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Visiting Blarney Castle, Ireland

GG Staff | Oct 20, 2013 - 05:33

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Can kissing an ancient stone deliver the gift of gab?

Please welcome Brette Sember, travel shopper extraordinaire who has a taste for flavors around the world. Brette is the author of more than 50 books. She blogs about travel, travel shopping and food.

We're a community-based travel blog and we welcome submissions from everyone. Whether you're a budget-baller or a first class only kinda traveler, we'd love to hear from you. Visit our [Writer's Guidelines](#) and learn how you can share your travel advice, stories and adventures!

Tales from Blarney's past

First let's get the history lesson out of the way. The story goes that Queen Elizabeth I sent the Earl of Leicester to tell Cormac McCarthy to relinquish [Blarney Castle](#) and surrounding lands to the crown. Cormac distracted the Earl with banquets and when the Earl sent the Queen a letter expressing that the land had not yet been turned over due to the distractions, she flung it down and declared it "blarney." Other versions of the story say Cormac kissed the stone on the way to see the Queen, giving him the ability to flummox her. Thus the legend goes anyone who kisses the stone will be given the gift of gab.



fabled Blarney Castle, Ireland

The stone itself has many stories surrounding it, including claims that it's half of the stone the first Scottish king sat on during his coronation. There are also beliefs that the stone played a part in stories in the Bible.

Kissing the Blarney Stone may be one of the most clichéd things to do in Ireland, but I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

Camouflaged beauty of Ireland

My family trekked to the Blarney Stone not because we believed the stories, but because it's something we felt we needed to do while in Ireland. A big checkmark on the travel bucket list.



climbing the Blarney Castle turret

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On [Club Orient - St. Martin](#), TreAm said "This was our first visit to a nudist resort/beach of any type. We absolutely loved it. Admittedly when the time came to take off our clothes we were both a little sheepish but within five minutes of having done so it was the most relaxing, freeing, exhilarating feeling that one has to partake in to fully understand. Nobody was sitting around qawking at us or staring. The feeling of the warm ocean water on your completely naked skin just cant be described. There was no sexual tension in the air at all, just the most relaxed "letting it all go" feeling. We'll be back many many times, highly recommended."

On [Algonquin & GoGirlfriend Escape 2012](#), Clement Reid said "I loved New Year's Eve camping in Algonquin when I lived in ON. Wonderful place all around. I'm back home in Gros Morne National Park in NL nowadays and loving it, too. The fall colours are wonderful. The mountains are accessible and both front country & backcountry camping are do-able year round."



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Blarney Castle is located in County Cork, near the middle of southern Ireland. Like most historical places in Ireland, it's reached by winding and twisting roads that feel as if they go nowhere in particular until suddenly you're somewhere magnificent. The castle parking lot is tiny and doesn't give any secrets away of what's hidden just past the entrance. We paid our entrance fee of 12 Euros per person and walked towards the castle, managing to bypass a big tour group. The walk to the castle meanders over a bubbling stream with fish, through an open meadow and then to the castle, which is stark and imposing.

Blarney Castle's past lives



the view from atop the castle roof

Blarney Castle is an actual castle, but it's in ruins. The walls are standing and that's about it. A stairway has been built to give access to the turrets, which lead to the roof. Because of the number of tourists, it took us about 45 minutes to make our

way to the top – with claustrophobia coming on strong inside the tight tourist-cramped turrets. Along the way, we peeked into various "rooms," including one believed to be the lord's daughter's room (this room had a floor and we were permitted to enter).

I had time to picture myself living in that grand stone building, dressed in a royal garb and sleeping in that room. The reality was likely harsher than my fantasy, but I could see how the two blur in fairytales.

Pucker up and kiss the Blarney Stone

At long last, we emerged to the top of the castle and surveyed the grounds around us. The cool, fresh air coupled with the rolling, pastoral landscape completed the fairytale setting.

The magic ends there though...

A worn black rubber mat has been placed on the ground just in front of the stone. The stone itself is part of the outer castle wall and there's a gap of 2-3 feet between the floor and the wall. I was told to lie on my back, grab two metal bars with my hands and let my head hang upside down in the gap between floor and wall, as I kissed the stone in this position.



kissing the Blarney Stone and banging my nose

There are two castle employees, one is a photographer who snaps a photo of each person kissing the stone (the photos are then sold in the gift shop) and the other is in charge of keeping the line moving quickly. I didn't tip my head back enough and I felt a smack on my nose as I was pushed into the stone. Not the kiss I was expecting. Instead of the gift of gab, I felt like I'd been gifted with germs of the millions of other tourists who'd done the same thing.

But it was still a fun bucket list item. It's a nonsensical thing to be able to say I've done and another bulleted item in the lifetime travel list I'm tracking in my mind.

On St. Martin ~ Tropical Getaway for Your Senses, Jane Boursaw said "Neat experience! My daughter loves perfume, and I love it on her. Not so much myself, though. "

On St. Martin ~ Tropical Getaway for Your Senses, Kerri Fivecoat-Campbell said "I have one perfume I've worn since I was a teen and these days, I don't wear it much at all. But, I do like it and I think this is a great idea for a mother/daughter adventure. "

On Arizona's Only Native American-Owned Resort, Desert_Sami said "Seeing the wild horses still roaming free despite the size of Phoenix is heartwarming!"



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Blarney Castle's "other" treasures



Blarney Castle's poison garden

If kissing the Blarney stone was a clichéd symbol of Ireland, the grounds provided something more tangible. Just outside the castle exit is the poison garden – a lush garden in which every plant is poisonous. A sign warns visitors not to

touch, eat or sniff anything in the garden and each plant is individually labeled. Though the plants are deadly, they're also beautiful and without hint of the danger concealed within. Nearby there's a more benign garden showcasing native plants.

A wonderful area for exploring is the Rock Close. This part of the grounds is truly out of a Disney movie, with small craggy caves and trees with branches that feel like arms that could swoop down and grab passersby. My favorite part was the Wishing Steps, a set of steps that grant wishes to those walk down backwards and then back up, with eyes closed. My only wish would have been not to fall and break my leg, so we skipped attempting it. The Bog Garden features a mystical waterfall. The Ice House, a round stone outdoor refrigerator is also fascinating.



inside Blarney Castle's rooms

I particularly enjoyed the large, lush open meadow in front of the castle with a view of the ruins peeking through the trees.

The shopping bounty hidden at Blarney Castle

No location can truly be perfect (in my mind) without some great shopping. The castle gift shop was a small, crowded room next to the ticket window and sold treasures such as t-shirts emblazoned with an "I kissed the Blarney Stone" decal over a castle with a cartoon face. A let down, to be sure.



the stream on the castle grounds

Thankfully, the **Blarney Woolen Mills** is right next door. While it lacks local artisan goods, this three-story Irish shopping extravaganza carries a healthy selection of authentic, Irish-manufactured and produced goods.

Most of the mill is made up of woolen goods: scarves, throws, sweaters, gloves, socks. There were plenty of Aran knit sweaters and scarves (I bought some of these) and beautiful plaid cashmere scarves, caps and capes as well as a smorgasbord of linens, lace and low-priced tourist collectibles. A nice selection of Celtic jewelry, including pieces made of green Connemara marble (my husband bought cufflinks) and the expected Claddagh jewelry. Waterford and Belleek products take up a significant amount of real estate within the store as well. The parking lot here is bigger than at the castle and there are plenty of tour buses in the lot. If you've shopped nowhere else in Ireland, you can find much on your wish list here.



Vancouver, British

Columbia.

Kissing the Blarney Stone didn't deliver the gift of gab but touring the property and exploring the surrounding area of Blarney Castle allowed me to get up close to the heart and soul of Ireland. Not a bad thing to bring home from my travels.

***Have you visited Ireland or kissed the Blarney Stone?
Connect with us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) – and let's
continue the conversation!***

About Brette Sember

Brette Sember grew up fascinated with the treasures her grandparents brought back from their travels as they visited every continent but Antarctica. Her passion for travel includes unique shopping finds, local foods, and breathing in the air of new places. Sember is the author of more than 50 books about food, divorce, organizing, credit, business, pregnancy, parenting, as well as college textbooks. She is also a professional indexer, ghostwriter, and freelancer. She blogs about food, travel, organizing, decorating, and gardens at [PuttingItAllOnTheTable.com](#). She lives in Clarence, NY with her husband, two children, two golden retrievers and tortoise. Catch up with Brette on [Pinterest](#), [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#).



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