

Iceland Journals

Day 1

The first day in Iceland was eye opening. What I initially noticed was how clean the air felt and smelt, most likely due to the abundance of nature and lack of ample industry and pollution. The breakfast at the Viking Museum after landing was surprisingly comforting with its array of recognizable breakfast foods not too different from what we have in the US. The tours and such that we went on were fun and all, though the best first day experience in my opinion was getting to go out and explore Reykjavík. The cafes and bars we went to were small and unique, with welcoming and fun atmospheres that made me feel a bit at home. All the native Icelanders we met along the way were friendly and wanted to chat, validating the reputation the country has for great hospitality.

Day 2

Day two was especially full and exciting. First, we went to see the Gullfoss and Geysir, which were some exceptionally awe-inspiring natural wonders of Iceland. One part of the Geysir shot incredibly high and could soak people standing in the wrong spot, while Gullfoss was comparable to Niagara Falls. I must admit, I was mesmerized by the sheer size and loud roar of the waterfall as I stood taking pictures. We also visited a horse and tomato farm—who would have thought! To see how they cared for the show horses and grew their own tomatoes in such a cold climate was fascinating, and having H there to give us her in-depth Icelandic knowledge helped too.

Day 3

The third day took us to a black sand beach which was very new to me. I hadn't known about black sand beaches before arriving in Iceland, so this excursion was especially fun and exciting to me. The cliff faces which overlooked the beach were intimidating with their harsh beauty and were fun to climb, allowing for some unique pictures. We also went to two other waterfalls, one of which was featured on Game of Thrones—much to the delight of us fans on the trip. I had no idea so much of season 4 of the show was filmed in Iceland, so it was amazing to learn about the locations they used and to see in real life a set for one of the episodes. There were a million stairs to climb, but the view at the top was far worth it.

Day 4

I think day four was the most profound for the majority of us on the trip. This was when we did the glacier walk, led by the awesome and personable Aaron. Seeing how much of the glacier has shrunk in the last nine years was heart wrenching and I believe allowed us to have a greater admiration for the glacier as we traversed its paths. If more people were to come to this spot and see its beauty and sad demise, there would probably be more advocacy for the thwarting of global warming and its devastating effects. Additionally, the fresh glacier water we got to drink was the most delicious water I've ever had the pleasure of tasting and I don't think any other water will ever compare. We went out

around the city after completing the hike and returning to Reykjavik to get one last exposure to the fun and culture, and I'm so glad we did. It was incredible fun and we met a lot of people as we went from shop to shop that wanted to know where we came from and give us recommendations as where to go for the night. The Icelandic people were exceptionally kind and friendly, allowing me to feel at home in the foreign country.

Day 5

On the last day in Iceland we went to the famed Blue Lagoon which, let me tell you, was a trip. First of all, I for some reason thought it was a naturally occurring swimmable hot spring, but it was nonetheless breath taking despite it being a manmade attraction. The water was so deliciously hot compared to the chill Icelandic air and it was nice to get so hot in the water and then stand to let the wind cool your body off. And the mud mask they gave out was amazing! My skin has never felt softer after rinsing that mask off. I was careful to load my hair with conditioner and give it minimal exposure to the silica-rich water, so luckily I did not experience any adverse effects on my hair. I know others complained of dry and crinkly hair but mine was just as soft as always. This was the perfect relaxation after the difficult hike the day before, and I'm glad we got to appreciate it at its best. Iceland was amazing to say the least, as we were blessed with beautiful weather the whole trip.

Ireland Journals

Belfast

Day 1

To start off our first day in Ireland, we had a wonderful hot breakfast much more akin to the traditional American breakfast than that we had in Iceland. The most notable part of the day was when we visited the peace wall, which had so much historical and modern meaning it was palpable. Getting to sign the wall and appreciate its symbolism made me grateful for the peaceful place in which I live, and hope for a better future for northern Irish folk. We also had a fun time with the night life and finding our go-to bar, Filthy MacNasty's. When we heard it was the hang out spot for the Game of Thrones cast members while on break from filming, we knew we had to see what it was all about. The lively atmosphere and great staff made us want to come back—which we did on multiple occasions.

Day 2

Day two in Ireland was quite eventful. The first thing we did was go to Carrick-a-rede bridge and climb all over the cliff face. There were some gorgeous wildflowers we found hanging in cervices and even birds nesting close by. Afterwards we went to the Giant's Causeway where some peers and I practiced out rock climbing skills. The unique rocky structure was pretty breath taking, and the mythos behind it was also fascinating to learn about. The final part of the day was a tour of the Bushmills distillery. As a chemist I geeked out a bit, learning about all the techniques used to create and refine their beverage. Not to mention the complementary whiskey margarita was fantastic!

Day 3

One of the most memorable and exciting days in Belfast included the Game of Thrones tour. My goodness, getting to see so many of the locations that appeared in the show was dumbfounding. Castle black, the caves, the King's Road; all of it was fantastic to see and capture on film! It was especially impactful since the final few episodes were coming out, and many of us on the trip were huge GoT fans. Our tongues were sent wagging as that night we crowded around laptop scenes to watch the aired episodes we missed and get to see the places we had just visited on screen. We even got to shop for the show's merchandise and additionally got to see the island that appears as Luke Skywalker's hiding place in The Last Jedi. Pretty magical stuff I must admit.

Dublin

Day 1

Our first night in Dublin was so fun! The initial observation we made was how nice all the people dressed in the city—no sweatpants to be seen anywhere which can be quite shocking to an American. It was definitely different from the casual wear of the States. Getting to wander the beautiful city and see the old roads and architecture mixed with the modern builds was intriguing, and one of my favorite places to capture some pictures. Since we were weary from traveling, quite a few of us adventured to a local grocery store where we picked up snacks and wine for a nice night in. Though I do believe others wandered to the bars after the wine shenanigans, most of us had an early night since we knew the next free day in Dublin was going to be full of more exploration.

Day 2

We had our whole second day free in Dublin to wander the city and find all the unique spots close to the hotel. The Guinness Storehouse was a bit of a hike but worth the walk, with a fun atmosphere and of course free samples. After that we walked to the heart of Dublin, stopping into any store or bar or venue we could. There were street performers at every corner, including some incredibly talented individuals serenading us with their music. We also stopped by a vintage clothes shop where we had a blast trying on funky clothes and making friends with the shop workers. To relax after a full day of walking, we stopped to eat at a nice restaurant also in the heart of the city where the food was terrific and the drinks came in glasses bigger than our heads! I wish we had a little more time in Dublin to really experience all it had to offer, but all in all it was a wonderful part of our trip.

Cork

Day 1

The first day in Cork was a relaxed one, where we had some time to spend downtown before heading off to the Rock of Cashel. The old castle-like architecture and extensive fields surrounding the

building were the star of the show. Tipperary, the town where the Rock of Cashel is found, was a quaint yet lively little town with many shops and hidden gems. We stopped by an adorable ice cream shop before heading back to Cork. Once we were back at the hotel, which was by far the nicest hotel of the trip, more shenanigans ensued. The hotel restaurant was alright, but our main entertainment was the crazy waitress who served us. For some reason she thought one of her tables had dined and dashed—despite that table already paying for their meal. She was a zany one for sure.

Day 2

For our second day in Cork we had a trip scheduled to Blarney Castle, though I was feeling a bit out of it that morning and stayed back at the hotel for extra sleep. Seeing the pictures of my peers hanging upside down to kiss the stone was quite something though! Once everyone got back and I was feeling better, we had our “last supper” together (our last nice dinner with the whole crew assembled). Our lovely travel guide Yvonne made sure our end of the table had an ample supply of wine which we all took great advantage of. Following the dinner celebrations was an epic game of adult hide and seek, with excitement fueled by the wine consumed at dinner. It was one of my favorite nights despite it being a night in.

Killarney

Last Day

Our last day in Ireland was a relaxing trek on the Ring of Kerry, with stunning views and gorgeous photo opportunities. Getting to see the coast along with the nature preserves was a reminder of just how beautiful the country is and made us all so sad to leave. We stopped at a bog museum afterwards where we saw the most amazing giant Irish Wolfhounds and got served hot Irish coffee. It was an interesting history lesson I must say. The final activity was exploring Killarney as we waited for our hotel to be ready and we got pizza to hold us over before dinner. It was a bittersweet day, as we knew we’d be on a plane the next morning headed back to the States. This was one amazing trip, and I’ll do it all again if I ever get the chance.