the price and availability for the trip you have requested.

How are the rooms assigned?

The location, view, and size of the rooms may vary. In most cases the establishment will make the assignments. In other cases, we will assign the rooms randomly, based on room types requested.

Do Hotels have air conditioning?

Air conditioning is not as widely used in Europe as it is in the United States, therefore, some of our accommodations may not feature air conditioning.

What can I expect for breakfast?

While some accommodations may serve a continental breakfast, most breakfasts will be buffet style with a selection of rolls, butter, jam, cheese, cold cuts, coffee, tea, milk and juice. In some locations, a "full Irish breakfast" will be served which typically includes orange juice, cereals, stewed or fresh fruits, eggs, bacon or sausages, grilled tomato, mushrooms, beans, tea, and toast.

What can I expect for lunch?

Lunches will typically be "on the go", with each person purchasing their own. We recommend keeping snack bars and bottled water in your day bag, but generally, there will be places to grab a quick bite. After a hearty breakfast, most folks don't need more than a light snack to keep them going until our afternoon teatime.

What can I expect at afternoon tea?

Our afternoon tea times will vary each day, based on our activities. All the venues selected for this tour will be hearty full meals including tea, sandwiches, scones and sweets. Some venues will offer unlimited sandwiches, and some will have a cake trolley brought around at the end of the meal. You will not leave hungry! Some establishments will offer champagne or other beverages. Any additions will be billed to you separately.

What about dinner?

The only dinners that are included in the tour are our welcome dinner the first night of our trip and the farewell dinner on the final night. All other evening meals are on your own. Our hotel will have a restaurant on site, or you can use local transportation to go wherever you'd like.

May I request vegetarian, gluten-free, or other dietary restricted meals?

Any dietary requirements remain entirely your own responsibility. Do let us know on your tour reservation application, so that we're aware of your needs. Vegetarian and gluten-free options are commonly available for an additional fee by prior reservations. We will let you know in advance of any upcharges. If you have an allergy that cannot be accommodated, just leave items you cannot eat on the tier and order additional items 'à la carte', at your own expense. The Secret Garden expressly disclaims any responsibility or liability in connection with dietary requirements.

Is this a Non-Smoking tour?

Yes. There will be no smoking during all group activities. We request non-smoking rooms for all tour participants where possible. Many hotels have converted all rooms to non-smoking rooms and charge a substantial penalty to guests who smoke in a non-smoking room. The Secret Garden expressly disclaims any responsibility or liability in connection with non-smoking requirements.

What is the pace of the tour and how much walking is involved?

The pace of the tour is considered "ACTIVE". To see and experience everything, a fair amount of walking is required, but you can set your own pace and opt to see only what is easily accessible. There is a walking tour in Dublin near the end of the tour, but you are welcome to take a taxi to the different venues if you would prefer to not walk. If you are concerned about your physical condition, please consult your family physician as to whether the tour is suitable for you and consider the following guidelines:

Physical Condition Guidelines

- 1) This tour is a good fit for travelers who can comfortably walk a half mile in 15 minutes without shortness of breath or physical discomfort or who understand that their own limitations means that they might miss out on a portion of the experiences.
- 2) If you are not keeping up with the rest of the group, the tour manager will suggest you take a cab to the next venue at your own expense and you may have to forfeit any sightseeing that requires walking as a group. If you are separated from the group at a venue, it will be your own responsibility to position yourself at the designated meeting point at the agreed time. If you take a taxi to do so, it will be at your own expense.
- 3) Tour and hotel personnel will not be available to lift or otherwise physically assist tour participants at any time. If you require any type of assistance, you must bring a capable travel companion who can comfortably help you keep up with the pace of the tour.

What if I opt out of some parts of the tour or need to return home early?

Tour prices are based on full group utilization of the hotel rooms and services. No credit or refund will apply for unused tour nights or services. You may leave the tour at any place on the itinerary after communicating your plans to the tour manager. You may rejoin the tour at the next venue or whenever you wish. Alternative transportation will be at your own cost.

What happens if I arrive late at a meeting place?

At each stop, write down the meeting time and landmark near your meeting point so that you do not forget and can ask for assistance if you get lost. (Or use your phone to take a picture). If you cannot arrive at a meeting point on time, call us, and then proceed to the next location or the hotel. Always carry your passport and a copy of our schedule with you! Be sure to call or text us, so that we know what is going on.

Are tips included?

Tipping is included for all meals included in the tour package. Regarding independent meals, the general rule at restaurants in the UK and Ireland is 10-15% depending on level of service. Many restaurants include an automatic service charge (typically 12.5%) so do check your bill to see if it is already included. In hotels, guest houses and B&B's, please leave a dollar or two on the dresser when we check out, so that your own service provider will get the money. Taxi drivers, porters, etc. who assist our whole group will be tipped by the tour guides. Please feel free however, to tip any service personnel who are extra helpful or friendly, or who provide a special or unexpected service.

How will I pay for things in Ireland?

Cash

When you arrive at the airport in the UK, use your debit card at a bank owned ATM to withdraw euros. Do NOT use an exchange service or an exchange service ATM. The best rates are always at Bank owned ATM's and they are prolific in Europe just as they are in the US.

Credit or Debit Cards: Recommended for the purchase of higher priced items and most purchases in Northern Ireland which uses pound sterling.

Before your trip, notify your credit-card company and your bank (for debit cards) that you'll be traveling in Ireland and the UK. This will ensure that they don't decline your foreign transactions.

While you have them on the phone, ask these questions:

- Will my card work in the countries I'm traveling to?
- What fees do you charge for withdrawals or purchases made in Europe? Is it a percentage, a flat fee, or both? Are other currency conversion or foreign transaction fees tacked on?
- If my credit/debit card is lost or stolen, what is my liability?
- What phone number should I call if there's an emergency?

Specific to Debit Cards:

- What is my daily limit for ATM withdrawals in Europe? (Change your limit, if necessary.)
- Do you have partner banks in Europe whose ATMs I can use without a fee?

What should I know about shopping?

Each person is allowed to bring \$800 worth of goods into the US every 30 days. Anything you mail/ship back to the US is exempt, but shipping costs are not inexpensive.

Retail prices in Ireland and Northern Ireland include a 20% VAT (value added tax). You end up paying this tax automatically, even though you are not obligated to pay it for goods that you will use outside these countries. A system has been set up to refund these taxes to you, however it doesn't kick in unless you spend £30 in a single transaction. If you make a large purchase, ask the clerk about the process. *** I have never had anyone bother with the VAT refund...it's a lot of work!**

How can I get my purchases home?

We highly recommend traveling with nesting suitcases. You nest a carry on-sized suitcase inside a larger suitcase. Pack your clothes inside the medium case and keep the suitcases nested throughout the trip until your purchases no longer fit. Then separate the cases and use your clothing as "packing material". You can purchase bubble wrap if needed. When it's time to return to the US, check both bags at the airport, placing anything super valuable or fragile in your carry-on bag. The baggage fee for a second suitcase ranges from \$50 to \$100, which is less than shipping a carton to the US, plus you won't have to wait for it to arrive. You must keep both bags under 50 lbs. though or the extra fee is substantial. If you end up not buying much, you can leave your suitcases nested and avoid the extra bag fee.

What is the weather like in Ireland?

The weather in Ireland is rather unpredictable. Bring along a sweater and a raincoat, plan to dress in layers and carry a sweater or light jacket in your day pack. The average high temperature in June is only 67 degrees Fahrenheit and we'll be spending a lot of time along the coast and in the mountains, so it may be much cooler at times. Expect rain at least a few of the days.

What should I pack?

We suggest traveling as light as possible. You can always wash out a few things in your hotel sink and hang it to dry overnight. We recommend selecting a color scheme so that most of your clothes mix and match. This way, if you spill on your shirt, you don't need to change slacks also. The weather can change quickly, so always have a lightweight sweater or jacket or pashmina in your day pack, just in case.

Most of the tea rooms we'll visit have a "**smart casual**" dress code, which means no jeans or tennis shoes allowed. You will want to have a dressy outfit for a couple of the teas so you don't feel underdressed. Jeans are heavy and dry slowly, so we suggest leaving them at home and opting for casual slacks instead. Of course, sturdy, comfortable shoes are a must!

What else should I bring?

- A money belt to wear under your clothes with your passport, extra cash, credit and debit cards.
- Documents, and copies or photos on your phone of:
 - passport
 - Other identification
 - Covid vaccination card
 - Insurance details (health and travel)
 - Phone numbers to call if your cards are lost or stolen.
- Day pack (or small tote bag for daytime essentials)
- Toiletries and Medications
- Two rapid Covid tests
- Electronics
 - Cell phone (talk to your carrier about their international plan)
 - Charging cords and portable power pack
 - An adaptor for using chargers, curling irons, etc.