

Aging Lifestyles: Travel for the planning-impaired

by Joe_Volz

We discovered the joys of Ireland during a glorious two-week vacation last summer. We found the Emerald Isle a gracious, welcoming country whose people are more than willing to chat and offer directions (whether they know the way or not). The Irish adore laughing and making visitors laugh and have never met a person they don't like.

So we asked ourselves an obvious question: Now that we are both septuagenarians, or just about, why not retire there? Or, at least, partly retire there? Living in Ireland would put us in the same category of many other retired and almost-retired people. It's common to find cruise ships loaded with seniors plying the high seas and visiting various countries and islands. On our trip last summer, we encountered seniors everywhere we went, speaking English and several other languages.

Because we have numerous writing responsibilities, it's not feasible for us to just up and go. So, while we don't plan to do anything precipitous, we're actually developing a long-range plan to make it happen.

Such planning is anathema to us. We've never made a plan for more than two or three weeks - and that was for our wedding.

Here's a partial list of how baby boomers and others can plan a long-term trip to a foreign country (ours to Ireland).

CONSULT EXPERTS ON IRELAND

We'll contact our Irish son-in-law who was raised in Dublin and has several brothers and sisters living there still. Benjamin O'Shea certainly will know the less expensive places to rent an apartment and how to go about it.

Another font of information is our longtime friend Dennis Sheahan, publisher of House Magazine in New York's Hamptons. He will have a plethora of information on how to swing a good deal in housing, transportation and touring.

WHERE TO LIVE

Merion Square in Dublin is where we'd like to live but it's way out of our price range. We'll have to settle for joining people from all over the world who come to this famous Dublin square to view its splendid Georgian houses. It was built by the Brits who governed the Republic during their infamous occupation. But the Irish, on hearing of a pending visit from Britain's Queen Victoria, showed their defiance by painting each door a different color, something that continues to this day.

HOW TO GET THERE

We'll visit a travel agent who specializes in Ireland trips and get some help on deciding what's the best way to get to Ireland - plane or cruise ship. The ship has our vote now since we'll have to carry enough belongings and clothes to make our Irish home a real home. We're thinking late summer by cruise ship, but we're open to other suggestions.

The agent also will know where to go to rent a furnished flat or row house and what areas to avoid living in, how to buy a rail pass and rent a car in advance. After all, Ireland is no longer a cheap retirement place. The Euro, at this writing, is worth \$1.30 in U.S. currency. So finding an inexpensive place is important.

MAKE A LIST OF 'MUST' SIGHTS

We'll want to visit some the famous Abbey Theater, the magnificent Catholic cathedral where Dean Jonathan Swift (he wrote Robinson Crusoe) presided over his congregation. He is buried in the church.

LEAVING THINGS AT HOME ON AN EVEN KEEL

This most important part of our planning involves making sure our elderly relatives, several in their 90s, are well taken care of for the duration. If necessary, we'll fly back home a couple of times to visit them and our adult children and grandchildren.

For now, while making our plans, we are luxuriating in the thought of how pleasant such a year away from home could be. And how easy it would be to visit other parts of Europe we've never seen - Spain, Portugal, Greece ...

There are endless possibilities for weekend trips to Spain's Costa del Sol coast, especially in the winter to escape the cold and damp Irish winter. Barcelona, Paris and London also beckon.

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