

The Lady Next Door

When we started planning our trip to Ireland, we looked into "self-catering" rental homes. I prefer to use vacation rentals because we have a big family. On this trip there were ten of us. With that many people we needed a home. To have everyone separated in hotel rooms the entire time would have really detracted from the experience of doing it together. We did stay in a few hotels as we traveled across Ireland coast to coast, twice, but Pontoon House was our home base for the majority of our two week stay. This is what I look for in a vacation rental in no particular order, but all of these things are important to me.

Aesthetic

It has to have something beautiful going for it. In this case, the house itself was very tastefully decorated and the scenery outside was jaw-dropping. The house was inviting, warm and well thought out. Why is aesthetic important? I guess it's the designer in me. I love to look at beautiful things. If I'm paying to stay somewhere I want to wake up every day and feel like I'm somewhere special. Pontoon House fit the bill and exceeded our every expectation.

Comfort and usability

For our large family this means enough bedrooms and bathrooms so that everyone can sleep comfortably, have a bit of privacy when needed and we can get ready for the day in about an hour. Pontoon House has 5 bedrooms and 4 baths with plenty of room to spread out. This was perfect for our needs.

Price

We've discovered that off-season travel is the best way to save money on a vacation. We went to Ireland in the winter and I think most of the natives were baffled by this, but for us the 40 degree weather was like early spring! When I think about the treacherous cold snap we avoided as we drove through "spring" showers and more rainbows than I've seen in the states over the past ten years combined, it made perfect sense to us! Pontoon House not only saved us money on hotels (five rooms per night adds up FAST) but was also discounted at an off-season rate which allowed us to do so much more on the trip in terms of entertainment, shopping and dining. Let's face it. You're not going to Europe with ten people for \$900 no matter how savvy you are with your money. It requires expenditure BUT scoring this fabulous home at an incredibly reasonable rate really made us feel like we got much more for the money we spent and much more enjoyment as well!

Landlords

This one is a bit tricky. I've corresponded with many owners over the years, discussing their properties and the way they respond to me is KEY to finding a great place to stay. In this case, we completely hit the jackpot. Our landlords, Paddy and Emer Moran, went out of their way to make sure that our stay was amazing. They took care of everything we asked for and then some. Since this was our Christmas trip (which we celebrated over New Year's), they decorated the house for the holiday. Paddy decorated the fresh Christmas tree himself, twice. (From what I gathered at our meeting in Dublin on our last night, his first attempt was not quite up to par and the general consensus was that he needed to do it over.) Please keep in mind that the Morans don't actually live in this house, they live 3 hours away in Dublin. An extra fold-out bed was provided. There was a fabulous loaf of fresh bread from a nearby café with butter (Irish butter-I could write an entire blog entry about Irish butter.) left as a welcome treat along with a bottle of wine and several other surprises. A starter bundle of firewood was waiting by the fireplace. The house was immaculate

with plenty of towels. The kitchen was equipped to a high standard. I'm demanding in that regard. I studied to be a chef so when I cook and need a good knife and a fine mesh strainer, I want it to be there. It was.

The best part about our landlords was that they understood how important this trip was to us and our family so they busted their tails to make sure it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Paddy made reservations at the local restaurant/pub for our first night and called the pub to make sure that we had arrived safely. Emer called the house the next morning to check in with us and make sure everything was satisfactory. They took care of us like we were family. When we got to meet them and talk to them, Paddy said, "I'm so glad you enjoyed it because all we wanted was to help make this a memory to last a lifetime for your family." Mission accomplished.

Frankly, I can't imagine they made a big profit from our stay. They spoiled us terribly! However, in our discussion with them, we connected on this crazy idea, this passion, that if you provide a place for visitors to come and help them create a special, lasting memory you can share it with them and the satisfaction one feels in facilitating this for a guest is a form of payment in itself. This is our vision for The Lady Next Door. We can't wait to do for our guests what Paddy and Emer did for us. Paddy owns an accounting and finance firm in Dublin so he knows a bit about money. He leaned over to me while we were having a pint in the hotel bar and said with a twinkle in his eye, "You know, you're never going to make money off of this...but you're still going to be richer!"

We do know that, Paddy. We know.