



## Ferries

Planning to take a ferry this summer? *Consumer Choice* looks at destinations, surveys ferry prices and gives you the low down on continental driving.

We may be living in the age of no-frills airlines and cheap flights, but taking a ferry remains a popular mode of transport for many holidaymakers. While the number of cross channel sea crossings is dwarfed by the number taking flights, Central Statistics Office (CSO) figures show that 357,000 Irish residents took a cross-channel ferry in 2008. This represents an increase of 24,000 on 2007 levels. The average length of stay by ferry crossers was also up at 7.7 days per trip in 2008, as opposed to 6.5 days in 2007.

### Destinations

There are five points of ferry departure in Ireland – Larne, Belfast, Dublin, Rosslare and Cork - with nine separate entry points in the U.K. There are three ports of destination in southwest Scotland: Troon, Stranraer, and Cairnryan, which are all reached from

Larne or Belfast (both in Co. Antrim). There are two in south Wales – Pembroke and Fishguard – both reached from Rosslare in Co. Wexford. (There was formerly a Cork-Swansea ferry service but this was discontinued in 2006). Holyhead, which is on the island of Anglesey, has a service from Dublin City Port and Dun Laoghaire, and Birkenhead and Fleetwood are near Liverpool. All three serve as gateways to the north of England. Services for these ports operate out of Dublin, Larne and Belfast. There is also a ferry service to the Isle of Man run by Seacat & The Isle of Man Steam Packet Co with the crossing taking 2 hrs 55 mins.

The only two destinations for direct ferry services from Ireland to the Continent are both to the French ports of Cherbourg and Roscoff. Roscoff can be reached from Cork or Rosslare with only Rosslare serving Cherbourg.

### Fares

When booking fares, most ferry companies have different levels of tariff that vary according to the season, the time of the week, and the time of sailing. Many of the cheaper fares depart and arrive at unsociable hours.

Most of the ferry companies sell economy fares alongside flexible fares. Economy fares are slightly cheaper but changes to tickets are only possible subject to an amendment fee and any cancelled bookings may not be refunded. Flexible fares are slightly more expensive than economy rates but changes to tickets are permitted without having to pay an amendment fee. Also, if you wish to cancel your booking you will be entitled to a refund, depending on how far in advance you notify the ferry company. Credit card bookings usually incur a handling fee. Mid-week crossings tend to be cheaper

### AT A GLANCE

Destinations.

Fares.

Driving in Europe.

## RETURN FARES ON FERRY SERVICES DIRECT TO BRITAIN FOR JULY AND AUGUST 2009

Route	Operator	Journey time	Car + 2 adults (€)		Car + 2 adults, 2 children (€)		Adult on foot (€)		Frequency
			July	Aug	July	Aug	July	Aug	
<b>FROM LARNE</b>									
Lairn to Cairnryan	P&O Irish Sea	1hr 45 mins <sup>1</sup>	253	253	297	297	64	64	6 daily
Larne to Troon	P&O Irish Sea	2 hrs	242	276	291	320	68	68	2 daily
Larne to Fleetwood	Stenaline	8 hrs	550	505	666	656	n/a	n/a	2 daily
<b>FROM BELFAST</b>									
Belfast to Isle of Man	Isle of Man Sea Cat	2 hrs 55 min	244	244	320	320	45	45	2 weekly
Belfast to Stranraer	HSS Voyager	2 hrs	300	310	356	366	70 <sup>2</sup>	70 <sup>2</sup>	4 daily
	Caledonia	2 hrs 50 mins	286	280	342	352	70 <sup>2</sup>	70 <sup>2</sup>	Up to 3 daily
Belfast to Birkenhead	Norfolkline	8 hrs	248	248	293	293	80	80	2 daily <sup>3</sup>
<b>FROM DUBLIN</b>									
Dublin to Holyhead	Irish Ferries Cruise Ferry from Port	3h 15	313	344	330	392	60	60	2 daily
	Irish Ferries Swift from Port	1hr 49	386	364	356	426	60	60	2 daily
	Stena line from Port	3 hr 15	278	278	326	326	60	60	Up to 4 daily
	Stena line from Dun Laoghaire	2 hrs	330	398	378	446	70	70	Daily
Dublin to Liverpool	P&O Irish Sea	8 hrs	232	246	284	298	n/a	n/a	Daily
Dublin to Birkenhead	Norfolkline	7 hrs	276	276	336	336	96	96	2 daily <sup>4</sup>
Dublin to Isle of Man	Isle of Man Sea Cat	2 hrs 55 min	244	244	320	320	43	43	2 weekly
<b>FROM ROSSLARE</b>									
Rosslare to Fishguard	Stenaline	Europe 3hrs 30 mins	258	298	306	346	60	60	2 daily
	Stenaline	Express 2 hrs	298	338	346	386	60	60	2 daily
Rosslare to Pembroke	Irish Ferries	3 hrs 45 mins	258	298	306	346	60	60	2 daily

**NOTES** Prices correct as at 1 May 2009. Prices quoted are online fares, for travel 14 – 28 July and August or dates as close to. When multiple prices are available for a given day the cheapest fare is quoted. Where the ferry company requires passengers to book a cabin, the cost is included in the price quoted. Sterling prices converted to euro. n/a not available. <sup>1</sup>One hour express operates March – October. <sup>2</sup>Foot passenger service is less frequent. <sup>3</sup>Only one service on Mondays. <sup>4</sup>One crossing on Sunday and Monday.

than those at the weekend so if your travel dates are flexible you should try to opt for mid-week services. Ferry companies sell their fares in the same way as airlines so within the peak travel season of July and August there will be some variation in fares. Also, consider using alternative ports for either leg of your journey as this can sometimes work out cheaper. And don't forget to check your ferry company's website before you set out for the port as there is always the chance your service has been cancelled due to bad weather.

### Cabins

On all Continental routes and some routes to Britain, accommodation must be factored into the price of your journey. The standard of cabin accommodation can range from a club class seat to a four berth cabin with ensuite bathroom and shower. Prices vary according to which accommodation is booked. For journeys where a cabin is required it is advisable to book early if you want superior cabin accommodation or indeed one of the cheaper units as numbers are limited.

### Special offers

Some of the ferry companies surveyed

had special consumer offers. At the time of writing, Stena Line has a special deal on single fares on their UK routes. The online fare costs €69 for a car plus two adults on the Superferry from Rosslare to Fishguard, or Dublin Port to Holyhead. The same deal is available on the Fastcraft from Dun Laoghaire to Holyhead route for €79. Irish Ferries also has special deals on its routes, as well as offering package holiday deals in conjunction with Haven Holidays. (For your rights and entitlements in relation to package holidays see 'Package Holidays', June 2008, p230.)

### Booze cruises

Given that Ireland has some of the highest tax rates on alcohol and tobacco, many consumers see taking the ferry to France as a way to combine a relaxing holiday with an opportunity to stock up on their favourite tittle or vice. The 20% hike in excise duty on wine announced in last year's budget will surely do little to stem the flow.

Holidaymakers are not the only consumers to take advantage of the cheaper cost of wine and spirits on the Continent. Some ferry companies host tailored three day booze cruises which can be taken over a weekend with just

enough time to visit the famous French hypermarkets. Irish Ferries recently had the first of their summer wine cruises to France over the May bank holiday weekend. Departing on the Friday, passengers arrive at Roscoff the next morning and can spend up to seven hours ashore shopping before returning to arrive in Rosslare on the Sunday. Escorting the participants on the latest trip was wine writer and broadcaster Martin Moran who conducted wine tastings, previewed some of the wines that could be bought and offered advice on the best bargains available.

In addition to the wine tasting, Irish Ferries has entered into arrangements with a number of outlets which have undertaken to give a special discount to passengers. One such outlet, the Wine and Beer Supermarket in Roscoff, has pledged a 17.5% discount on wine purchases of €351 or more. This particular trip was priced at €99 per adult return which included a cabin berth with en suite shower and toilet. A car or motorbike could be taken for an additional €89 return when two adults travelled together. For the later summer wine cruise offers, consumers should check the Irish Ferries website, [www.irishferries.com](http://www.irishferries.com).

### Useful contacts

**Stena Line**  
[www.stenaline.ie](http://www.stenaline.ie)  
tel (01) 204 7777

**Brittany Ferries**  
[www.brittanyferries.ie](http://www.brittanyferries.ie)  
021 4277 801

**Isle of Man Steam Packet Company**  
<http://www.steam-packet.com>  
1800 805055

**Norfolk Line Ferries**  
[www.norfolkline-ferries.co.uk](http://www.norfolkline-ferries.co.uk)  
tel (01) 819 2999

**P&O Ferries**  
[www.poirishsea.com](http://www.poirishsea.com)  
tel (01) 407 3434

### Useful websites

[www.revenue.ie](http://www.revenue.ie)

[www.aaireland.ie](http://www.aaireland.ie)

## Getting accustomed

Consumers who decide to take advantage of the low price of alcohol (and cigarettes) on the Continent should remember Irish customs regulations on their return. Since the abolition of the sale of duty-free goods in the EU, any goods purchased are now subject to normal rates of excise, duty and VAT. The table below sets out the alcohol and tobacco allowances for travellers to Ireland from the EU.

Provided that the goods are for personal use, consumers are not charged

IRISH ALLOWANCES (EU ORIGIN)	
Goods	Maximum quantity allowed
Cigarettes	800
Cigarillos	400
Cigars	200
Smoking tobacco	1kg
Spirits	10 litres
Intermediate Products (e.g. sherry, port etc.)	20 litres
Wine (non-sparkling)	90 litres <i>or</i>
Sparkling wine	60 litres
Beer	110 litres

any extra duty or VAT on purchases where the duty and VAT has been paid in another EU country. Where purchases of the specific products listed above are equivalent to, or less than, the quantities shown in the table they will, generally speaking, be regarded as for personal use. The Department of Revenue advises that consumers retain their receipts as proof that the duty and taxes have been paid. Also, consumers must personally transport and accompany the goods on arrival.

However, the above limits are not set in stone, so long as the goods are not being imported for commercial purposes. Many people hire vans which return to Ireland filled with drink; however, consumers should be prepared to justify the quantity of goods being brought back if questioned by a customs official. As mentioned, keep those receipts just in case.

## Our survey

We looked at the prices of standard return fares on all the routes from Ireland to Britain and France for the

peak season of July and August. This is the most expensive time to travel and for most people it is also when they are likely to take their holidays. We analysed the prices for three types of fare:

- Two adults with a car.
- Two adults and two children with a car.
- A single adult foot passenger.

As mentioned, ferries now operate their bookings much like airlines, so in general it is best to begin the process of booking your tickets as early as possible. Similarly, the more flexibility you have in your travel dates and times the better prices you can get. Many of the quotes listed in our survey were for travel at very early and late hours, or during mid-week, but then this is where the cheapest fares are. Also, it's important to keep abreast of ferry operators' special offers as you might find you are able to reduce the cost of one, or both legs of your journey by booking with such an offer. Finally, remember to consider all the different types of onboard accommodation before deciding which to go for.

Report by  
Mark Channing 

## driving in Europe

Those of us who are unfamiliar with European driving should take certain steps before motoring across the Continent. If taking your own car check with your insurer before setting off to make sure your policy includes coverage for driving abroad. If driving at night the headlights on your car will need to be adapted so as not to dazzle oncoming traffic. Most garages sell special beam adapters which can be fitted to your car's headlights for this purpose. As well as making sure your car is well serviced, it's also probably a good idea to take out emergency breakdown assistance insurance for European driving.

As you can be asked to produce them at any time, make sure you have all relevant driving documents with you. These include a valid full driving licence, the original vehicle registration document, motor insurance certificate, your passport, and an International Driving Permit when necessary. Unlike in Ireland, failure to be able to immediately supply these documents in other Member States can result in a fine of hundreds of euros which is payable immediately. Other traffic violations such as speeding can also incur hefty on-the-spot fines.

Make sure you familiarise yourself with the rules of the country or countries that you will be driving in, as there can be particular regulations you may have to comply with. For example, in France, drivers are required to have both a warning triangle and a fluorescent safety vest which must be carried inside the car (not the boot). Failure to comply with these regulations can result in an on-the-spot fine of €130.

Of course, the most important thing to remember when driving in Europe is to always stay on the right side of the road. This is easy to forget at the best of times but especially in certain situations. Be extra vigilant when leaving a petrol station or a car park as these occasions tend to be the times when left-hand drivers are more likely to forget about the direction of the oncoming traffic, or the lane they should be entering. If driving on a narrow country road, remember to pull over to the right to allow for oncoming traffic. When on motorways it is probably best to remain in the slow lane until you feel more confident with right-hand driving. And if you get faced with a complicated junction keep an eye on how the local drivers navigate it.

112 is the European emergency number that can be dialled from any of the 27 Member States for help if you are involved in an auto accident or other emergency.

## RETURN FARES ON FERRY SERVICES DIRECT TO FRANCE FOR JULY AND AUGUST 2009

Route	Operator	Journey time	Car + 2 adults (€)		Car + 2 adults, 2 children (€)		Adult on foot (€)		Frequency
			July	Aug	July	Aug	July	Aug	
Rosslare to Cherbourg	Celtic Link	18 hrs 30mins	830	830	1,160	1,160	n/a	n/a	3 weekly
	Irish Ferries	19 hrs 30mins	678	558	862	615	371	364	Weekly <sup>1</sup>
Rosslare to Roscoff	Irish Ferries	19 hrs 30mins	869	1,042	563	782	388	344	Weekly <sup>2</sup>
Cork to Roscoff	Brittany Ferries	14 hours	1,211	870	1,904	1,300	528	528	Weekly

NOTES Prices correct as at 1 May 2009. Prices quoted are online fares, for travel 14 – 28 of July and August or dates as close to. Prices quoted include 2 or 4 berth cabin. <sup>1</sup>Seven crossings in July, twelve in August. <sup>2</sup>Eight crossings in July, four in August.