

Blog 13 - May 3rd - Free Day to Explore Killarney

We slept in a bit before having another wonderful breakfast. The weather was cool and cloudy but a fair day for a decent walk about town, so off we went.



Despite our lack of a good city map, Judi quickly located Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty Road. (The story of the Monsignor is a very interesting one - worth reading.)

I asked walking directions for Ross Castle from a local cab driver and though he was wonderfully helpful, we kind of lost our bearings. We walked as far as we could along M O'F. road, but miss the turn. We did however get a glimpse of St. Mary's Church (which we thought was the cathedral). Also saw some rather unique shops that we would have



missed had we not taken the wrong turn.

We did get some directions to the "I" office which led us down a back alley. (all the locals were using it rather than the main street which even at this early hour was packed with crazy tourists. (oops, that's us)

Had a bit of fun when we stopped at the Discover Tourism Office to get a map. Just as we arrived, all the Star Wars figures appeared



on the scene. There is a Star Wars Festival here on May 4th so the storm troopers, etc. are every where.. All the Trekkies are in town as well as all the folks who are part of the annual car rally. Busy little place. A few Kodak moments presented themselves.

There were a bunch of children with their teachers at the info center and they were having a marvelous time posing for photos with the characters. Star Wars is a big thing in this area and everyone is hyped because of the Star-Wars festival today. The tourists lap it up and the amount of paraphernalia that is sold in the various stores is crazy.

Have to say that we did enjoy watching the kids and of course we had to get in on some of the fun. When in Rome, do as the Romans do! Tolkien, Nana was kind of scared standing next to Darth Vader - but he was really nice.



Once we had our map, we were able to get around a little better. It was still quite a walk to the entrance of the Killarney National Park.



We arrived at St. Mary's Cathedral first, (right across the street from the entrance to the park) so we decided to go into the Cathedral. It is a magnificent building on the outside as well as inside. There were people there setting up for a wedding and someone practicing on the organ so it was really a special time to visit. We left the cathedral and went across the road to the entrance of the Killarney National Park.



Signage at this entrance to the park was not great, but we figured it would be a piece of cake finding Ross Castle.

There was a lovely cottage as you entered the park, complete with a thatched roof. It was a small cafe. All the net proceeds from the sale of goodies goes to the Down Syndrome Foundation. We were able to get warmed up as we sipped on Americanos and indulged in a muffin and scone. (no calories in Ireland.) We have been using our coffee cups to warm up our hands quite a bit on this trip.



We were fortified and warm after this break so off we went to find Ross Cottage (just up the road there luv someone said to me). RIGHT!

We walked forever about a mile on a long, flat pathway hoping to see a tower sticking up around the next bend to identify Ross' Castle. Nope, no sign of a castle. The pathways were smooth, and there were no hills so though the walk was about 4 miles in total, we were able to make it to the castle.

The gardens were absolutely beautiful. We loved walking through there. As we walk several horse drawn buggies past us with folks enjoying the scenery, but not the lovely walk. It might have been nice to do the ride, but actually walking through the park really was nice. We finally arrived at the castle and were able to join a tour group that had just started. The tower castle was similar to the one at Killarney Castle. Winding, narrow steps, and four floors up. I was quite proud of Kevin as



he just kept climbing. We both enjoyed the tour and it gave us great insight into the lives of the Irish people.

The castle had originally been owned by the local chieftain but through the years it had fallen into

disrepair. The roof fell through, the castle was deserted and forgotten about. Vandals began to do damage to the building.



Eventually a wealthy American John McShane and his wife bought the estate. (*John's father had been a famous architect who had been involved in the designing of the White House, the Pentagon and other major buildings in the US.*)

They wanted to bring this building back to life. Once they had it fully restored, they turned the building over to the people of Ireland on the condition that this property would never be developed. It eventually became part of the Killarney National Park.

The guide lead us up to each level and he explained how the occupants would have lived there without running water and electricity. Candles were too costly so they used reeds coated in beef tallow to create light. Their diet was simple, meat, carrots etc. There was no mention of potatoes being in their diet, so Kevin asked the guide. Ireland had no potatoes at that time in history. the potato was introduced to Ireland by Sir Walter Raleigh.

Potatoes from Peru, Tobacco from Virginia.



This was an amazing tour and it runs for about an hour. There are signs everywhere that say no photos allowed, so I have nothing from the inside of the castle. However, there was one jerk who lag behind and took photos of every room. I so felt like ratting on him. If you are planning on going to Ross Castle it would be a good idea to book ahead, and perhaps enjoy the buggy ride or boat sightseeing excursion in the park until your tour. Well worth it and again there is an unending amount of history to learn.

After the tour we explored the surrounding ramparts and grounds before we started heading back to town.



I did take one photo while in the castle - thru one of the windows. Now this would be something I would have liked to do.



As we were leaving the Castle grounds the 'hop on, hop off' bus was there so we stopped to confirm with the driver that we were heading back in the right direction. It is very easy to get disorientated. We were fine, but we found out it was a good 2+ miles back to the town. We were both not looking forward to that as we had been walking all day and were tired.

The driver offered to drop us off at the entrance to the city center for €2 each. It was so worth it. It was still quite a walk back to the hotel but we strolled around Killarney until we could find someplace for lunch. Quinlan's is where we ended up and enjoyed "fresh" fish. The restaurant is very small, the fish is caught by their own boats every day and the food is delicious. Lots of great dishes to choose from. A must if you are wanting to enjoy fish and chips, homemade fishcakes, mussels, shrimp, Listed as one of the 10 best places to eat in Killarney.

We strolled a bit more on our way back to the Lodge. It was a very slow stroll as by this time neither of us had a lot of energy. Our plans for coming back out later tonight to take in some local Irish music were fading very fast.

A quiet evening of reading, blog doing and a bit of TV before we collapse into our beds.

I have posted all my photos for the day.

K & J