

PERSONAL JOURNEY: The magic of Ireland

Weeklong father-son getaway features biking, music, and a night of pub hopping

By Martin R. Farrell FOR THE INQUIRER

My son, Martin, a junior English major at St. Joseph's University, is taking full advantage of the many opportunities that have come his way at SJU — including the study abroad program. He spent the last semester in Galway, Ireland, at the University College of Galway. Being of Irish heritage, and with a great love of Irish folk music (along with a great love for my son), I was quick to jump at the chance for a visit.

We spent a special and memorable week together in Galway, Cork, and Dublin. I flew to Dublin direct from Philadelphia and took a bus to Galway. Our first day together turned out to be one of the highlights of the trip. We took a 45-minute ferry ride from Rossaveal to the Aran Islands — specifically, Inishmore — and spent the day biking out the high road to Dun Aonghasa (a dramatic and beautiful setting for the oldest stone fort in Western Europe), then back the low road along the coast. It was absolutely breathtaking in its beauty, and I treasured the time with my son.

As it was November and windy and chilly, only about 25 folks made the trip, so we had the island pretty much to ourselves. We made several stops along the way to explore some ancient ruins and **take in the scenery. We stopped at Ti Joe Watty's Pub for a few pints with the locals** before taking the ferry back to Galway for some dinner and traditional Irish music. We had plenty of options as far as music is concerned. Two of our favorite spots were Taaffes and Tigh Fox Bar.

During several more days in Galway, we enjoyed the shops, pubs, and street performers along Shop Street. We were fortunate to witness the lighting of the Christmas tree and the official opening of the Christmas Village in Eyre Square. Our time in Galway ended with 9 a.m. Mass on Sunday at the historic and beautiful Galway Cathedral. One of the must-see items in the cathedral is a stained-glass window of the Irish Holy Family, which depicts the Blessed Mother knitting and young Jesus bringing a cup of tea to St. Joseph. A classic!

A 2 1/2-hour bus ride took us to Cork **City, where we connected with our cousins, the O'Meara clan.** We were treated to great Irish hospitality at their beautiful home in Midleton, a 20-minute ride from **Cork. Two of the highlights of that swing were a wonderful "trad music" session at the Mad Monk Bar** in Midleton and a tour (and tasting) at the Old Jameson Distillery.

We were sad to leave our cousins and Midleton, but we needed to get to Dublin for my flight back **home. In Dublin, we stayed at O'Callaghan Davenport Hotel, a quaint and very homey** lodging right next to Merion Square. I spent my last night of the trip — appropriately — **"pub hopping" with my son and his buddy. We visited McDaid's, Bruxelles, Stag's Head, and Mary's Bar & Hardware Shop ... just** to name a few.

The next morning, Martin headed back to Galway and I took a cab to the airport, sad to leave but with a bag full of memories to last a lifetime.

Martin **Farrell** writes from Philadelphia.