

My journey in Ireland

Preface

All the reports I wrote about my experiences, about the parties, the religious gatherings, the excursions and travels, organized by the “Haus Zueflucht” or undertaken by myself, I have ordered them for the most part in different chapters, which I have sometimes numbered, according to the sequence of the events. So one can have a clear oversight about all what happened.

As for my journey in Ireland, I made an exception. I just named the chapters by different designations, more intuitively than in a proper order, for the whole experience I had, travelling for the second time in that country, impressed me so much – through the peculiar and the natural character of the land, that I can state only one thing with certainty: it is unique in the world! So let us start for this “magic trip” and let us be conquered by the beauty of the “Green Isle”!

Introduction

The whole thing began, as Carmen, one of our woman-social workers in our house, suggested me to undertake a holidaytrip to Ireland. She had found a favourable offer on some travel brochure, and presented it to me. I found it interesting, and laid myself some money aside, whereat she kept it gracefully for me in the safe of the office. She gave me some help too for the online-booking.

The trip should take place with the plane, starting in Zürich-Kloten, until Dublin. Then we would travel with the bus, through the South and the West, and then all the way up to the Atlantic coast, to Connemara, to Kerry and back to Dublin again.

It was an organized tour, within a group, and we would spend the night in different hotels, like near Dublin, in the area of county Clare, then near Ennis, Limerick, Killarney and finally at Dublin again.

The booking was closed on time, for the flight, travel with the bus, hotel, insurance for theft and accident, among other things. Then I took care of the payment. I was clever enough, to lay myself enough money aside, in order to have sufficiently, to spend it for the stay, for shopping especially.

I was glad, that I could count on the help of Carmen, because I had rather little knowledge about working on the computer, and everything that goes with it. I could also count on a helping hand from Sandra and Sara, two other co-workers in the office. It's great to have all three of them in the office, because they are nice, they have a good knowledge of office-work and they are so helpful as well. I had made up my mind for Ireland, because since a long time, I had heard so much about it, I had a lot of interest for and wanted to get acquainted with it. I know a little bit of its History, and since four or five years, I work on learning the Irish-Gaelic language. Four years ago, I was in Dublin for three days. I liked it very much, but I found it a little bit too short. This time, I was preparing myself for a real discovery-tour, in an unknown but, for me, promising country.

Formalities and excitement of flying

With my traveling bag in my hand, early in the morning, I took the tram in front of my house, until “Hardbrücke”, and from there, I went on with the bus and with the “Glattalbahn”, until the airport. All airports present, for their great size, a somewhat impersonal atmosphere. Yet, their cosmopolitan aura awakes in oneself the desire to travel. So it’s starting to get exciting right now! At the check-in, I got my air ticket handed out, my travel bag conveyed, and on it went direction Security, where they control all your personal items. At the iron gate, the attention of the staff is being attracted by a beep – as always. Once it’s about my shoes, provided with a brooch, or there’s the belt buckle, or, as it seems now, my artificial hip joint made of titan, which would mean for me, an extra control. Unfortunately, you can’t avoid those proceedings.

It’s lucky, that I took myself a cup of good coffee, at the first shop by the entrance, to keep my mind on positive thoughts, and gave a fair tip to the personnel! This is to get in a real high mood and to keep the human relations upright, as well as I can. I think, this begins with those who serve us.

Then came the pass control, the waiting at the gate for Dublin, - flight with Air Lingus – the last control for my ticket, getting on board with a friendly greeting for the hostess, who welcomes us at the door. Finally, I reach my seat and I can sit down. Before the start, I listened to the instructions of the stewardess, about the safety-measures on the flight. However I didn’t understand much of her English, which didn’t seem to originate from Oxford. It’s not that important after all, for I could read all that on the brochure by the seat ahead of mine. It’s always impressive, how – lead by a professional hand – we lift off from the runway, get at high altitude real fast and attain the flight-height, where we can relax, enjoy our flight or just get some rest.

I got acquainted with my seat-neighbour, a Swiss named Hanspeter. He told me, he was going to Ireland, to purchase an antique, which seemed to interest him. So I got involved in a conversation, about professional matters, about personnel problems and labour-market. It doesn’t matter whom you meet, each person has its own lifestyle, and - so it seems - is stuck with it, whether he or she is interested in fine arts, in management or in human problems at the workplace, as I am. The means we have at our disposal, like infrastructure, information, finances and others, should help us to get the best out of it. His view was more pragmatic than mine – he was more for, like keeping the proper order in the business, than exchanging ideas, - so our talk was animated by our own different personal views.

The friendly police officer at the airport

In the Dublin-Airport, there was a delay at the luggage-check, and we had to wait for about an hour at the baggage claim. Was there really so much to control? The concept of security seems to prevail everywhere. When I entered the hall, where our travel guide had to meet me, I saw in fact some people with big name-plates in their hands, but I didn’t catch sight of my name. I missed the person who came to pick me up, and so I took another look around. I just didn’t find him!

Well – so I had some problem here! Ok, I had a hotline-number with me, for an emergency like this, but as I tried to call, it didn’t work. Probably the dialing code wasn’t right. Besides, I didn’t have the name of the hotel neither. I was depending on myself only. So what? Should I go for help at the Information? For that, I had to walk over, from this terminal to the other one, the number two. There they couldn’t tell me more about it. I went to an Info-desk for hotel transfers, where I explained my problem to a competent employer. The young man, though he was helpful and tried it, couldn’t establish the connection neither. After a second and third desk, arriving to the same result, I went back to the first desk, where I found a

lively young man, who seemed to be expert about phone and computer. Unfortunately neither he, after some earnest attempts, succeeded at it.

Now, how about that? Here I am, in a foreign airport, without a contact-number, without any helpful information, without any other person who could help me, this was a really uncomfortable situation! In the case I couldn't find my hotel, I could possibly miss our travel-guide, and then, who knows if I could start this bus-travel I was certainly looking forward to? I just had to make it!

In the meantime, I stepped twice into the pub in the first terminal, to drink a cup of coffee. There I could collect my thoughts, and observe my surroundings in all tranquility. In spite of everything, I enjoyed the fact that I had arrived in Ireland. The special, traditional aura of this room, like the pictures and the photographs on the walls, that were telling us of a past time of the country, reminded me that I was where I wanted to be, and I was happy about it. So by no means, I would let escape the pleasant side of my journey!

As we arrived towards the evening, I decided to step by the police office of the airport, - the Security, as they call it here. That could help. Actually, I met an elderly police officer there, who kept his calm manner and understood at once my situation. He made one first attempt, to type in the number I presented to him, on his set, one more attempt, and at the third one, it finally worked! I don't know how he succeeded at it, when all others had failed! Maybe he had the equipment he needed, for to reach the person I had to talk to. I could get in touch with the personnel of the hotel, explain my problem to them and get knowledge of the name of the lodging for my first night: Hotel Clayton Liffey Valley. Whatsoever, I will always be grateful to this friendly policeman, I met at the airport. Because as a "simple" routine officer, he brought me the help I was expecting.

To be continued...

My journey in Ireland – Part 2

Yuri, our travel guide

The hotel had informed me, I had again the possibility to meet the travel guide at the airport, in the evening. Though I didn't know exactly at which place. Finally, I had to take a decision by myself: I climbed into the next taxicab, and had me be driven to the Clayton Hotel. I told the driver, he should take the fastest road, even if it should cost a little bit more. I was anxious to find myself in a more familiar surroundings. And, don't they say in the world of business: Time is money? On arrival, I paid in cash, because the driver wouldn't accept business cards. Happily I had enough financial reserve on both accounts, cash and business card. Then I went inside the hotel, to get myself checked in, glad to have found at last, my first lodgings in Ireland! I felt now safely arrived and cared for, and I could also meet Yuri, the travel guide I missed at the airport.

Yuri is Czech, he was staying in Germany before, and lives now since a fairly long time in Ireland. He gave me the impression that he is well integrated here, and that he knows a lot about the country and its History. He would accompany us through the whole trip, give us all necessary instructions and be in charge for the animation. So he could let us take part in his interest of the land and its culture.

The next morning, we went aboard, on our bus. There were mainly couples from Germany and from Switzerland here, travelling with us, and a few singles, like me, who like to travel by themselves. The advantage of it, is that this way, you have a lot of time for observing and discovering the surroundings on your route. We began with a tour in the town of Dublin, and let us show the commercial area Temple Bar, the bridges on the Liffey River, and admired some nice buildings, like the Trinity College, where the famous antique bible, the "Book of Kells" is duly kept.

We had then some free time left, and we could do some sightseeing around on our own. I wandered down two or three streets, in the proximity of the Trinity College, having no precise aim, just looking at the nice townscape, which is, just in itself, an attractive sight. While walking on those pavements, I was practicing finding out the streets I read on my citymap. I feel comfortable in each town or metropole, also when there is hustle or stress, or maybe just for that reason. Dublin could offer what not all big cities in the world possessed: a lot of appeal, and as much fun! It seems that the Irish have here two very strong trumps in their hands, and I was ready to play the game, and to invest time and money, for gaining excitement in this round, a round that would last for seven entire days!

Before I got back to the bus, I stopped by the corner and stepped into the Lincoln Pub, to have a drink. In each place I'm going for a visit during my traveling, I provide for a stop at a pub, for to enjoy the local atmosphere, and also to get in touch with the inhabitants of the town, I mean the ones I meet there by chance. If I happen to spend there a good time, or even make some good friends, then this stays my favoured meeting place, where I will go to, on each future visit in the area.

The magic of the Wicklow Mountains

Our ride continued through the great nature reserve in the South, and the Wicklow Mountains. There was a lot to see: meadows, covered by beautiful flowers, mountainous landscapes, very inviting and decorated by plants and trees of all sorts, or wild and inhospitable, flanked by rocks, looking ready to scare away any bold visitor by their roughness. Then again, a smoother rocky landscape, rivers and small gorges, were awaiting you for a trip in a fantasy reign of hills and endless pastures. I caught myself imagining that a goblin, one of those fairy people living under the ground, climbed out of a gorge and disappeared in the landscape, out of our sight. Though I don't believe that such creatures exist, it was as some mysterious natural force was acting on my thoughts, to prove me I was wrong, and everything I heard about those mysterious beings was reality.

This was one of the countless experiences I had, which showed me the richness of the Irish world, in all its splendour. All those natural beauties, completed by brooks, hedges and grazing cattle's in between, ornate with rhododendrons and violets, that wait for us at the most surprising places, I have seen some of them elsewhere too, but the special sight, dominated by the shining green all around, and the ambience that goes with all these features, marked by the History of the country, by the old tales and legends, covered everything with a spell you could not escape.

The stereo in the bus was playing a CD with Irish ballads, sung melodiously and with emotion by Tina Mulrooney. All I had to do, was to let myself carry away by the music, like being rocked by the waves

of an enchanting ocean, to admire the countryside and to relish our journey with all its expected, and even more, its unexpected moments. Here I lived the first, and one of the most convincing moments of the so well known, and so much sung of “magic” of the green isle.

In Glendalough, the ancient “spiritual center” of the country, we just had to stop, and not miss to visit this site. There we could admire the old cemetery of the monastery, and the high round tower, which served the monks in old times, as a refuge against hostile attacks. What I also did notice, was a small souvenir shop, at the edge of the alley, where nice cups, jars and caps were exposed outside for sale. After the visit of the historical site, I had nothing special to do, so I paid a short visit to this – smaller site. I was in good mood, had enough money in my pocket, and wanted to take advantage of every moment of my stay. In no way, I felt like doing “nothing”. Inside the hut, I had the owner lady show me the pretty clothes, the beer mugs with the Ireland logo – the cloverleaf or the harp, and finally I took along a traditional Irish wool cap, that I promptly put on my head. I acted spontaneously, as a real Irish fan, the one I became now. I hadn’t in fact, thought much about money, or about our time schedule or about doing the important thing in my stay or so, because I hadn’t come here only for getting knowledge about History or culture, but also to get to know the people here, and the lifestyle they express and live every day. In one or two words, I didn’t want to stay aside, but to share in the life of the Irish, with my cap on my head I was wearing like some advertisement mark or a trophy.

We had a halt near Carlow at a hotel that looked much like an old country house: the rural style was present everywhere, with old distinguished wallpaper designs on every wall, and with old fashioned furniture. When I opened the door before entering my room, I noticed this special handle, with a sweeping S-shape, one you find only rarely nowadays. Well, I think this is the perfect surrounding for such a trip.

In the evening, I came across my two neighbour women from the bus, who welcomed me at their dinner table. It was time for me to start some new friendships, and after a short introduction between myself and the whole round, we spent our time in a relaxed and friendly conversation, in agreeable company. When you start a new acquaintance, you can never say, how well you are going to reach someone else. Yet, if you are lucky, you can have an interesting, constructive experience and this is what I would call a success! Because all what you learn, in relating with other people, can bring you ahead in life. It’s a kind of chance everyone should seize, when the opportunity is here, for as one says in Latin: “Carpe diem!” Which means like: “Take the day, take the chance!”

The next morning, I met Hanspeter, my seat neighbour in the plane. I saw him right before we took the bus, by the entrance of the hotel. I was surprised and told him, that I didn’t expect to see him here, participating in our trip. He explained to me, that he needed a little bit more time for his purchase, as he thought at first. So he took the decision to use the couple of free days at his disposal, for doing some traveling around, a nice way to occupy the waiting time. I also learnt to know Alice, a friend of him who is, like both of us, from Switzerland.

Galway, heart of the Irish tradition

Today is the third day of our tour. As always, Yuri is on time and in a good mood, to greet us in the bus, and to start for the sightseeing. He called out a loud “good morning” to us, which was answered only halfheartedly. He wanted to be sure we were all awake, so that we could enjoy the trip, and he called again, even louder: “Good morning!” Then there resounded a more distinct and loud “Good morning” from the group towards him. Now we were ready! We could travel on westward to Galway, our next destination!

Yuri was a good guide. He took care of every one of us. He was sure to commentate every special site, which awaited us on the way. He was communicative, and created a lively atmosphere during the

whole tour. I was looking forward for this part of the tour, for I had heard and read a lot of interesting things, about the traditional character of this region, of the Connemara especially with its numerous lakes, of the traditional Irish speaking in the Gaeltacht, that was still very alive here, and I was already focused on that. Would we also meet Gaelic speaking inhabitants? Would I understand them, or rather: “Would they understand me?”

Until we reached our goal, we drove through very different natural sceneries, once with sheep and cows on it, peacefully grazing, once with small brooks, framed with trees and small patches of agricultural land, and another time we were admiring a special rocky landscape like the Burren, where you saw all kinds of plants, and even nice exotic flowers. The particularity about it, is that they are growing on chalky soil, there were you wouldn't expect them at all! It was, as we were travelling in an unreal world!

After the towns of Tullamore, Athlone and Clifden, we arrived at Galway. We parked, - or I would rather say, our Irish driver, who demonstrated us his know-how, with his dexterity to drive through the narrowest lanes and tightest curves – parked his vehicle at the street side and let us climb out on the Merchants Road, just next to the pedestrian zone of the little town.

All I did now, was to start to stroll around, because I felt fine in this urban area, all the more as Galway appeared to us as a very charming place, and seemed to welcome us, travellers from the continent, in its intimate sphere. I was relying on my inner feeling, marched ahead and was hopeful, I would learn more about the local crowd, get myself involved in an exciting talk, and, and, and... I ended up on the William Street, where the lively trade, the boutiques and the inns, discreetly said a friendly hello to me. I decided, this would be a good terrain for my discovery tour. I aimed towards the first attractive shop, and after having stepped inside and taken a quick look on a great range of caps, t-shirts and mugs, I acquired two t-shirts with an Irish logo and a big jar, for drinking pints, or else for deposit little objects in it, and put it on a frame between some books, like I did when arriving at home, some days later. This drinking cup became so a souvenir, for one of the most beautiful journeys I ever made in my life. I also took along a cap with me – or was it a bottle-opener? I think I lost the supervision on my personal having. In fact, I wasn't here to have a constant control on my expenses, but rather to learn more about the life of that pretty town, and to see what it would all offer to me!

It was getting time for a Read Ale, which I personally found as good as the Guinness. I sat myself at a table in the outdoor yard of some pub, and ordered my beer. It was, except for the crowd walking by on the pavement near us, a quiet day and I listened to the usual talks around, lively but not all too interesting. I stayed aside and observed the bustle, staying all quiet. Then all the customers and myself, had our attention caught by a group of youngsters passing by, holding shields in their hands. They were marching before us on the street, with an earnest expression on their faces. I never was very interested in demos – for it was a demo – still this time, I took the trouble to give it a closer look. I didn't quite understand what it was about, maybe about social and financial problems of part of the population, or maybe about environmental issues... I noted the sad expression of some of the participants, and for the first time, I had some sympathy for those manifestants. They were not aggressive and didn't have a negative attitude. They just wanted to show us their position, their feelings about those problems, and to express their discontentment. I thought they were not satisfied, because they saw so much prosperity, in this modern world, and in spite of that, they couldn't take part in it, and didn't know how to reach a satisfying level. If I want to be honest, they looked disoriented to me. I really felt sorry for them, just within my heart!

They are confronted with many things. There's not enough work and jobs, there is much uncertainty in this 21st century society. Also important values are crumbling down, such as family life, work ethics, and religious faith too, which plays an important role anyway, in this country.

How can that be? How can we convince the young generation about undertaking new things, how can we bring them to participate, how introduce and motivate new employees for their start in their working place? I often ask myself about it. Where is a job for this or that youngster? Does that job exist anyway? Or do we want to secure our future, just by finance, automation and technology?

We certainly should invest more in human potential, such as good will, experience, friendliness, creativity. There should be more interest for social issues, as some of our fellow humans get confronted with problems that surpass their own means or their potential. Afterwards, we sure can undertake any business, or go after some personal interest. The spirit of enterprise definitely has its right place in modern life. But success should not be attained at cost of human wellbeing, and neither at cost of environment and durability.

As I finished my beer, I found out that I hadn't find much time for chatting, at this pub visit. But on the other side, I had learned more about the local young people, and therefore I returned to our bus, carrying a fine feeling of satisfaction, in myself.

So we started off once more, heading to our next place for the night, next to Ennis. As we arrived there, and turned around the last corner, I caught sight of a pub, which looked well inviting, and I said to myself: "A last stepping-in, into this hopefully pleasant inn, is a must!"

To be continued...

My journey in Ireland – Part 3

First experiences in the pub

The problem was this: I didn't really wish to pay with my credit card, because, while going out for amusement, I prefer the good old way of paying my bill with banknotes. But I didn't have enough cash in my pocket. I saw a cash-automate in the hotel lobby, and took my chance there. I probably pressed on the wrong button, as it didn't come out any money. I let it go, because I didn't want to stay in that hall, a place I found too anonymous. So why not just drop now in the pub, and see how to solve this problem with the bar crew? When I was in the place, I told the young barman about my concern. He showed himself very friendly, and pointed to the "cash machine" - a new expression for me, I wanted to keep in mind – on the other side of the street, by the service station. At this "cash machine", I could draw my Euros all quietly.

Back in the bar, I attempted to speak two or three words in Gaelic, with a local customer. Most of the clients around us were all ears, eager to find out, whether this newcomer really understood their dialect... So I tried hard not to disappoint my audience, and began slowly: "Tá me in ann, Gaeilge a chaint!" That had to mean: "I can talk Irish!" Another man behind me, also listening to us, answered me: "It is not wrong, but you can say: Is féidir liom caint Gaeilge!" In any case, I succeeded at earning their respect, and this affirmed my intention, to learn to speak real Gaelic.

I emptied the red ale I bought, said farewell to my new bar mates, whose spontaneous and open attitude I appreciated so much, and went back to the hotel. I sure was happy about the fact that I finally got in touch with the people of the country, and on top of it, using my knowledge of Gaelic!

The Kylemore Abbey

Then came the fourth day, and we had the visit of the Kylemore Abbey on our schedule. I must admit, that I was so busy at sightseeing, that I have been distracted from the notes I put down on my draft-paper, and lost so somewhat the overview on our itinerary. That's why I will now tell about the important episodes of our trip, the ones I remember the best, just the way they come back to my memory. I will not give too much importance to the timely succession of events.

We had a wonderful cultural experience, in the Kylemore Abbey. We wandered about the gardens and alleys of the abbey, which were built by Henry Mitchell in the 19th century. The gardens were occupied by twenty-one greenhouses, which were heated by an efficient system of water pipes. These grounds, which meant an important contribution to the local economy of that time, are now part of a set of constructions, with a splendid castle, also built by Henry Mitchell, a gothic cathedral and a Benedictine nuns' convent. The nuns were running there previously a renowned boarding school for young girls from all parts of the world, and they live still here, as a religious community. The cathedral is a rather small construction, yet built with much elegance. The inside impresses the visitors, through its bright expression, with colourful glass windows, marbles of different colours, and sends out a peaceful atmosphere. The Christian faith, is of great importance to the Irish people, it did have an impact on the culture and the lifestyle of the inhabitants of the Isle, and beautiful constructions like this one, will only acknowledge that.

Further experiences in the pub

I can recall of a nice stay in Waterville, on the peninsula of Iveragh, in the county of Kerry. It's situated at the Atlantic Coast, and we were surprised by a fierce wind, at our stepping off the bus. We had got used to this rough climate. If we couldn't support that, I guess we wouldn't have come here, would we? In these areas, the nature seems to have the last word.

After a half hour of strolling around in the lanes, and after a stop in a little commercial center, to by a drink, I thought it was pub time. As I sat down at the counter, I noticed for the first time during the trip, a customer who attracted the attention of everyone, by his behaviour. He constantly laughed aloud, as if he wanted to provoke the other people around. I got curious and asked the server, what did make him so cheerful? He simply answered me: "He does precisely the right thing, he drinks! Do the same, and you'll be joyful too!" I asked myself, if this was as true, as it sounded like, but I accepted it as a wise thought for living. Good mood, good humor, optimism: when it's used at a reasonable extent, it can be of help in many situations.

Our stay in this picturesque little village, was definitely a nice "event". You feel like coming back, not because the advertisement for the travellers was good, but much more because you were conquered by the simplicity of the local life.

I had another funny event in the pub at Ennis. I entered into a personal, friendly talk with an Irish customer. "You Irish people are in fact uncomplicated," said I. "You like to work, you're doing your job well and in the evening, you enjoy drinking your beer in the pub!" That's right!" was his answer." You know, here it's quite simple: I can offend whom I want, and everyone can offend me!" I had to smile inside about

his words, words which none should consider really seriously. For the Irish are often direct, but certainly not heartless. They just like to give expression to their thought and their opinion.

We stopped several times in a day, whether for seeing a historical site, a cathedral, a castle or a ruin, or just for shopping. As for me, I can design this kind of shopping as “robbery”. I never bought so much within a few days, so uninhibitedly, I got really infuriated! I can say, in explanation to that, that I had prepared my schedule and my finances for the travel so well, with the help of Carmen, I have to notice, that I wanted to make the best of it, at 100 percent! At each stop, we had many opportunities, to get to know the country, to explore a city, and to undertake our pub visit in the evening. We found an interesting inn among others, in the Kerry, at one of those stops. As we stepped inside, we were instantly impressed by its vastness, and the crowd of visitors present.

The place seemed to be well known around, because it was filled with travellers, tourists, customers from everywhere. The personnel was constituted by many active and attentive waiters, waitresses and bar servers, who were busily hurrying around the halls, ready to serve instantly every customer. I had to be patient, and wait a little time at the counter, until the server arrived. Of course, I let myself hand out my preferred one, this “Red Ale”, to accompany myself at one of my main activities in my leisure time, which is to observe and contemplate my surroundings. Then my attention was caught by an interesting thing: I found that the personnel was more active in the space reserved for the diners, where many meals were served, and neglected somewhat the seats at the bar. Was it something like a clever strategy, like occupying the space where there was more profit to make? I didn’t want to speculate further about it, when I saw another person, who seemed to observe this activity with interest. There was an elderly man behind the counter, who had a little unsatisfied look on him. It looked like he had the say here. At least, that’s what his slight authoritarian style told me. Was he the boss, or even the owner himself? Was this here sort of a family business? In any case, it seems that he wasn’t satisfied with his crew because, so I thought, the bar looked relatively little occupied for this time in the afternoon.

However, I didn’t want by any means, to start a discussion about that with anybody. These problems about economics and personnel politics, were of our host’s business. I was here for my pleasure, and I let everyone else go about his job. But I found the situation interesting! The chief here seemed to cultivate a rather conservative manner, being the one who wouldn’t go easily for some rapid change. Or maybe he was just concerned about everyone’s effort? As a matter of fact, I found the atmosphere around very positive. Like I’ve seen in all these comfortable pubs on our way, I met here too this warm social activity, open to every soul coming in, adding a plus to the fun and the exciting moments, that you expect to be part of your evening. I think, that the sense of respect for social order - to be specific - for the family spirit, still has priority in the land we are visiting. It provides for cohesion in the social structures, and contributes to the unity, benefitting to all Irish in their homeland and in their own house. I know, from my own lectures, that it did help the population through many crises in its History. I must say, I have respect for that!

The famous cliffs on the Atlantic

The cliffs of Moher are a magnificent nature spectacle. At their highest point, they fall 214 meters down into the ocean, and they extend as far as eight km along the coast. In the presence of this wilderness, the walls of rock, the waves, the wind that never wants to let us in peace, and the green meadows on which we stand, seeming to remain the trademark of this big island – here you wished to spend your whole stay, wandering on the green grass, contemplating continuously this rough nature all around, while wishing to print it forever in your memory.

Moreover, these cliffs are a paradise for many species of birds, sea animals and flowers. Fulmars and peregrine falcons have their nest on ledges of the rocks, and whirr all around the walls and out into the wind. Obviously they are the main actors in this show, produced by nature. As an observer, you are having a vivid impression, from a world centuries old, not to compare with what you see on postcards! As a marvelled, but not fulfilled spectator, I turned finally towards the mainland, and climbed up the height, so I could get, from up there, a larger and wider view of the scenery.

Initially I wanted to avoid any physical activity during my vacation, to be able to shake off my fatigue from work at home. Yet to my glad surprise, I wasn't tired at all, and could make the climbing without any problem, happy and cheered by today's experience. The powerful wind was blowing relentlessly from the ocean and I had to hold my cap tight, to not let it fly away. It would be a real loss, for such a nice piece of clothing and souvenir.

The Iveragh Peninsula

We visited this region, as most travellers do it, driving through the Ring of Kerry. The drive goes partly along the Atlantic coast, and so we could admire other steep, vertical cliffs, bays and other beautiful spots. Towards the interior, we see the characteristic meadows again, the woods and hills, and on top of that, old fortresses, real testimonies of past times. I think I will leave my descriptions for a while, for there's the risk that I would just repeat myself, in my enthusiasm.

Our travel guide had the bright idea to offer us a halt in Killarney, in the afternoon. We were free to walk around, do some shopping or anything you liked. That came at the right moment for me, because I bought a couple of postcards before and had no stamps, to be able to send them home. I had to find a post office.

As I went on the way, passed by the near shopping center, looked at the beautiful church on the opposite side of the street, and had to wait for the green light at the pedestrian crossing, I said to myself, we were in a typical urban area – in the usual stress, as a matter of fact. But that didn't last for long. Soon I found myself in that commercial area, discrete but attractive for everyone, for rich and poor, old and young, and I was surrounded by the lovely boutiques and the cozy restaurants. Even common residential buildings, administrative offices and news-stands, contributed their share to the local ambience. Once again, I let myself lead instinctively, trying to guess where the office was about, one time dreaming, one time observing and – an activity I had now learned to appreciate – picking up the typical atmosphere of a provincial town.

After a while, I thought it was time to orient myself, and eventually to ask, which direction I should take. Nearby, I noticed a kiosk, where I bought a newspaper, and asked the saleslady, where I could find the post-office. This was an elegant way to inquire about, while not looking like some lost downtown freak. There it was! I saw the street sign, telling me to go about 300m ahead, and then to the right, just around the corner. I had bet fairly right! I got my stamps at the counter, and took them back to the bus, because I had left my cards in my hotel room. There, at the reception, I could hand in my cards, correctly stamped.

Previously, at the parking lot on our stop, I had a little time to look around in the shopping mall, before we drove away. It was Sunday, so there was nothing much open. There was not much to do either, except looking at the shop-windows. At least I was back early at the parking, and could have a rest. Not the way I did the day before – was it at the high cliffs or was it at Waterville? I came ten minutes late to the bus, and Yuri received me with these nice words: "You ain't back on time, now you must sing!" He set up the rule, according to which we had to be right on time at the departure, for he just had to keep up his

schedule. In case we were a couple of minutes behind, we had to sing a song for all the passengers, to make amends.

I didn't argue, for I was actually the one responsible, for this uneasy situation. I grabbed the microphone, relaxed myself and said aloud: "I'm going to sing a French song, from Hugues Aufray, a sailor's song, or shanty!" The song, named "Santiano", was a great hit in the sixties, especially at summer-camps, and practically at all camp-fires among young hikers. It was telling about a sailor, who was proud to serve on board of a smart ship, "Je suis fier d'y être matelot!" I sang pretty well, and all the auditors in the bus clapped their hands heartily, so I was pleased, considering I didn't get close to most of the other travellers so far, and I didn't know how they were going to react. I believe, the good ambience that reigned during the whole trip, had contributed to this personal success. Thanks to that and to Yuri, each stage was a special event, and we all did appreciate that.

To be continued...

My journey in Ireland – Part 4

The rock of Cashel

When you catch sight of it from afar, you are instantly impressed by its fabulous aura. Miles around, the famous site is visible: the castle, the cathedral and the chapel. It appeals to you inevitably, by its mythical and historical character. This remarkable cultural place, played a leading part in the History of Ireland. Here were reigning the kings of Munster, in one of these four provinces, which divided the Island in past days. Though some structures have been partially destroyed, the site is still a remarkable witness of tumultuous times. It doesn't really take much to describe the bright aura, that shines from this old fortress built on the rock. past.

During two centuries, as the records tell us, the power was constantly exercised by bishops. So this rock was not only a symbol of a political, but also of a religious force. The legend says, that it's here where St. Patrick explained to his followers the meaning of the Holy Trinity, with the aid of a cloverleaf. Thus the events happening about this region, were influenced by many important persons.

Each of the participants got its entry paid for. But, while watching the ruins in the inner courtyard, I lost my ticket. I had listened with keen interest to the explanations of our guide and, while doing so, I wondered what I would have been telling my subjects, if I would have been the ruler in the castle. The magic here present, already had taken me back to these medieval times! Still, I needed my ticket, to see the movie they showed here afterwards, that was telling us about the earlier days of the fortress. Well, as I had to rely on my own, I went to the cash desk, to let me hand out an entry card. This way, I could get a little bit in touch with the employees working here, and act somehow outside of the group, for a while. I organized my own little visit, so to say. Remembering my hard experience in the airport of Dublin, I could think this is sort of a predestination for me... Thereafter, I was able to attend our History lesson for today.

The Cormac's Chapel, of Romanesque style, is of interest by its different elements acting together, of German origin, of France, of Normandy and of England. The various origins of architecture, and the amazing ability of assimilation, have often been functioning so well, here in Ireland! The Gothic Cathedral was burnt down at the end of the 15th century, by a warlord, the earl of Kildare. It was reconstructed later, and finally abandoned to its own fate. Either way, whether of modest construction, or of stone, of limestone, or as a ruin, these vestiges can relate us all, from a thrilling and fascinating past.

Before going back to the bus, I paid a visit to the next by town Cashel, and its local pub. There wasn't much going on inside, there were about five customers present, who were watching one of those popular horseraces on TV, and like I myself now too, enjoying their Guinness or Red Ale. I regretted a little bit, it was so calm, as I like exciting life whatsoever. Though it was nice to be here, because I enjoyed participating in this social life, which regretfully, hadn't have much time for, since the beginning of my vacation. Here I had the opportunity to get closer to the inhabitants, and be a little more familiar with the Irish lifestyle. Although I missed the excitement of the "rush hour", I could still feel a sense of welcoming, and this has been one of my most beneficent experiences, I mean the discreet, but warm expression coming from the serving crew, wherever I went. I guessed by then, this would be the last one of those pub visits, that were so much fun for me! My point was to say farewell discreetly to the people of this place, and to the people of Ireland altogether – and to say thank you for the nice time I had.

Further events and highlights

We had some more interesting events on the trip, which I would now, considering the beautiful and spectacular sceneries we saw, almost rate down to "daily routine". Such as were: a hike in the Wicklow Mountains National Park and the visit of the "Kerry bog-village", an ancient village, set up presently as a museum, where you found houses covered with reed, and heated by peat. The ancient residents, farmers and workmen of the 18th and 19th century, used mowing-, reaping- and threshing machines, which looked archaic but they were functioning, at the ancient time of the harvest. We had insight in an older and also – more needy time. I know that Ireland at this present day, has found its way in the 21st century, but as far as I'm concerned, I find its past certainly worth some personal attention, considering the hard times it went through, at some stages in History.

One evening, we were invited to a traditional Céilí, an Irish dancing night. Unfortunately, I had to do without, for lack of cash in my pocket. It's too bad, but neither in your holidays, you can plan just everything at your own wish and envy.

Well, that's how I would describe and summarize the most interesting events and happenings, of my Ireland journey. I'm sure I forgot to mention one or two impressive moments. But if you allow me, I'm sure that this all builds up a thrilling report, of my personal discovery of the country. I hope most sincerely, that you enjoyed this lecture and that it may rouse in yourself the desire to come and take a look at this beautiful island by the Atlantic!

Now I find myself, like in every adventure at some time, on the way to our last destination, our last stay for the night, in the area of Dublin. After this hotel night, I will have to leave Ireland definitely, and to set off in direction of my home country. I'm afraid, that means having to say goodbye to a fascinating and unforgettable journey!

Last hotel night in Ireland

We all gathered in the lobby, of the hotel “Green Isle”, to listen to Yuri’s last instructions for tomorrow’s departure. Every one of us said goodbye to him, before in the bus, and he shook hands with each of the participants, the way it should be done. Now he wanted to explain to us at last, how the drive to the airport was organized. We were divided in three or four groups, and each would take another plane. We, that means the Swiss, were the last to take the shuttlebus, at eleven o’clock. We could load our luggage at ten approximately, into another bus. Yes, now began the last preparatories, the hardest part being tomorrow, when everything had to be ready at time. It was over with the comfortable bus-drives, the sighting of the wonderful landscape and the surprising discoveries, which delighted us every day.

I went on to my room, to install myself. I looked from my window, upon the land around and down on the highway, which was lying close to the hotel building. Probably the traffic passing by, causing much pollution, was the reason that you couldn’t open the windows, and that the hot air was accumulating itself in the whole room. So I put my shoes between the door and the frame, for letting come some fresh air inside. Yuri, who was dwelling on the same floor, noticed that and came to knock by me. He wanted to check, if by any chance, I forgot to close the door. I could reassure him, and had to smile about his attention. It sure was fine, that he was still keeping an eye on us.

At each other stay, I liked hanging around in the lounge, to relax, to take a coffee or a drink in the cafeteria, picking up the lively atmosphere or getting into an improvised talk with someone. This evening, I just wished to prepare my travel items for tomorrow, my baggage, my passport and my flight ticket, and then nicely go to bed. I was satisfied with the day and I was trying to get calm and relax for the day tomorrow, for my breakfast and for my flight back to Switzerland.

After the breakfast, I met my two Swiss friends, Hanspeter and Alice, in the hall, and we went along chatting easily, on the comfortable seats, to keep those two hours of waiting-time pleasant. Hanspeter made me the proposal, to stay both together by the check-in at the airport, to get the formalities done without any delay. He meant, he had himself much experience with it, and his help could be of use to me. This was the first time, I was travelling by air again, since twenty years back or more – so I was glad about his offer, and I agreed. I didn’t want a similar misfortune, like the one at the arrival, to happen to me again. I’m not kind of a coward, but eventually there would be a change in the methods at the checking, so we could be somewhat surprised by it, and lose a lot of time! In fact, we had our flying card to be checked by a new type of machine, what my friend did without delay. Then we passed, as usual, the luggage check, the pass control and made out our gate number, everything without any trouble. I was honestly relieved, and we had plenty of time for walking around in the halls, enjoy our last moments of holidays and finally, get ready for the flight, living the excitement of it all. We went strolling around the shopping areas and visiting the snack-stands, each one his own way. I didn’t miss the chance to buy a bottle of this excellent “Jameson” at the whisky-shop. This went without problem, as we had the personal checking behind us.

After a quiet flight, we landed in Kloten and at the terminal we went of course through the usual procedures, but – I didn’t believe it: the whole checking was run like clock-work! For the pass control, we just had to put the side with the photo on the screen, and it was instantly scanned. It seems that the Swiss know the art to carry out every control as simply as it can be done, when they wish to do so. At the luggage-conveyor, waiting for my travel bag, I said farewell to Alice, and Hanspeter, telling him a nice thanks for his help. Meeting him during the travel, I had made a new friendship, and this counts for me as a valuable experience.

I had my bag in my hand and was proceeding to my way home, as a joyous group of participants of our bus-trip, waved at me and called out a bright “goodbye” to me. They were Germans, maybe Austrians too, who had to travel further with the train or with another plane, or who wanted to spend some time in Switzerland. I didn’t notice them at first, but it looks like they remembered me, for my singing performance

in the bus. So I told them goodbye, with a big wave with the hand. So I had made my farewell mostly to everyone, and I left the great building, leaving the place to other travellers.

What does the future of Ireland look like?

On the tram town wards had to recognize: "The excitement of holidays is gone, the old trot is coming about again!" Though I felt happy about the fact I knew much more about Ireland now, and that I have seen the richness of its countryside and its impressive cultural heritage - in the midst of the pretty meadows and the wild-looking hills, there came an alarming thought to me:

What if this tremendous scenery, cherished by the inhabitants and so much praised by the whole planet, what if it would, on a future day, lose its magic? What if these natural areas, would relentlessly and inexorably be built over? What if the population, who look on their isle more as a good place to live, than as a spectacular scene, they who love their homeland and their family, as well as their lifestyle, what if they would lose their, sometimes impulsive, but healthy and pleasant way of being? What if now, pushed aside by financial pressure, away from prosperity, let's say, overwhelmed by a crisis, they would just be forgotten on the world scene? What if in such conditions, undesirable for no country and no-one on earth, they would lose their values and their sprawling taste of life? Would they still be happy in their favoured pub, enjoying their beer and would they still be able to joke with their seat neighbour, such as I once was and be so spontaneous, like they proved it to me?

Let us be honest about it, wouldn't the remarkable features of the Irish culture start to disappear, and wouldn't we, at some point start to send back home vacation-guests and other visitors, such as business people and ambitious workers, full of expectations. Such people would have to quit, disillusioned and disappointed, and stay away from the riches of the island, in the extreme case. If this cultural treasure, among others, would lose its brilliance, where could we find the essential answer to this, actually often asked question: "To be or not to be?" Or in other words: "Where, else would I have such a nice stay as I had in Ireland?"

I don't dare to think about it any further! It would be a real catastrophe! As in our modern cities, constantly other traditional comfortable places and shops have to yield to "hype-inns", which can certainly offer a high-level gastronomy, with a class service, but do not generate much enthusiasm and interest in a clientele, that looks more for good feelings, than professionalism? Where can we find that spot, where we get a really warm reception, and where we enjoy every glass and every minute, for which our money is spent?

Tell me, where are these towns, whose churches, and houses – whether we dawdle in and out of it, or whether we are stuck in it, caught by the crowd or by the traffic - which seem to watch us from above, and where do we find those trees, which seem to twinkle to us, because they're all part of our life? We still need these patches and spots, these areas and meeting places, whose humanity and characteristic traits, nobody can tear away. I was allowed to visit such places every day, in my seven days-journey, for which I never can tell, how grateful I am about! It did remind me, that if I don't lose my human attitude, and my joy of life, and if I stay and I'm doing my job with people who are important to me, than I really can expect to live well. If you get to know the ones around you, if you talk to them, communicate with them, you will love them and, believe me, they will help you to find the good in life! It is so with the family, with the working place, with the country one lives in. To all these we have to give our care, these ones we have to love, for them and ourselves, we have to build a home, which is nice to live in!

My personal wish for Ireland

I don't know what the future is providing for our world, in the next years, or decenniums. Who can know that anyway? Still, let us hope that the nature around us, our culture, our human relationships are not getting too short for us and – let us take care of it! I don't know what Ireland will look like in a more distant future, how beautiful its landscape will be, what impression the historical sites will still exert on their visitors.

But I do hope, and I do trust that the reason of the humans, will be thus, that this, and also other, invaluable heirs, will stay and will be looked after for us, and for the future generations. This seven day long, exciting event, which has been offered to me, this excitement of this - in reality simple - journey with the bus, shall be available to many other vacation guests and to those who love discovery. I hope that the "Green Isle", by its legendary past, by its incomparable beauty, by its literally unreal attractiveness, will enchant thousands and thousands more travellers in the future!

Francis Bovigny
Zürich, May 2020