

The crystal city

Tim Saunders explores the southern counties of Ireland with his young family



This clock is valued at 150,000 euros," says our guide, pointing at an intricately designed crystal long-case clock during a tour of Waterford Crystal. It is at this point that my wife shudders and we wonder whether it was such a good idea to visit the world-renowned factory with our daughters, aged two and four. By the end of the 50-minute tour, however, we know we made the right decision.

Established in 1783 when Beethoven was busy composing and the world's first hot air balloon took flight, Waterford Crystal was begun by George and William Penrose.

Ireland was the chosen location because of large amounts of forest, which could provide the fuel for the furnaces. It cost £10,000 to build and equip the factory and they employed between 50 and 70 staff. I am particularly interested to learn that in 1823 George Saunders, who had worked with the firm for many years, became a partner in the business. Today, more than 3,800 staff are employed by Waterford Crystal across 14 countries, including at its factories in Waterford and Slovenia.

"About 70,000 pieces of crystal are produced annually and this does not include commissions," we are informed as we watch expert craftsmen at work. "And 95 per cent of our products are made by hand."

It really is an inspiring place to visit and easy to see why 800,000 people have experienced the tour. In July 2015 WWRD,

the owner of Waterford Crystal and Wedgewood China, was sold for just over £290m to Fiskars, the Nasdaq-listed Finnish metal and consumers brands company, founded in 1649.

We stayed at The Range, a 300-year-old converted barn, booked through Sykes Cottages. Located at Dunsinane House it is just outside Enniscorthy. All on one level, it is a large and spacious property where our energetic daughters could run and roam free without us worrying. There are high ceilings and many windows and doors which allow for large amounts of light to enter the property, as well as providing great views of surrounding farmland. From the kitchen window we can watch cows grazing. It is also helpful that there is a substantial private driveway, making

unloading easy. The historic accommodation, which dates from the 18th century, is comfortable, with all the mod cons you would expect, including dishwasher and washing machine. We are able to relax and on mornings when the weather is not so good we snuggle up and watch some children's television. However, the sun decides to shine pretty frequently during our stay and we enjoy mooching around the extensive grounds.

You cannot help but notice the extremely friendly Irish way. Stroll into a shop to buy some groceries and the helpful staff will greet you happily, have a chat with you and end by saying: "That's grand. You're very welcome." This is really refreshing to me. It is not just in the shops where there is a genuine interest for people but also on the streets.

An excellent way of finding out what to do in easy to read, well researched, bite-size chunks is to grab a copy of the Lonely Planet Guide to Ireland. We are pretty much able to plan our week thanks to this resource.

At Enniscorthy, the second largest town in County Wexford, there is a castle built in 1205. Vinegar Hill at Enniscorthy is famous for the bloody Irish Rebellion of 1798, an uprising against British rule in Ireland. We visit St Aidan's Cathedral with its striking facade and interior.

The best day for sunshine sees us visit Kilmore Quay about 20 miles away. Here we are able to carelessly laze on the beach. We enjoy seeing the old fishing boats, the smell of the sea and eating ice-creams. There is also a play area for the children. Directly opposite the beach are the Saltee Islands, an important bird sanctuary featuring 375 species.

While there are many attractions that can be paid for it is pleasing to cash-strapped parents that some attractions do not charge. For instance, just down the road from us is Ferns Castle, which has a fascinating story behind it and is brought to life by a truly enthusiastic Irishman, Larry Smith, who was in the police force for 43 years. Our tour with Larry is attended by Australians, New Zealanders, Irish and British visitors. We are all astounded by Larry's ability to remember so many facts and to be so engaging. "William Marshall built this castle," he reveals. "He never lost a battle."

Although now a ruin, we are taken around its remains and up many spiralling staircases to the very top where views of the outlying Normandy brocade landscape are very similar to that found in Normandy itself due to its layout and hedgerows. Larry

concludes his fascinating tour by passionately reciting *Requiem for the Croppies* by Seamus Heaney.

Probably the easiest day out with a young family can be found at Carlow, about 30 miles away. Within easy walking distance is a museum of local history, a cathedral and an art gallery, all free to enter.

We travelled to Ireland with Stena Line, one of the world's largest ferry operators and the largest privately owned shipping company in the world.

Certainly their ferries are enormous and ours makes light work of travelling the 50 or so miles between the Pembroke coast and Ireland.

For more information visit: sykescottages.co.uk, stenaline.co.uk, waterfordvisitorcentre.com and heritageireland.ie

Travel What's top of your bucket list?

Dream destination



If you were to be granted an infinite amount of free time and an infinite supply of cash, what would be your dream holiday destination? Disneyland? Vegas? The Great Lakes? Oz? Why not let your imagination take flight... and share with us your wildest wanderlust wish list. Each week we will publish a reader's number one dream destination. Email yours (200 words max) to sparker@westernmorningnews.co.uk or post it to Simon Parker WMN Studio 5-11 Millbay Road Plymouth PL1 3LE. Today it's the turn of Dawn Ellis...

The hustle and bustle of daily life is a distant past and thousands of miles away. Sat with a cocktail in hand, the white sand beneath my feet and crunching between my toes and listening to the lapping sound of the crystal clear blue water – surely there's no better dream destination than the Mexican island of Cozumel. Looking in both directions there's barely a person in sight and all you can see is vibrant blue sky which merges into the sea and, of course, miles of sand. It's paradise. Kayaking out to sea and doing a bit of snorkelling, gently manoeuvring into the underwater world to see giant sea turtles, brightly coloured starfish and huge sting rays all gracefully moving through the warm water. Despite being underwater you can feel the heat of the sun beating down on to the water. There's also time for adventure and history thanks to the Mayan ruins and the famous Chichen Itza and the cenotes on the mainland.