

UK / Ireland Trip, Summer 2008

Monday August 25 to Tuesday August 26: Monday we flew from LAX to London Heathrow aboard Virgin Atlantic flight VS008, leaving LAX at 6 pm Monday and arriving in London at 12:25 pm Tuesday afternoon. From London we boarded a direct train to Paddington Station. Our Hotel, the Royal Park Hotel, was in walking distance from Paddington. We checked in and freshened up. A brochure mentioned the Notting Hill Carnival was supposed to be going on that date, this being nearby we went walking looking for it. Nothing was going on though... we realized the dates were probably wrong, why would the carnival be on weekdays, it must have been over the prior weekend. Oh well. We then headed to the Tower Hill area of London, as our planned Jack the Ripper walk departed from the Tower Hill tube stop. We arrived with plenty of time to spare; considered doing the Tower of London but decided it wasn't enough time but we would come back in the next 2 days. We had a bitter at a pub located under the train tracks (every now and then there was a rumbling), and ate dinner at a nearby Indian restaurant, then went on the walk. There were tons of people and we split into two groups; a woman led our walk. She talked more about the victims and economic situation than our previous guide had several years ago on the same walk. Following this we took the tube back to the Paddington area, had another bitter at a local pub, and turned in.

Wednesday August 27: We had a mid-morning breakfast at a café nearby – Pete had a full English Breakfast, I had scrambled egg on toast as my stomach was a bit upset from overindulging in the Indian food the night before. I did make use of the tomato & mushrooms from Pete's meal that he doesn't care for though. Then we headed for the Tower of London for a 10:45 am London Walk on the Tower. The walk was interesting, there were tales both in and outside of the Tower walls,, on topics like Henry the VIII's wives, etc. Following this we went to Kew Gardens, with a stop in between at a tea shop near Kew. A few hours was not enough time to spend at Kew, it is enormous and has lots to see. Too bad you can't bike there. We mainly looked in the greenhouses which were closing earlier than the rest of the gardens, and managed to make it to a Badger set and then out by closing time (6:30?). We boarded the tube back to our hotel area. Part of it I'm sure was the jetlag, but the tube rides seemed quite hypnotic, we could (in some cases, did) nap on them. Upon arriving at Paddington, we stopped for kebabs at a take out place and brought them back to the hotel. Then we went out for a beer before bed.

Thursday, August 28: We stopped in the same café for breakfast, this time I got the full breakfast and Pete had beans on toast plus some of my meats. Today we walked through Hyde Park which was very close by, to make our way to the Natural History Museum. We spent a few hours there and didn't see it all but what we saw was quite interesting. It was pretty crowded and warm. The museums are free, while Kew was pretty pricey. We did like both however. We walked back through Hyde Park again, getting a refreshment on the way. We had already packed and checked out in the morning, but retrieved our bags at the hotel and headed for Pete's Grandad's whom we would stay with this evening. Unfortunately we timed it for rush hour and with suitcases it was hard to keep out of others' way on the tube. Granddad picked us up at the Surbiton station and brought us to his place. He pointed out many things on the way

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and had a good command of the roads – he used to drive a bus in the area. We walked to a local fish & chips shop for take-out dinner and ate it at his place. I called my Mom to wish her a Happy Birthday. Then Pete and his Granddad and I stayed up till 11 pm or so talking and drinking.

Friday, August 29: In the morning Granddad drove us back to the station and we headed for Cambridge. This entailed switching trains in Kings Cross in London. There had been some troubles on one of the lines and it took us longer than expected to make it to Huntingdon station but... David & Gwen met us at the station and took us home to Over. We saw Anna and Ramon again, and Paul and PJ were there also so we got to finally meet Pete's nephew. Gwen made a nice roast dinner with Yorkshire pudding. There were quite a few of us this night but tomorrow's dinner would be even more.

Saturday, August 30: During the day Pete, Paul, PJ and I took a walk in the fields around Over. Gwen and David were beginning preparations for the dinner and Uncle Richard, Aunt Cynthia, cousins Adam and Rosalind's visit in the evening. The extended family arrived and we decided to sit outside to enjoy the nice weather before dinner. Theana came by, it was good to finally see her. It was unfortunate she wasn't coming to Ireland with us, but her sister Leanta was having a baby in a couple days. We all enjoyed the dinner, the hosting Warden's had made a nice casserole and there were other vegetables and bread and so forth. Later we again found ourselves outside enjoying the nice weather, and there were some strange lights in the sky... we figured they were some planes from a nearby air show. They were eerily quiet though. Later on, Paul, Theana, Pete and I went to the local pub The Admiral Vernon for a drink. It was nice to chat more with them.

I should note that the weather we experienced in the UK was warm and sunny, no rain at all which was actually a disappointment for Pete and I coming from rain-deprived southern California. Each day I dressed in case it might rain, but in the end I ended up sweating from the warmth. Well, not the case with Ireland, where it frequently sprinkled, then cleared, then sprinkled again... we loved it!

Sunday, August 31: Today we - 8 of us - left for Ireland – flying out of London Stansted airport around noon, aboard Ryanair and arriving in Shannon Ireland about 1:30 pm. We rented 2 cars at Hertz, and set out for our house near Ardfert in the county of Kerry. It was mostly sunny but as mentioned there were a few bouts of light rain mixed in. Along the way we stopped at a café for a late lunch / early dinner – fish, chicken, mash, chips, etc. We picked up a few groceries a short while later at a convenience-store type place – we didn't know if we'd find open stores late on a Sunday. Then we finished up our drive to Ardfert, where Pete contacted the owners of the Windrush House that was to be our home for the next 4 days. Pat and Liz Lawlor met us in town and we followed them north of Ardfert through the community of Banna Beach, to the waterfront so they could show us the proximity to the shore, then over to the house. It was lovely, very spacious and well decorated. We settled in. We attempted a walk on the beach before it got dark but it was a bit too rainy and windy for all to like. Before bed, we had some snacks, and Pete and I had a few pool games or

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two with Anna and Ramon. The Lawlors were thoughtful to have left several necessities such as a couple bottles of wine, tea, coffee, milk, apple pie, etc. for us, which we made use of over the next several days.

Monday, September 1: We started our first full day in the Irish countryside with tea and coffee, toast and fruit, then all of us piled into our 2 cars and headed for a castle - Ballymalis Castle seemed a good choice from the book I had. Well, the book was a bit off in both the location and description of the place, but we still had a good time. En route we picked up a better map from a tourist center in Killorglin. We had thought the castle was just north of there, but instead we found out it was further east. On our way back we stopped in Tralee, the nearest sizeable city – to do some shopping, in the city center and also to stock up on groceries. For dinner Pete baked up some whiting fish with vegetables, salad and bread. Anna and Ramon and Pete and I continued our nightly pool tournaments, which we ended up doing each night at Windrush House. Nearly daily, Pete and I took to morning walks on the beach, each morning rain or shine except for Wednesday morning. It was beautiful with the changing sky, changing tides, mountains in the distance and waves.

Tuesday, September 2: Today we made a nice English Breakfast in the morning, then we headed for the Dingle Peninsula. We'd hoped to do a loop around it but didn't quite manage to intentions. We did check out a nice view outside of Tralee, a lake (Lake Anascoul), and stop in at a Celtic museum , which also had a nice gift shop – the owner (a transplanted American, his accent belied) really put a lot of time into his interests. A bit later as we headed back, we stopped at a café (and pottery shop) for tea and scones. The weather this day was again pretty variable. The countryside in the changing clouds was beautiful. Later that evening, at the house, we had dinner of steak with potato tortillas courtesy of Ramon and Anna, accompanied by salad and bread.

Wednesday, September 3: A split day – Anna and Ramon went for a walk on the beach. Gwen, Paul and PJ hung out at the house, with Gwen making a nice salmon dinner for us with vegetables, bread, and salad. David, Pete and Liz went to Killarney and the National Park there to hike some trails. As we traveled through Ardfert we found the roads were flooded in a particular spot with all the rain. We were not gravely affected by this, luckily. In Killarney, we stopped at a Tourist center for more maps and things, then we started a hike at the Ross Castle and hiked the full set of trails around there, which travels around a peninsula on Lough Leane, the Lower Lake. This included an old copper mining operation. It rained frequently, and was very windy when we stopped to eat our packed lunch of sandwiches. Next we went further south to the Torc Waterfall. This hike had some elevation gain and it felt good to get those other leg muscles working. The rain finally started to let up towards the end. I was happy my jacket kept me pretty dry and that I'd worn pants that dry quickly, but my feet were soaked!

Thursday, September 4: We made another English Breakfast in the morning, lounged about a bit (it was a beautiful day today), and then set out for some local places / a road trip. This took us immediately south of us and near Tralee, by a golf course that had a

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helicopter and landing pad. We walked through the course to the beach, which was a bit different from our relatively flat beach – some cliffs, and tidepools to play with. We'd hoped to see some of the nearby castles a little more up-close but they were not accessible in this manner. We ended up with something related but a little different, though, on the other side of Tralee, at Ballyseede Castle Hotel. We stopped here looking for a trail through Ballyseedy Woods marked on our good map, but were interested in having some afternoon tea so stopped in to the place. I'm glad we did, it was quite interesting. Apparently it was an old castle that was refurbished into a hotel. It still had quite a bit of charm, both from its castle-ness as well as furnishings. We were told how to get to the nearby trails and so did so after our tea. On our map it looked like just a single out-and-back trail but after a point it joined with a network of trails. We nearly got lost! It was nice to get out in the woods for a spell, and the trails were very well maintained.

Friday, September 5: Today was our departure day. Pete's parents, Anna & Ramon, and Paul & PJ head off for Shannon airport to return home. Pete and I drive to Dublin, where we would stay at a Bed & Breakfast – more of a hotel, really – called Waterloo house. It is south of the city center, just south of the canal. It took us about 45 minutes to walk to the city center, which we did several times over the next few days. It rained most of our drive to Dublin. Emily, our GPS, started us out on some interesting one-lane roads through the farmland north of Tralee. An hour or so into our drive we stopped in a town for some lunch. I had second thoughts about the BLT after I had ordered it, remembering the bacon is different overseas, more ham-like – but when it arrived I realized this sort of bacon, while maybe not as good for breakfast, is better on a BLT than crispy American bacon. Pete had some chicken with stuffing which he also liked. The rest of our drive to Dublin was on wider roads, even on a “dual carriageway” for a while. On arriving in Dublin, we ran into some (probably) flooding of the canal as we made our way to the B&B – requiring some quick thinking as to how to get there. We made it fine, settled in, and went out for a drink and dinner. It was a bit late so we had dinner at a Chinese fast-food type place.

Saturday, September 6: Planned for today is a walk around Saint Steven's Green, a hop-on-hop-off bus tour, a tour of the Kilmainham Gaol (a jail), and Ghost Bus. We did manage the first three, but the Bus was not meant to be today – we reserved a spot for tomorrow for that, however. On the bus we did a loop around the city, and as a result decided to explore Phoenix Park by bike tomorrow also. Getting back to today, the green was nice, there were ducks in the ponds and lots of statues and things to check out in the park. We toured the jail, which was interesting and the guide was quite informative. We walked around one of the main shopping areas – Grafton Street. It struck me that people were dressed quite trendily, more so than in London, I thought. For dinner we had Indian food in a restaurant in Temple Bar, preceded by a drink in a nearby pub. Then we headed to the bus, which we found we really needed reservations for. Ah well. We went back to the hotel, stopping for another drink in a pub before bed. (Got to have our Guinness!)

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Sunday, September 7: Today we went on a Historical Walking Tour of Dublin, meeting at Trinity College and ending up in the Temple Bar area. Again our guide was quite informative, he even was an editor for a history magazine. Then we walked back to our hotel, on the way stopping for lunch in an old bank that was converted to a restaurant (great salads and soup), to take our car to Phoenix Park for our bike ride. On the drive there, Pete had an unexpected problem with his teeth, out of the blue one of his front teeth chipped off a piece. We considered the options, luckily it wasn't hurting, just a bit startling. He decided to make an appointment in London to have it checked the next day. In the meantime, we did do our bike ride in the park – we decided to give a Tandem bike a try. It's definitely not as easy as people make it look! But it was good to try it. After driving back to the hotel, and Pete making an appointment in London, we walked to our bus tour. It was rather amusing, a bit different than I expected, but still fun. (I think I prefer the ghost walks in London or thereabouts though.) It was rather theatrical. We did leave the bus in a few places to wander about a cemetery and the ?? steps, where our guide had us take photos looking for "orbs" – I had several on my camera from the haunted steps! After our bus tour we stopped at Abrekebabra for kebabs (me) and chips (Pete). I loved the name so wanted to try it, but found the kebabs were better at the no-named places like the one we'd been to in London. Ah well. Pete was worried about eating for his tooth, so just stuck with chips. He was less worried about drinking, we had another Guinness on the walk home.

Monday, September 8: We made our way to Dublin airport and fly Aerlingus to London Heathrow. I had a 3-4 hour layover before I board my Virgin Airlines VS023 back to LAX at 3:15 pm – well, scheduled for 3:15 – it ended up being about 2 hours late, for which we make up an hour in the air. I arrived home at around 10 pm PT. Pete stuck with me for an hour or so and then took the tube to his dental appointment. His teeth got capped and he then set out to Cambridge to continue with the rest of his vacation, which included Cambridge, Dundee Scotland, and back to London to stay with some friends.

A few notes about driving in Ireland – which is a lot like driving in the UK: Yes it is difficult because you need to be on the left, there are roundabouts, and the roads are narrow. Also, even if you are familiar with manual transmission, it is disorienting that the shifter is on the left not the right. I kept using my right side mirror a lot more than I use side mirrors in the states. And something that would have been really confusing if we'd spent more time driving in cities, is that the center lane on a typical road is not yellow but is white which in the states makes you think the other lane's traffic is going in the same direction as you. Towns were especially scary for me because they were just so congested and narrow – very little room for error, and you are on the other side which adds to the difficulty in judging whether you are going to hit another car or not.