



Review: A CIE Tours Walking and Hiking Trip on Ireland's Northern Coast

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The stunning Slieve League cliffs are a highlight of CIE Tours' new Ireland Walking & Hiking Tour – The Northern Coast. 2026 CIE Tours

For those who love soaring sea cliffs, Ireland's rugged northern coastline serves up one breathtaking vertical drop after another — provided you're willing to put in the footwork.

In fact, the heart-racing thrill of standing next to a sky-scraping oceanfront precipice became strangely familiar while I traveled in June on a newly launched [CIE Tours](#) guided product: [Ireland Walking & Hiking Tour – The Northern Coast](#).

The nine-day itinerary featured bucket-list heavyweights including the UNESCO-listed Giant's Causeway and the colossal Slieve League cliffs, but we also logged trail time at sleepier scenic gems such as Glenveagh National Park, Glencolmcille and the stunning Horn Head peninsula near Dunfanaghy.

CIE Tours announced its new Ireland Walking & Hiking Tours — exploring either the north or south of the country — in June last year and began operating the trips late this May, according to Stephen Cotter, CIE's managing director.



Vacationers can hike along less-crowded sea cliffs near the UNESCO-listed Giant's Causeway.

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“First off, it’s not too strenuous; it’s a walk in the hills,” Cotter told me on my last day in Ireland, sitting across from me in the Iveagh Garden Hotel lobby in Dublin. “There are no ropes or anything technical involved, so most people are

able to do it. ... On one of the first departures, we had in the south of Ireland a few weeks ago, the average age was 66. And there were two 77-year-olds.”

Cotter adds that CIE expects demand for the new small-group walking and hiking products to come from a demographic very similar to that of its larger coach tours.

“We know from our customer surveys two-thirds are female and two-thirds are 55-plus,” he said. “We have a lot of families. We have a lot of grandparents who travel in an extended group with their children and grandchildren. We also get a lot of sisters travelling together — or four or five female friends traveling together.”

Repeat Appeal

Barefoot now and nearly knee-deep in the cool water of Lough Veagh, I was creeping over a bed of rounded lake stones, wishing I’d worn my swimsuit.

Our little band of CIE hikers had finished the spellbindingly gorgeous 5-mile Bridle Path trail through Glenveagh National Park earlier in the day, and I was enjoying a moment by myself, wading near the shoreline while marveling at the green shoulders of the Derryveagh Mountains, rising sharply across the lake.

Facilitating these thrilling little moments of natural wonder is a chief aim for CIE’s new walking and hiking tours, according to Cotter, who describes small, guided products as a fast-growing market segment.

“We wanted to get a slice of that action,” he told me, adding that CIE has operated group tours in Ireland since 1932.

“We have a great reputation here, and people are comfortable with our brand,” Cotter continued. “They often come in large groups and enjoy Ireland, but then maybe they want to come back and do something slightly different. So, trying to get that repeat business up is part of our strategy with these new tours.”



There's no shortage of green in Glenveagh National Park, a terrific stop on CIE's new Ireland Walking & Hiking Tour – The Northern Coast.
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Accommodations, transportation, airport transfers, breakfasts, lunches and most dinners are included in the CIE product's commissionable double-occupancy starting price of \$4,445 a person (single-supplement costs are \$1,195).

The tours max out at 16 passengers, and clients can expect up to five hours of walking per day “at a comfortable pace,” covering anywhere from 2 to 6 miles on the new hiking tours, according to CIE's website, which notes that “while the terrain is mostly gentle, occasional muddy or rough patches and ascents of up to 1,500 feet add to the adventure.”

Each of our daily treks in late June fit squarely within the parameters of that description — except for the mud. The Irish weather was spectacularly sunny, bringing blue skies to just about all of our Northern Coast excursion.

“And everywhere we go, we make sure the tour guides are fantastic,” Cotter insisted. “You build up a relationship with the tour guides. ... And I think that's why people fall in love so much with the brand when they have an experience with us.”

Advisor-Friendly Experts

That relationship building was certainly apparent throughout our CIE tour in June, during which our enormously knowledgeable and kind guide — Paul Quinn — connected meaningfully on countless occasions with every single person on the trip.

Thoughtfully discussing everything from Celtic legends and medieval battles to the far-reaching impact of mid-19th-century famines or the 30 years of Northern Ireland sectarian violence referred to as the “Troubles,” Quinn brought Ireland’s past to life while regularly connecting us with its present — often with a smile and a warm laugh.



Historic stone towers and windswept oceanfront bluffs are a recurring marvel on the tour.

2026 Shane Nelson

And Quinn not only led each of our daily hikes, but he also drove every mile of the trip, piloting our small van from the Iveagh Garden Hotel in Dublin to comfortable boutiques in Donegal, Dunfanaghy and Derry — in Northern Ireland — before returning us to Dublin.

CIE is also a longtime operator in Scotland and launched small-group products in Iceland and Italy in 2019, according to Cotter, who says the tour operator announced new Spain and Portugal itineraries this year.

“We have two itineraries in Spain, we have six itineraries now in Italy, and we have two in Iceland,” Cotter said. “And we know on those trips we get 40% repeat business. ... If we do a good job in Sicily, or we do a good job in Tuscany, there's a really strong chance that they're going to come to Ireland.”

Describing CIE's customer base as overwhelmingly American with just “4% to 5% Canadians,” Cotter says 75% of the tour operator's bookings come from travel advisors.

“It's the best money you'll ever spend,” Cotter said about commissions the tour operator pays to advisors.

CIE also plans to unveil a new advisor booking portal later this month.

“It's a bit more streamlined, a bit more intuitive,” Cotter said. “It's got extra features where you can, for example, get a quick quote. We couldn't do that before. Now, you can get a quick quote and a PDF you can send to clients, giving you a breakdown of the price, insurance and air. ... We're really excited about that because it will speed things up for advisors.”