

Snapshots from Ireland

LuAnn and I just returned from a trip to Ireland with the Greater Iowa City Area Chamber of Commerce. I may not be able to bore you with my photographs in person, but I'll bet I can do it with just the descriptions.

>At airport security in Chicago O'Hare I walked past two TSA employees who directed me to empty my pockets, but I ignored them because I knew I'd be OK with a metal detector. Instead, I tripped the alarm when I experienced my first full-body scan. When the burly TSA guard pictured here asked if I had anything in my pockets, I produced Chapstick, credit cards and folding money. I told him, "I'm sorry, I failed." He nodded solemnly and replied, "Completely."

>Here's Harry, our very knowledgeable and animated tour guide who met us at the Dublin airport. He had an endearing way of gesturing with both arms as he spoke, which he did continuously. He was also our bus driver, which I found mildly disconcerting as he narrated and navigated our full-size motor coach around the narrow, twisting back roads of Ireland, often with barely one hand on the wheel.

>Harry is pictured here holding the bus's fire extinguisher, giving the mandated safety speech at the beginning of the tour. I was less than reassured when he explained that it was a little difficult to operate, ending with, "By the time you get the cap off, whoosh! You've gone up!"

>This is a photo of Irish cows blocking our bus's path on a rural Irish road. Every one of us ran to the front of the bus to take this picture. The odd thing was that almost every one of us was from Iowa and had seen plenty of cows before. We couldn't help ourselves.

>We asked Harry what the oddest thing was that ever happened to him on one of his tours. He said that he once did a tour that included France, and someone died peacefully in his bus while it was waiting at a French dock for the ferry back to Ireland. After determining that nothing could be done, the tourists on the bus took a vote and decided they'd rather endure the inevitable paperwork in

Ireland than in France. They rode the ferry back to Ireland with the dead guy on board and told the authorities he had died en route.

>This guy is a clerk at the Blarney Woolen Mill. He asked us if we had any Irish heritage, and I responded that LuAnn is half-Irish. He jokingly asked me which half, and I replied, "The half with the red hair and the temper."

>Lu and I were jet lagged the entire trip because we insisted on visiting pubs like this one almost every night. One night she let me go out without her, and when I hadn't returned by the agreed on 11 p.m. she texted me: "Get your ass home, dear." Unfortunately, she accidentally sent it to my brother, who eventually responded: "Uh...what?"

>The chalkboard pictured here on the outside of a Galway pub indicates that the entertainment that night was "Fred and James." We seek out traditional Irish music so we would have preferred "Feardorcha and Seamus" (Gaelic translation), but we took a chance and went in. It was rather entertaining to hear the two of them cover Johnny Cash, James Taylor and Simon & Garfunkle hits with a pronounced Irish accent.

>This is Jessica, a young woman along with us on the trip who was somewhat concerned that one of the top-hitting results when you Google "Galway" is "Galway Hooker." She was relieved and I was mildly disappointed to learn that Galway Hooker is the name of both a popular Manhattan pub as well as the traditional sailing vessel used in Galway Bay.

>Finally, here I am coming back through customs and airport security on my way home. You can see that the container I am about to send through the X-ray machine includes the entire contents of my pockets, including a used Kleenex and a surprising amount of lint.

Writers Group member Dave Parsons is busy planning his next trip to Ireland instead of working very hard at the business he co-owns on the Coralville Strip.