

## Choosing The Best Guidebook For Traveling Ireland

*Budget and travel style may determine the best guide for you*

by Corey Taratuta

My task was simple. Visit my local bookseller, find a guidebook on Ireland, then start planning the trip of a lifetime. With this strategy, I would be compiling a list of top ten sites and a rough itinerary before dinner, right?

My naivety became obvious the moment I approached the bookstore's travel shelf. There I found one, two, three, four...TWELVE books on Irish travel. There were guides for hikers, bikers, parents and even dummies. Others claimed to reveal the best of Dublin, the highlights of the southwest, the most beautiful villages, the coziest B&Bs. It was a collage of superlatives, but deciding which book would actually deliver my dream vacation didn't seem as obvious as my inclusion in the race for the "most clueless tourist in Ireland."

In the end, I made the obvious choice. I bought the book with the most pictures.

That was over ten years ago, and a lot has changed. I thumbed through all twelve of those original travel books, even reading many of them. The Irish travel section of my personal library now exceeds my local bookseller's, and I can usually rate a guidebook's attributes by leafing through only a few pages. I've also learned that the right guidebook really depends on your travel style and budget.

### **"Dreambooks" – More Prose and Pictures**

For the first time traveler, I recommend starting with, what I call, a "dreambook." "Dreambooks" are filled with pictures and a general overview of Ireland. Ranging from a coffee table book of beautiful photographs to a guidebook with maps, cutaways and lots of photos, a "dreambook" is useful in helping identify a region you may want to visit when your itinerary is not yet set. Some good books in this category include "DK Eyewitness Travel Guides," "Fodor's See It Ireland," "AAA Spiral Guides: Ireland," "Reader's Digest Illustrated Guide to Ireland" as well as the many photo books out there.

### **Full-On Guidebooks – Everything but the Kitchen Sink**

For a more in-depth look, traditional guidebooks provide additional information on regions, routes, sites, accommodations, restaurants and nightlife. These books can be text-heavy and may seem intimidating at first, so I suggest starting with a region that includes a site on your must-see list and branch out from there. Budget travelers will find "Frommer's Ireland from \$90 a Day," "Let's Go: Ireland," "MTV – Ireland" or "Lonely Planet Ireland" the best for making economical decisions. Meanwhile, "Ireland for Dummies," "Fodor's Ireland," "Frommer's Ireland," and "Rough Guide to Ireland" each provide thorough coverage of the Emerald Isle.

### **Special Interest Publications – A Perfect Fit**

If you have a special interest, such as golfing, biking, walking or traveling with children, there are books written especially for you. These books, as well as those dedicated exclusively to listing accommodations, can provide all the details you need to plan a personalized tour. Many of these books are distributed by major publishing houses, but several books and pamphlets are put out by independent authors as well as smaller publishers. This category includes "Independent Walkers Guide to Ireland," "Secret Dublin," "Garden Lovers Guide to Ireland," "Michele Irdvig's Best Little Guide to Ireland," "Ireland's Golf Courses," "Take the Kids to Ireland," "Take a Break In Ireland" and the "Exploring" series from O'Brien Press.

### **Back to the Bookstore**

Nowadays, my biggest challenge at the bookstore is choosing between guidebooks. Now, I select the same area in each book, reading the sections carefully. Most books do a good job of covering cities, so I tend to inspect their coverage of places like Donegal or Cobh comparing how they handle the less-known destinations and then make my decision.