



EUROPEAN CYCLING HOLIDAYS

2018

IRELAND – NORTHERN IRELAND BELFAST & THE CAUSEWAY COAST

7-days / 6-nights self-guided inn-to-inn cycling holiday from Belfast to Dublin



This self-guided cycling tour of Northern Ireland has surprises and highlights at every turn. The region has so much to offer – rugged coastal scenery, quaint villages, tranquil rural countryside, and centuries of history. Begin in the vibrant city of Belfast and cycle your way north to the fascinating geological formation the Giant's Causeway, passing by medieval castles, ancient ruins, dramatic sea cliffs, verdant glens, sandy beaches and sweeping bays. Literary and film references abound too – *Game of Thrones* fans will recognise many locations, and this enchanting region served as one inspiration for Narnia in CS Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*.

Self-guided cycling offers freedom to cycle at your own pace, carrying just a lightweight pack with your daily essentials, knowing your main luggage has been sent ahead to your pre-booked accommodation. You stay in carefully chosen B&Bs, with a full Irish breakfast each morning, usually including traditional black and white puddings, eggs, fried tomatoes and potatoes all cooked in lashings of Irish butter, to fuel you up for the day's cycling. Lunch and dinner are not included so you have the freedom and flexibility to choose where to eat, whether you prefer a picnic or café lunch, a fine restaurant or traditional pub fare. A highlight for most travellers to the island of Ireland is the *craic* (fun) to be found in the local pubs, many with traditional music every night, and the warm hospitality and generous nature of the Irish people.

Belfast is the capital of Northern Ireland and there is much to do here so we recommend an extra night or two if time allows. Visit Belfast Castle and Gardens on Cave Hill for views of the city and Belfast Lough; visit the Titanic Experience in the shipyard where the ship was built or the nearby Game of Thrones film set; take tea and cakes in Victoria Square or St George's Market; visit the 'peace walls' in West Belfast separating the Protestant (Loyalist) and Catholic (Republican) communities, and the colourful murals. Belfast is a vibrant and lively with great nightlife and a wide range of restaurants, bars and traditional pubs.

Departs: Daily on demand from April to October 2018

Cost from: \$1270 per person, twin-share Single supplement from \$480

Starts: Belfast **Ends:** Bushmills or Dublin

Grading: Moderate with more challenging sections, average daily distance of @ 30km of undulating terrain with occasional steep ascents and descents. Most of the route is on-road; traffic can be heavy near Belfast and in high tourist season. E-Bikes are available for this tour at extra cost – ask for details.

Inclusions: 6 nights' B&B accommodation (all rooms with en-suite bathroom facilities), 6 full Irish breakfasts, bike hire, maps and route notes, luggage transfers, ferry to Rathlin Island, transfer from Bushmills to Dublin.

Not included: Lunches, evening meals, drinks, personal expenses, entrance/admission fees, travel insurance.

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations

Suggested itinerary:

Day 1 Arrive Belfast

Arrive into Belfast with time to explore this fascinating modern British city. Check in to your hotel and collect your bicycle and final documentation and route information.

Day 2 Belfast to Ballygally

Cycling @ 47km

Plan an early start as this is the longest cycling day and there's a lot to do along the route. Leaving the city cycle alongside Belfast Lough to Carrickfergus Castle, built in 1177. From Carrickfergus continue along the coastline, perhaps detouring just before Larne to The Gobbins sea cliffs. At the Visitors Centre you can arrange a guided walk on the cliff's edge path. Your destination is the resort town of Ballygally with its sandy beach and castle.

Day 3 Ballygally to Cushendall

Cycling @ 32km

The riding is mostly along the scenic Antrim Coast Road, a road carved into the cliffs. The first highlight is Glenarm Castle and gardens with a charming tearoom. Continue to Waterfoot (Glenariff), a fishing village at the entrance to the largest and perhaps most scenic of the Glens of Antrim, Glenariff. Continue either along the Coast Road to Cushendall or detour to the Glenariff Forest Park, adding about @ 15km return to your ride. The park has a waterfall walk into a mossy gorge. Cushendall is a picturesque village on the River Dall with many well-preserved Georgian-era buildings.

Day 4 Cushendall to Ballycastle

Cycling @ 30km

After breakfast ride to the ruins of Layd Church dating back to the 13th Century, an important burial place for the Clan MacDonnell. Cross the Glendun River at Cushendun and cycle the challenging Torr Road with wonderful views across to Scotland and along the rugged Antrim coast. Ballycastle is a scenic town at the north-eastern tip of the island of Ireland, offering views to Fair Head, Rathlin Island and the Mull of Kintyre in Scotland.

Day 5 Rathlin Island

Cycling @ 25km

Weather permitting there is an 8.45am ferry to Rathlin Island (check timetable locally). Take your bikes with you on the 25-minute crossing. The Boathouse Visitor Centre, the RSPB seabird centre and the lighthouse are all worth a visit. Rathlin is a wonderful site for birdwatching; April to July is puffin season. The island has a long and somewhat tragic history as it was the first place in Ireland to be sacked by Vikings. It was the site of several massacres, and many ships have wrecked along its treacherous coast. Its history is closely tied to that of Scotland as well as Ireland – Robert the Bruce retreated here to lick his wounds after his defeat by the English in 1306. The story has it that in a cave he watched a persistent spider try over and over again to bridge a gap with its web, which inspired him to return to Scotland for another tilt at the Scottish crown.

Day 6 Ballycastle to Bushmills

Cycling @ 25km

A short way out of Ballycastle you can detour (@ 6km return) to the hair-raising Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge. The narrow rope suspension bridge, 30 metres high, links Carrickarede Island to the mainland and was once used by salmon fishermen checking their nets on the island (it's now operated by the National Trust). Continue past the sweeping curve of Whitepark Bay to the Giant's Causeway. Around 40,000 polygonal basalt columns were formed 50 to 60 million years ago by intense volcanic activity or perhaps built by the legendary Irish giant Finn MacCumhail. Either way there is a multitude of formations to walk amongst, including the Grand Causeway and the Amphitheatre. From the Giant's Causeway it's a short ride to the quaint village of Bushmills. If you arrive early enough, perhaps take a tour of the Old Bushmills Whiskey Distillery.

Day 7 Tour ends in Bushmills, transfer to Dublin

Your tour ends after breakfast in Bushmills. You may like to make your own onward travel arrangements, or spend the morning exploring Bushmills and in the mid-afternoon join a coach transfer to Dublin via Belfast. Arrival time in Dublin is around 7.30pm.

Outdoor Travel offer other self-guided inn-to-inn or small group guided cycling holidays in the UK and Ireland and across Europe, including **Kerry and the Dingle Peninsula**, and **the West Coast and Connemara**, in England **the Cotswolds**, the **Great Glen Way** in Scotland. In France see **Bordeaux** or **Burgundy**, in Italy cycle from Bolzano to Venice or around Assisi in Umbria. Ask too about Poland, Germany, Sweden or Spain.

Self-skippered or hotel barge boating holidays are available in Ireland on the **River Shannon**. Or try **Bike & Barge** or **Bike & Boat** cycling holidays in France, Italy, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Holland, Croatia or Greece.

Contact Outdoor Travel for itinerary details and reservations:

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