

Irish Way 2015



By Clare, Chicago, IL

The Irish Way was truly a life-changing trip. I had put it off for two years, but I finally came to my senses this year and went on #IW15. I am so happy that I did. I would never want to see Ireland for the first time any other way. Before I left, I was incredibly nervous about meeting new people and going to a new country. I come from a small high school with about 80 people in my grade. I had never left the

country before. I knew no one going on the trip and I thought the counselors would be super strict and scary. Everything about the IW was out of my comfort zone. I was freaking out for days before I left and literally sweat through my shirt at Logan Airport.

In the end, there was nothing to be nervous about! From the moment we stepped foot in Dublin, I felt right at home. I made new friends instantly with both students and counselors. Over the next 25 days, I became a part of a new family. Strangers became my best friends and I hate not seeing them every day. We might live miles apart, but I know that we will be friends for life, even the counselors. I was a little nervous when I met the IW Staff, because they are all older than us and I thought that they would be really mean. In reality, it was the complete opposite! Every counselor made an effort to get to know each and every student. Mama T cared for us as if we were her own children. There was never a moment on the IW that I felt lonely or uncomfortable. #IW15 became my second family and they will hold a special place in my heart forever.

Not only did I make new friends-I got to explore another country. I had always wanted to travel to Ireland, always hoping that my competitive Irish dancing career would take me there. IW allowed us to travel throughout the country and every day was a new adventure! I loved the day spent in Northern Ireland at the Giant's Causeway and the day spent biking around the Aran Islands. Even the rain at the Cliffs of Moher couldn't deter my excitement. I distinctly remember a moment in Killarney National Park. A friend and I were standing on rocks in the middle of Torc waterfall and we just freaked out, saying, "We are standing in a waterfall in Ireland!" Every once and while, it would actually hit us that we were in a new country and we just could not believe our dream came true. I woke up every single morning excited for the day ahead and I went to bed each night with a smile on my face. The entire trip felt so surreal and sometimes I can't believe that I actually got to go on the IW.

On the last day, I was sobbing uncontrollably because I did not want to leave Ireland or my amazing new family. While most of us could not pull ourselves together, the counselors were completely fine. I asked them why they weren't in tears and I remember one counselor telling me, "I'm not sad right now because so many people would kill to be on a trip like this. We were just lucky enough that it happened to us." And that is so true. I am incredibly lucky and grateful that the IW happened to



me. I could not thank Taryn, Angie, Shona, Miles, Kate, Kent, and Casey enough for the summer that they made happen. The IW was the most amazing trip in the world and words do not do it justice. I came home with a new family and a new home. The Irish Way was the best summer of my life and I cannot wait to go back as a counselor!

By Owen, Boston, MA

On a rainy summer's night in Boston, I boarded a plane alongside thirty other teenagers whom I had never met, and embarked on what would become four of the greatest weeks in my life. As an Irish Way participant, I spent twenty-five days in various parts of Ireland, taking classes about Irish history and culture, and visiting some of the country's most scenic areas. My older brother went in 2012, and called it "the best experience of his life." I had been interested in going ever since then, but I always kept pushing it off. I finally decided enough was enough, and I applied to join the IW family!

That decision was honestly one of the smartest things I had ever done. Everyone involved in the trip truly cares about you. I thought that the IW Staff would be these terrifying authority figures. Instead, they were the best part of the trip! The Counselors always went above and beyond to make this trip great, and were some of the most fun people I have ever met. Taryn is hilarious, but she will always take care of you, and help with any problem you might have. Angie is the sweetest person alive, and the greatest storyteller you will ever meet. The other IW students are some of the best people you'll have the privilege of knowing. You really do make a new family when you are there, and the people I met are already some of my closest friends.

Everyday was an amazing experience. The counselors made our classes so much fun! Whether it was Gaelic twister or Irish Jeopardy, every teacher made their class as interesting as possible. Classes didn't take up all the day though, and they made sure to give us plenty of free time in

the cities we were in. I recommend going to a cafe with your new friends and go people watching! Most days we didn't have classes, and those were the days we would do our excursions. You'll make awesome friends on those long bus rides, and maybe even sing a few One Direction songs with Angie! You will see so many amazing things, from Air Shows at Tramore beach to the amazing dancers at Riverdance to the intense Gaelic football matches at Croke Park-not a single day will bore you. My grandma grew up right near the Cliffs of Moher, so visiting County Clare was a really important moment for me. Everyday you experience a once in a lifetime opportunity, and make memories that will stay with you forever.

Day after day, I had a moment that made me remember "Oh my God, I'm in Ireland!" It might have been something huge, like standing at the top of Blarney Castle, or something as basic as driving on the left side of the road. You never really get over the excitement of being where you are. Joining the Irish Way was truly the best decision of my life and I will cherish every moment I spent in Ireland. I am counting down the days until I can become an IW Counselor!