

Snapshots from the British Isles

LuAnn and I recently returned from our first overseas vacation, an Iowa Voyagers cruise around the British Isles and Norway. I can't bore you with our photos and mementos in person, but I'll bet I can do it with just the descriptions.

- This is a picture of my legs during the 7-hour flight from Chicago to London; it shows the limited kneespace available (I'm 6'3"), even after upgrading to United's "Economy Plus" seating. I checked to see what an additional upgrade to business class would cost; \$1700. One-way. Each. I did the math - for \$243 per hour, I figured I could be a little cramped.
- Meet Rocelyn, a petite, unnaturally happy attendant for the ship's deck 8 portside cabins. We think she actually lived in the corridor outside our room – she was scurrying around out there literally every time we went in or out for two weeks.
- Here's a shot of one of the numerous castles we visited, the name of which I can't remember. I do recall the guide apologizing for the fact that it was very recently built; "only in the 17th century." Contrast that with the United States, where folks tend to become giddy over anything older than about 75 years.
- This photo was taken as LuAnn dangled upside down on the Blarney Castle parapet to kiss the Blarney stone. The burly man holding on to her was there to make sure nobody lost their grip. The woman next in line after LuAnn asked him anxiously, "You won't let me fall, right?" He replied, "I'm not here for me good looks."
- One of LuAnn's goals on this trip was to view the Book of Kells at Trinity College in Dublin. It's a famous 8th century illustrated Latin manuscript of the four Gospels of the New Testament created by Celtic monks, and this is the long line of tourists waiting to see it. LuAnn was not amused by my suggestion that we skip the visit and wait for the movie version to come out.

- This \$150 Euro receipt from the Guinness Brewery gift shop in Dublin is proof that it's a mistake to schedule that tour and the Jameson Distillery tour back-to-back.
- These hootin' and hollerin' residents at the Castle Arms pub on the Isle of Man are clustered around the TV watching the Tour de France. With perfect accidental timing we stumbled in for a pint of Guinness just in time to see the local boy (Mark Cavendish, the "Manx Missile") win the final stage in Paris as well as the green jersey as the overall points leader.
- We took a bus tour in Holyhead, Wales, and to return to the ship we had to pass through this port security checkpoint where a uniformed agent required three male and three female "volunteers" from our group for a pat-down search. We gave up six of us who we quickly determined were carrying the least amount of contraband, and shortly thereafter one of the women re-boarded the bus bragging about her "free massage."
- The Shetland Islands are way out in the middle of nowhere, about halfway between Scotland and Norway. Our bus tour guide (pictured here) didn't understand why LuAnn and I thought it was amusing when she remarked that she likes to go to one of the smaller islands on her weekends off "to get away from it all."
- Here's LuAnn, posing with a real Shetland pony on our visit to one of the numerous pony farms. LuAnn is the one on the left.
- This young woman in shirtsleeves and shorts (59 degrees passes for summer in Norway) is our tour guide. When I asked her if she could speak a little Norwegian for me so I could hear what it sounded like, she sheepishly admitted that she was German and couldn't speak Norwegian at all. I asked a different tour guide the same question the following day and discovered that she was German as well.
- Practically every two-lane road we were on during our trip was actually 1 ½ lanes – every tour bus had fresh scars on its outside rearview mirror. This hour-long traffic jam on a winding Norwegian cliff road was caused by a guy in a camper who was too terrified to squeeze past a stopped bus heading the other direction.

- Finally, here's an older couple at Heathrow airport who we accidentally set next to while waiting for our return flight. The man was an avid U of I graduate now living in California, and was delighted to meet us – he said it was the highlight of his trip. I was afraid to ask him what his trip had encompassed up until that point...

Dave Parsons is getting his land legs back as he works at the business he co-owns on the Coralville strip.