

A few days in Ireland

(previous days will follow) We arrived home shortly after 11 p.m. Door to Door 12 hours. And opened that door to the rather musty smell associated with properties that have not been ventilated for sometime.

Our journey from Dublin began at 11 am when we left our hostess' house to be taken to Dublin Airport. Traffic was reasonable and we turned up at terminal 2 to and were duly dropped off. After some inquiries we found the area from which the bus was due to leave, so called Zone 20. I noticed the complete absence of any signage including a timetable; the only one we found much later was in the main terminal. There was no official to ask. Everyone seemed to be on their mobile phones conducting their business from there.

According to a previous Google inquiry the next departure to Belfast was at 11:55. May be due to the fact that it was a public holiday recently announced, the Google information was slightly outdated. The next bus was actually an hour later at 12:55. We joined the queue only to be told that the bus was full and that I should go to Terminal 1 where there was a choice of two bus companies. We found the first of the companies to be told they were not taking bookings due to demand. Our plane was due to depart at at 18:45. already it was 13.15 and we had a long way to go including a 2-hour coach journey. We went along to another company, the only other company actually. We had to wait in a standby queue and by a great miracle we were the last 2 people to be allowed on the bus. Packed it was.

Finally we were on our way through the Irish countryside. There is no question that there is more rain in Ireland than in UK and the fields were green and lovely to look upon. The boundary between South and Northern Ireland no longer exists but it is somewhere along the M1 motorway near Newry. The bus

stopped off at 3 or 4 places and we arrived in the Belfast bus hub at about 15.30. Buses to the international airport – about 17 miles away from Belfast itself please note – leave every 30 minutes and we were able to get a seat without any difficulty. Francoise grabbed a roll which turned out to be largely inedible. What do they use for bread?

Bearing in mind the exhausting and frustrating wait over over an hour “shuffling forward” at the airport security in Bristol on the way out we were dreading the same happening on the return journey but as it happened there was no queue and we passed security in a matter of minutes. Since I last flew, flight protocols have changed. You show your QR code to a machine tube at the gate. You show the same QR code when you are boarding. Everyone had their mobile phones to do this. We were one of the few that had a paper print out.

Anyway, on arrival at Belfast International and passing through security we were greeted by a combination of a kitchen and a bar where for the first time whilst in Ireland I sampled a very generous single whisky (more like 40 cl than 25 cl) accompanied by a Guinness with its lovely fresh almost medicinal taste. We had finally made it by 4:45 p.m. And so had time for refreshments. Check in was at 18.15 but we were only told the departing Gate 10 minutes prior but in spite of that, the flight left on time and we had a very smooth journey back to Bristol. Lovely sights of the setting sun above the clouds.

This was when the journey became interesting. At the bus hub in Bristol airport there were no timetables largely I surmise because there were a number of different companies using this as a convenience stop. We did not know if there were going to be any changes due to the Queen’s funeral on that day although we knew it was going to be treated as a public holiday. We turned up at 19:30 just as a bus to Bath was drawing out – or trying to. The bus broke down about 100m from the start. We learned that through knocking on the window and asking the

driver.

We had debated taking a taxi but discovered that the cost would be over £75. On balance we decided to wait to see if there was another bus that evening. Even on Google, it's not possible to find a straightforward timetable so we guess there would be another bus and around about 20.30 and indeed another bus turned up. We get a discount for having a Freedom Pass so we paid £10 each. We arrived in Bath after a smooth journey and caught the 22:06 local bus which dropped us off a couple of streets away from where we live.

It could have been so much worse. If we had not by some magic found a bus to take us to Belfast we would not have caught the plane. As for Bristol I have never spent a night at an airport but I would have considered it. I'm not going to pay big money for a few hours in a hotel. You don't get away with less than a £150 for such a convenience. Next time we will be able to take the plane to Dublin itself as Francoise will hopefully have her passport.

We arrived surprisingly refreshed. A really enjoyed the change. I realize that it does not matter what I do when away. It is the change that is the therapy and the inspiration.