

Tuesday, June 18, 2019



DRAKE POLITICAL REVIEW

Let's Talk Politics



Access Ireland

People

[March 17, 2019](#) [DPR](#) [Leave A Comment](#)

Though Ireland is a popular travel destination, it has a long way to go to become accessible to

everyone

by Haley Hodges

Even though it's only half the physical size of Iowa, the Republic of Ireland's capital city, Dublin, has over eight times more people living in it than Des Moines. The city bustles constantly with its fleet of public busses, trains, the local tram, tour busses and taxis to help locals and visitors get around, but only some of them are accessible to people with physical disabilities.

Dublin is a city built on movement. Getting from point A to point B can either involve a series of public transit options or plenty of walking over cobblestone streets, tram tracks and other obstacles.

Real estate in the heart of Dublin is rarely one floor, with restaurants often up a flight of stairs from the street level or shops that extend multiple stories. While escalators and elevators are possible (though not always present) in bigger or more modern locations, a truly authentic Dublin experience features multiple-storied bars and restaurants tucked up above the streets.

While it's possible to follow a more accessible route, it involves a lot more planning. The Dublin bus system's accessibility policy aims to "make our bus services as accessible as is practically possible" through most of the busses having low floors. The Bus Éireann company has wheelchair accessible city busses, but 78% of their other non-city busses are not accessible, so it is advised to book ahead. The inner-city tram system is also up-to-date on accessibility requirements, though certain stops may be more difficult to access.

Ireland's train system is perhaps the most challenging with only certain accessible stations. Unlike most large cities throughout Europe, Ireland's train system is primarily above-ground, eliminating the need for elevators to the platform. Still, many of the stations must be built around surrounding areas, requiring elevated platforms or paths across stations.

Irish Rail publishes data on all of their station's accommodations, and while many are fully equipped for physically handicapped guests, there are a few that are not. Several others require assistance from staff members, though the site also notes many stations will only have one employee at the station at a time or the station may not be manned at all hours. Because of this and other difficulties, the website notes that while they will try their best to accommodate every passenger, it is best to book the train in advance and check with the station ahead of time as certain trains may not be able to accommodate specific wheelchairs, scooters or other needs.

While Dublin may contain a quarter of the total population of the country, much of the rest of the island is characterized by rolling green landscapes and cliffs overlooking the sea. Though beautiful, these natural sights are not exactly handicap accessible.

Kevan Chandler is a 31-year-old writer from North Carolina who has spinal muscular atrophy disease. He and his friends are known for their organization We Carry Kevan, which was created after the friends planned a trip to

Europe and took turns carrying Chandler on their backs in a homemade backpack. Their mission said, “Believing in the inherent value of all people, We Carry Kevan mobilizes individuals with disabilities by redefining accessibility as a cooperative effort.”

Chandler and his friends visited England, France and Ireland, visiting locations that were not traditionally handicap accessible. In Ireland, Chandler said they split their time between County Dublin and County Kerry, though he was sick for most of the time in Dublin.

County Kerry is on the southwest coast of Ireland and boasts some of Ireland’s top sights including the Dingle peninsula, Killarney National Park, the Ring of Kerry and the island Skellig Michael.

Skellig Michael is a Special Protection Area, nature reserve and UNESCO World Heritage Site that is relatively untouched and features a monastery believed to have been built between the 6th and 8th century. Most recently, Skellig Michael has gained fame as the shooting location for Luke Skywalker’s island in Star Wars: The Last Jedi, which gives an idea of the isolation and lack of accessibility on the island. Travelers must be lucky and encounter ideal conditions for the ferry to even take them out to the island.

“Skellig Michael was by far the greatest challenge of our whole trip,” Chandler said. “You take a 45-minute ferry ride out to the island, climb out of the bobbing boat onto a wet rock, and then there are 600 stone steps to reach a 1,400-year-old monastery at the top, which is walled in with four-foot-tall entrances on a cliffside. It was a difficult four hours but also one of the most beautiful and rewarding experiences we shared together.”

Skellig Michael and other areas of Ireland face challenges between being accessible or remaining untampered with. For Ireland as well as other countries throughout Europe, the desire to maintain the rich natural and historical foundations can outweigh the need to create accessibility for the sights. While big cities and main areas should be made easily accessible to its inhabitants, the entire island cannot be.

“I think there are the traditional ways to make some things accessible, and communities should work on being more aware of those options, through research or consultation perhaps,” Chandler said. “But then, there are places like the English countryside or Skellig Michael, where its natural and historic and beautiful as-is and shouldn’t be tampered with in the name of accessibility. Instead, we need to work together and find creative ways to include folks of all sorts in these places. My friends and I wanted to hike Skellig Michael, not take an elevator to the top, because that’s why you go to Skellig, to walk where men of God walked before you,” he said. “All of this fosters conversation to hopefully reshape our culture’s concept of accessibility so that working together and self-sacrifice becomes the heart of it rather than ADA [Americans with Disabilities] guidelines or government mandates for inclusion.”

Similar to the United States and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Ireland’s most recent update to their policy was the Disability Act of 2005, which added to five previous legislative items since 1998.

The National Disability Authority (NDA) is an “independent statutory body [which] provides information and advice to the Government on policy and practice relevant to the lives of persons with disabilities.”

The NDA also works to create universal design that is accessible, catering to all people within a range of different disabilities, for those who are not able to travel the world on their friends’ backs. This can mean many different design choices, including level and step-free entrances, bathroom stalls large enough for a wheelchair, wide and level sidewalks and different available heights on devices like parking meters or ticket machines.

In a statement from the NDA, they have also noted they have an aim for “the promotion of an inclusive Irish society where people with disabilities can reach their full potential and participate in the everyday life of the community.”

Ireland may not be the most accessible country but, like many others, it is working to provide better accessibility for people with disabilities in their day to day lives. With organizations fighting for better accessibility throughout Ireland and creative solutions for other locations, travelling Ireland may just be possible.

◀ [Rush Gone Wrong](#)

[Candidate Profile: Jo...](#)

RELATED POSTS



[Different Backgrounds, One Home](#)

📅 January 21, 2018 👤 [DPR](#)



Candidate Profile: John Delaney.

📅 [March 27, 2019](#) 👤 [DPR](#)



Q&A With Senator Jeff Merkley.

📅 [January 9, 2018](#) 👤 [DPR](#)

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment

Notify me of
followup comments
via e-mail