

We were there on a bus tour last year, and we stayed in a bed and breakfast near Dublin that had been a wealthy family's mansion. It was very comfortable, and the Irish breakfasts were fantastic. However, all the women on the tour were anxious to get into the city to take advantage of the great shopping. Of course, we husbands were dragged along, expecting a very boring day.

The Fifth Avenue-wannabe area was Grafton Street, and that upscale line of exclusive shops featured many ritzy products, with the snootiest store of all called Brown and Thomas. There my spouse and her friends could rummage through such labels as Gucci, Chanel, Vera Chang, Amy Vanderbilt and many others. Fortunately, with our suitcases already loaded with Irish linen, Irish wool sweaters and other native products, my spouse didn't buy anything at B&T.



However, when we ventured away from the posh downtown shops, we found U.S.-style malls, including one called Dundrum. It seemed to be a somewhat 80s type of hip neighborhood, something like Melrose Avenue in Los Angeles. I expected to see Herman's Hermits performing there, but he and his crew never showed. Maybe it was just a dream, and Herman is now a bus driver in SoHo.

Another shopping area is in Liffey Valley, near government buildings at the picturesque riverfront. The usual mall-type of shops are all lined up there, and prices are much lower than they are in the downtown stores. There are also some nice little restaurants, including a traditional fish and chips house. We bought some wrapped in a conical newspaper and sat on a bench outside watching a sidewalk artist do a large, very competent portrait of Elvis Presley from a small photo he used as his guide. We and most of the people from our bus tour were so impressed, we filled up his hat with Irish money. Of course, we had no idea of the value, so I presume this artist had a great payday before the rain washed away his masterpiece.

We loved the historic scenery of Dublin, the beautiful green fields, the shops, the cafes and the sunny nature of all the people we met. However, the most impressive sights there were the children. Now we know why Irish artists have used them as models for their paintings of heavenly angels since before the Renaissance.