



County Galway: "cycling in Connemara with Cyclewest"

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My daughter and I bonded while cycling with Cycle West, a company owned by a red-haired dynamo named Fidelma Ray. If you want to experience the best of Ireland on a cycling holiday, I highly recommend using this company. Fidelma is awesome. She took care of every detail perfectly. Because she is Irish and lives in Ireland (although she has lived in the United States as well and understands the American psyche) she is able to seek out fabulous restaurants and great inns as well as true backroads to cycle on.

We had to deal with very little traffic while cycling. Fidelma's father drove the "sag wagon" van to pick up tired cyclists, or to stop and show us sights like the ruins of a potato farm on a hillside or miniature orchids next to the road. You really do feel like family with Cycle West. I managed to eat salmon twice a day for over a week, a feat of which I am very proud and from which I feel very satisfied!

My daughter cycled with Fidelma's daughter Alison, and had a blast. She came home with a lot more self-confidence. One of the other terrific things about this cycling trip (I have cycled in France and Italy as well) is Fidelma's unique system for keeping you from getting lost. It is foolproof. You can stay with the group or venture forth on your own. The second day I didn't see my speed-demon daughter all morning and was worried she might have taken a wrong turn. But no, she followed the directions perfectly and completely on her own and ended up at the designated lunch spot wondering what took me so long. She did this several times during the week.

Our group spent some terrific nights in Irish pubs, often where we were the only tourists among the local folk, singing and enjoying the music. We did some sightseeing while we traveled, cycled 20-40 miles a day; took a day off from cycling to hike on a remote island with spectacular views; fell asleep beneath down comforters in charming inns; enjoyed "bangers and rash" for breakfast, etc. Fidelma let everyone order whatever they wanted from the menu each night, which is a boon for picky eaters, vegetarians or those who might (yikes!) be allergic to seafood.

If you are looking for a romantic holiday with someone you love, or a great family bonding experience, or a solo trek where you will be welcome, safe, comfortable, and part of a friendly group, this is the trip for you. I would go every year if I could afford it! Ireland is a fantastic place to visit, and seeing it from the seat of a bicycle is the perfect way to absorb all things Irish, including the occasional traffic jam of oncoming sheep!

This was the best vacation my daughter and I have ever had. Looking back I can't think of a single thing I didn't like, except that the time seemed to go by too quickly. And there was this one hill I had to get off and push my bike up...but the sailing down the hills and warming ourselves at a peat fire while waiting for our (salmon on my part) lunch to be served were experiences I'll never forget. All the places we stayed were terrific and the cycling wasn't too difficult, if challenging sometimes. You can find out more about this company **at www.cyclewest.com or WWW.TRIPADVISOR.COM**

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