



IRELAND

2004

Old Irish saying: If you look out in the distance and can see the mountains, it's going to rain. If you look out and cannot see the mountains, it's raining. WE were in Ireland in the spring.....definitely green. I didn't realize that the

country's history had been one with so much conflict. There has never been a period of long term peace or stabilization since the beginning of time. Their history is unique and complex, violent and extreme. President Clinton cemented a "commitment to peace" agreement in 1995 but political friction continue to this day. If you happen to be in a pub where locals supported either the North or the South, might not be good to be cheering for the wrong party. A rowdy bunch they are. Yes and still a proud country trying desperately now to advance.

Speaking of pubs....Every other building in every city or town we visited had streets lined with pubs. More interesting is that they all seemed to be full almost all the time— shoulder to shoulder— when does anyone work? Delving deeper into this social way of life, I think it has mostly do with the weather. The geographical position of Ireland lends it to more than its fair share of gloomy, rainy and foggy days. I can understand the need for a cozy place to bond with friends and share a pint or two.

But not to fear, we forged onward and were lucky enough to see the Cliffs of Moher and the Giants Causeway. Both were number one sites to see on our list. We discovered that Ireland has more than 3000 castles! Throughout history, the reigning chieftain built his won castle that now dots the landscape in medieval fashion. Some of these castles have now been made into elegant lodgings, some are used as historical points of interest and many more are just in ruins. There is an awareness and desire to restore more castles but— as usual with much of the world— the economy is struggling.

Driving on the roads was a frightening experience! Between trying to see the views or often, just finding the road itself, was a challenge. Ireland was predominantly a rural economy until it got its independence in 1921. Today they still herd their cattle and sheep. You can feel a slower pace of life. But with many of its ups and downs, it is now on par with many of the other European countries. Ireland was a delight to visit.