

**Ep #137: Iceland & Ireland with Points:
Jess's 10-Day Family Adventure**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Alex Payne, Jess Field, and Pam Lorg

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Ep #137: Iceland & Ireland with Points: Jess's 10-Day Family Adventure

Alex: Want to hear all about Jess's recent trip to Iceland and Ireland? She scored flights for her family of 5 and 7 hotel nights all with points and miles. Listen up as she shares exactly how she did it and how you can do it too.

Welcome to *Points Talk with the Travel Mom Squad*. We are three moms who've discovered how to leverage credit card welcome offers to get hundreds of thousands of dollars of travel expenses for nearly free. We've used credit card points and miles to take vacations to places like Hawaii, Paris, Greece, Maldives, Japan, and so much more. And the best part? We each still have 800 plus credit scores. Imagine being able to take the vacation of your dreams for nearly free. It's totally possible, and we're here to show you how.

Alex: Hey, I'm Alex.

Pam: And I'm Pam, Alex's mom.

Jess: And I'm Jess. Let's talk points.

Alex: So Jess just returned from a summer trip to Iceland and Ireland with her family. So Jess, we want to hear all about it, how you got there, where you stayed, what you did, all the details. So first, tell us about the flights.

Jess: Okay, so I want to preface this by saying that Iceland is kind of tricky when it comes to booking flights on points. I'm going to share what I did, but the trick that I used isn't currently available anymore. I don't know if it's the Alaska website is broken or this deal is dead. I don't. I went, you know, crime dog went on a sleuthing tour of FlyerTalk, and there are other people who are having the same issue with Alaska's website, and it was basically like, we don't know if there's any way to fix, we don't know what to do until Alaska fixes it on their side.

So, I will say though that you can oftentimes find a really good deal, cash deals on Icelandair to go to Iceland. And so this may be a time where you're using the flights as a points earning opportunity, or you're booking, this could be a time where it makes sense to book through the portal if you can get 1.25 to 2 cents

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per point by booking those Icelandair flights through the portal. And so that is an option.

The way I did it is I booked us from Chicago to Reykjavik and then Reykjavik to Dublin. The Reykjavik stop was technically a stopover on Icelandair. I booked this through the Alaska Airlines website. And so I booked these flights last July, and I talked about it in a podcast episode. I don't remember exactly what the theme of the podcast episode was, but I think it was like mid-year check-in, like what we're looking to book for next year. And I was like, "Y'all, I found this deal on the Alaska Airlines, you can do this." And then I ended up booking it for myself.

And so from Chicago to Reykjavik, 4 nights in Reykjavik, and then Reykjavik to Dublin, total, it was 27,500 Alaska miles per person plus \$211 in taxes and fees. So I feel like for both of those flights, 27,500 miles in economy is a pretty good deal. Icelandair does not have a true business class. You're flying on a 737. It's basically just flying domestic first class is their business class. And so I didn't even look into upgrading to business class or booking business class from the start just because for me, it's not worth the extra money to sit in just a wider seat. From Chicago to Reykjavik, it's only, it's like you're in the air for less than 6 hours. And so it just was not worth it for me, especially with 5 of us going to fly anything other than economy.

It was totally fine. Icelandair is very no-frills. You get free coffee, water, and tea, and everything else you have to pay for. So like a soda you have to pay for, snacks you have to pay for. They do give out little snack boxes to kids, so Molly got one of those. But otherwise, you're going to want to bring your own snacks or drinks or be prepared to pay for them.

Pam: So you went at nighttime, didn't you?

Jess: Yeah, our flight left at 10:15 from Chicago.

Pam: Oh, so you didn't need dinner.

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Jess: So I didn't, I wasn't even, I literally sat down as soon as we were in the air, I put on my, I put in my earplugs and I put on my eye mask and I just tried to fall asleep. And so that is what I did.

So I originally booked this for 4 of us, and then a few months before our trip, my one of my stepdaughters, Olivia, said, "I decided I do, I can go after all." So I was like, "Okay, great, but this, there's no way that I'm going to be able to get you a flight for 27,500 miles." And I didn't want to say, "Sorry, you can't come with us because you waited too long." So I ended up paying cash for her ticket. It was around \$900. It pained me to pay that.

Alex: Was hers also like a stopover?

Jess: Hers was a stop. Yeah, so it was the exact same flight that we were on. So it was \$900 for Chicago to Reykjavik and then Reykjavik to Dublin, total.

Alex: Okay, and you booked that on Alaska as well, or did you book that with Icelandair?

Jess: I just booked that directly through Icelandair.

Alex: Okay.

Jess: So don't wait until 2 months before to book your flight, but that was just something that we had to do given our situation. And then coming home, so we flew from Dublin to O'Hare, Chicago, direct on British, no, we flew on Aer Lingus. I booked it through British Airways. And so again, economy, it was 20,000 Avios plus \$158 in taxes for each of us in economy. Paid cash for Olivia's ticket. It was because by the time I went to book hers, this wasn't available anymore. Hers was around \$700.

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Pam: I think those, those redemptions are amazing for economy class tickets. I mean, it really shows that a family can absolutely afford to travel and go to Europe as a family when you can get those kind of prices.

Jess: And this one, I mean, the Alaska one, like I said, not currently working, going to be harder to find, but British Airway, like if you're going to fly Dublin to Chicago on Aer Lingus via British Airways, that one is much, much easier to find availability on. And so that is an option. I mean, if you just want to look into that, if you just want to go to Ireland, that would be an easy option for you. And Aer Lingus was great, no complaints about that one.

Alex: They gave you free drinks and snacks?

Jess: They gave us free drinks, they gave us a meal, they gave us a hot snack. So...

Pam: Was the food good?

Jess: The food was pretty good. Yeah, it was, it was pretty good. I mean, it was like, for airplane food, it was great.

Alex: Nice.

Jess: Yeah, so that is how we did flights. And now I will get into where we stayed and what we did. I'm going to say I will not be pronouncing anything we did in Iceland. You can go watch our stories on Instagram and I have all of the locations tagged, but I will not be attempting to pronounce the names of any of these landmarks or waterfalls because I do not know how.

So in September, we got a message on Instagram from this woman named Stephanie. Her handle is @irelandtravelcoach. And she said, "Hey, Jess, I saw that you're going to Ireland. I help people plan trips to Ireland for a living. I've learned so much from your account and from Travel Mom Squad, and I would love to give back to you by helping you plan your itinerary for Ireland." And I was

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like, "Well, great. This is perfect because I've never been to Ireland and we only have 4 nights there and I want to maximize my time and I don't know what I'm doing."

And so had a Zoom call with her, kind of talked through our goals and what we wanted to see. She sent me a custom itinerary. She did not, I was like, "Please let me pay you for this because at first, I thought she was just going to send me recommendations." And then she was like, "Let's hop on a Zoom call." And I was like, "Okay, I feel bad that you're giving me this for free."

Alex: I remember Jess texted and she was like, "I thought she was just sending some recommendations. I feel so bad, like she's putting so much time and work into this."

Jess: So I was like, "Please let me pay you." And she said, "No, no." And I said, "Okay, well, I'm going to give you a shout out on the podcast because you're amazing." But then once she was done, I said, "I didn't know how much I needed this in my life, but do you know anyone who does this for Iceland also because I would love to have that taken off my plate." You know, I normally love planning my itineraries, but it's like this past year has just been kind of a blur with all the trips I've gone on and I was like, "You know what? I would love to offload some of this to someone else and support a small business in the process."

Alex: Well, and it's nice too because you're like, "I've already put all the pieces," because sometimes points and miles, putting stuff together is like a puzzle. And so you're like, it's a lot of brainpower sometimes to make all the flights work out and the hotels. And I know you had to do some stuff where you're like trying to get upgrades to get people to fit in rooms, which I'm sure you'll talk about. But after all of that, it's like, I think that's a fantastic idea to offload some of that. And when you use points, it's like, "Okay, yeah, I can afford to have someone plan our itinerary." And no offense, like Jess is an incredible itinerary planner. I have been the, on the receiving end of it, but I don't know if you can be a local person

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who lives there, who does this for a living. So I think that is genius and I want to start doing that for some of my trips now.

Jess: Yeah, so she put me in touch with Eric. His handle is @Icelandwithkids. I'm going to link both of their info in the show notes so you don't have to memorize anything. So I reached out to him and I said, "Hey, my family and I are going to Iceland. We only have 4 nights. We're staying all 4 nights in Reykjavik because I wanted to be able to use points for our hotel because Iceland is pricey." And so I said, "I need you, I need your help. I need you to help me like maximize our time in Iceland, see a bunch of stuff while being, you know, in Reykjavik and not, I didn't want to be hotel hopping all over Iceland." And so he was like, "I got you, girl." And so...

Pam: And how much did that I got you, girl cost you?

Jess: It was \$1,200 for him to plan the trip.

Pam: And what does that include?

Jess: It included, so we did like, I think we could have done more. I think we did 3, 2 or 3 Zoom calls with him where we kind of went through where we were staying, what we wanted to see, our interests, dietary restrictions. I would like, I said, "My kid's picky, don't send us anywhere like super fancy, you know, like send us to like family-friendly restaurants." Um, he was able to, he arranged our rental car for us, he booked all our tours for us, and then I was able to pay him back with a credit card. So that was amazing. And he also got us discounts on things. And so like he got us 10% off our car rental, so that right there saved us \$100. He got us a bunch of discounts on the tours that we did. Um, because he was able to get like a travel agent rate. And so I feel like for the time that I saved planning and plus the discounts he was able to get us that it was worth it for me. Obviously, you have to decide whether you would rather pay that or do all the research on your own.

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The really cool thing was he plans the itinerary, he has an app. It's not his app, it's just like an app he uses. And then he puts your entire itinerary in the app with all of your confirmation, like there's a, there's a day. And so it's like every day it's like the list of all the places you're going and the times. If you've booked something, there's like a link to view your confirmation email or view your QR code. There's a navigate link. So we would literally like open the app, hit navigate on the first thing of the day, and it would like go into our GPS in the car and we would drive there. And then once we were done there, we would hit navigate on the next thing and we would drive there. So it just saved us so much time and energy.

Alex: That's amazing. Like I just, I feel like it takes away a lot of the things that could go wrong when you're doing it yourself and you're trying to navigate and then you're late to your tour and then you miss your time slot. Like there's just a lot of things that can go wrong and I feel like going through somebody like that can really like mitigate some of those issues. And also like you're spending a lot of time and a lot, I mean, you know, you're spending a lot of not a lot of money, but points and a lot of time planning and just going, you know, never been to Iceland.

Jess: Yeah.

Alex: Most people don't aren't like, "I'm going to Iceland every year." It's like, you know, they go once or twice in their life kind of thing. And so you're like, if you're going to go on this big of a trip, I think there's something to be said about doing it right and not like get doing a lot of guesswork yourself trying to figure it all out.

Jess: Well, and like, like I said, I can't, I can't pronounce any of the names of the places. Like he had all that in there. He had and it was, it was cool because like his navigation would be like to the parking lot. You know, like it was exactly where we needed to go. It wasn't like, "Let me just put this name in here and hope that it brings me to the right spot." It was exactly where we needed to go. He made our restaurant reservations for us. You know, so he did, he was like a full service. I think he'll even, obviously I booked my own flights in hotel, I think

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he will do that for you too, if you're not using points. But yeah, so he was, I thought that was worth the investment. He takes credit cards. So if you are looking to hit a minimum spend, that would be a great way to do it.

So like I said, we organized the rental car through him. We did rent a car. I think if you're going to Iceland, a rental car is the way to go. Their road, they drive on the right. Their roads are so nice. Y'all know I don't love driving in different countries, but and I didn't drive in Iceland. Ella actually drove the entire time because she wanted to. But the roads are wide and they're, they're not like they're new paved roads and so it was super, super easy. Like I think it's easier to drive in Iceland than it is to drive in Texas. So that's not something I would be worried about in Iceland. We would see these like huge buses pulling up with all these people getting off and I was like, "That looks miserable." Like I just loved that we had control over our day and could do what we wanted and weren't waiting around for a busload of other people to see these sites.

Rental cars are expensive. We paid \$700 for 5 days, 4 nights with a Kia Sorento. There were 5 of us, so we needed a 3-row vehicle and gas is around \$10 a gallon. So that is something that you are going to want to keep in mind. I'll say this, this was a heavily discounted trip. Iceland is by no means a budget trip. If you want to take a trip on a budget, you should not go to Iceland. You should, you should just mark it off your list because everything is expensive in Iceland. The nice thing though was that groceries are not that much more expensive than they are here. It's really eating out that's expensive. And so Eric listed a few like different grocery stores along, you know, like one near our hotel, one near a route that we were going to be on one day. And so that was a nice place to like go grab some drinks and snacks at a reasonable price versus, you know, to have in the car.

We stayed at the Canopy Reykjavik on Hilton points. I don't think there are any Hyatt options in Iceland, maybe one Mr. and Mrs. Smith property, but none in Reykjavik. So I was like, "All right, time to put these Hilton points to work." It's a, it's a great hotel. Um, it's right in the city center of Reykjavik. Reykjavik is really walkable. And um, there was a parking garage right across the street where we

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parked our car. Like I said, we redeemed Hilton points. We stayed for 4 nights and it was 80,000 Hilton points a night, so that's 320,000 Hilton points per room. We had 2 rooms. Yes, I could have gotten the fifth night free. No, I did not because I booked our flights before our hotel. And then once I realized, "Oh, I'm going to be staying at Hilton. I can get the fifth night free," it was too late to try and change our flights. So don't be like me. Get your fifth night free, I guess.

I think a lot of people are probably wondering, how the heck did she get 640,000 Hilton points to make this redemption? We have signed up for a lot of the Hilton cards and Amex transfers one to two to Hilton and there was a 35% transfer bonus last year from Amex to Hilton. So I took huge advantage of that transfer bonus. Like Hilton is already a pretty good transfer partner of Amex since it's one to two and then with that transfer bonus on top of it, I was like, "All right, we're staying at Hilton's for our entire trip because this is such a great deal." So, um, I did get some of those from just spend on my Hilton cards or welcome offers on my Hilton cards, but I think a majority of those were from transferring from Amex.

It's Europe, room occupancy for standard rooms are 2, but when Olivia did, so I had 2 rooms, and then Olivia decided she was going to join us and so I emailed the hotel and asked, I really did not want to get a third room. I really did not want to pay another 320,000 Hilton points. I emailed the hotel and asked if there was a way to pay cash to upgrade one of the rooms to a junior suite that slept 3 and they said yes, it was going to be around \$200 a night. And so I said, "Yes, let's do that because that's way better than 320,000 Hilton points."

I had one room booked under my name. I'm diamond status because I have the Hilton Aspire card, and then one room booked under Ted's name. He has Hilton gold status from having the Hilton Surpass card. You can also get gold status if you have the Amex Platinum personal or business card. And so we received free breakfast for all 5 of us. That saved us so much money because of how expensive Iceland is. Like I told Ted, I said, "The money that we've saved on breakfast in Iceland alone covers the annual fees on all of our Hilton cards that we have because it's so expensive." You also, they also gave us 20% off any

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meals we ate at the at the restaurant because we were hotel guests. So I think we ate two dinners there because I was like, "Hey, 20% off these crazy prices is a huge savings." And so the food was really good.

The service was great. Molly got sick one night and we had to call housekeeping at like 1:00 AM and they brought us new sheets and they were great. And so I highly recommend this hotel. It's just really pretty. It's a really great location. I will say it does not have air conditioning, so that is something to be aware of. I don't think, I don't think many if any of the hotels in Iceland do. It wasn't an issue for us. It was in the, it was in the 50s while we were there. So we just slept with the windows open.

Pam: Well, I wouldn't imagine that you would need air conditioning very often in Iceland. In fact, the thing that has kept me from not wanting to go there is feeling like it's too cold.

Jess: Yeah.

Pam: So I, so I, you know, it's kind of like we grew, um, raised my kids up in Northern, um, California. Nobody has air conditioning because you only need it on a handful of days. And I would imagine that's kind of how Iceland is. And I was really shocked at all your pictures, Jess. So many blue skies.

Jess: Yes.

Pam: I thought, "Whoa, maybe I can go there."

Jess: I, I don't, I think we lucked out. I think it's pretty, I think their weather is pretty unpredictable. Like I remember packing my sunglasses. This goes for Iceland and Ireland. I was packing my sunglasses and I was like, "Do I even need these? Like, am I even going to wear sunglasses? Am I, am I fooling myself?" But I ended up wearing them almost the whole time. So I think, um, I think it was a combination of looking out and then summer is obviously, you know, if you want your, if you want the best chance of sunny weather and

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warmer temperatures, you know, June, July are going to be your best bet for that. Um, but yeah, we slept with the windows open. They provide fans in the room. It wasn't really an issue for us. It's only dark for 3 hours a day in summer in Iceland.

Pam: It's a good thing you brought your mask.

Jess: So I brought my eye mask, the one that Alex and I swear by.

Alex: Truly, I actually bought another one because I want to keep one in my carry-on and I keep one now on my nightstand.

Jess: I need to do that. Yeah, so it was only dark from about midnight to 3:00 AM every day. And so the eye mask definitely came in handy. I wore it every night.

Okay, so let's go into things that we did in Iceland. Like I said, you want to go look at our stories if you want to see the exact locations of everything we did. Eric put everything in the Trip Creator app, grocery stores, gas stations, cafes, little bakeries to eat at. We did not need cash at all. Everywhere in Iceland takes credit cards. Even there's one part where we went to a horse farm and they had like food that you could buy to feed the horses. I think it was like 1, 1 euro or one, whatever their, I don't even know what their, um, currency is. The equivalent of 1 euro. And they had a QR code to like pay that via Apple Pay. And so we really did not need cash at all. I will say a lot of places don't take American Express. The only place that took American Express was our, was our hotel. Every other restaurant, grocery store only took Visa or MasterCard. So that is something to be in mind.

We drove the Golden Circle our first full day in Iceland, and that was amazing. I think the part that is so crazy to me is like, you can see these types of things in the United States, but they're so far apart from each other. You know, like you might go to one national park and see a geyser and then you might go here and like see a waterfall. You can see all, you can see waterfalls, geysers, craters, sheep, horses in, in one day. You know, if you drive the Golden Circle, you can

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see that all in one day. And so it's like you feel like you're really getting like a great bang for your buck when you go to, I mean, you're paying it, you're paying a pretty penny, but you're just seeing all this nature in like such a short amount of time.

And so we went to a geothermal park. Molly got to boil eggs in the water and then we ate them. We saw a crater. We went to a petting zoo. We went to a tomato greenhouse for lunch and that was really cool. That was something Eric suggested and he made reservations for us. Everything on the menu has tomatoes in it and they're all like tomatoes from the greenhouse. And so, everything in Iceland is on geothermal energy, so there's no power lines. It's just beautiful, like it's clean and it's beautiful and it's just, it feels like you're on a different planet sometimes. We saw waterfalls, we saw geysers, we went to a horse farm, we went and got ice cream at a dairy farm, and you can like eat your ice cream while you look at the cows that helped make your ice cream. So, super cool. If you have an animal lover, Molly is, all of our kids are animal lovers, but Molly loves animals. And so, Iceland has so many different animals that you can see and pet and get up close to and in the wild. And so she, she really loved that.

Alex: I know the answer to this, but I just have to ask it because I was thinking of it when you were sharing, like when I saw your stories of eating the ice cream at the farm. Did it smell bad while you're eating your ice cream?

Jess: It did smell bad. Because I know you're sensitive to smells. I'm like, I can't imagine eating good ice cream with it smelling like cows and horses and farms.

Alex: It did not.

Jess: To me, it didn't smell inside. Like when we were, like when we parked the car and we got out of the car, I was like, "Okay, it smells like horse, it smells like cow manure." But then inside, it did not smell to me.

Alex: Okay.

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Jess: So like I would not get the ice cream and like take it outside and eat it, but if you're inside, there's like glass, it's not open. It's like glass where you can see the cows through. So it did not smell inside to me.

Alex: Cuz I was like, Jess would not be recommending this and eating this ice cream if it smelled that. I know she does not like her weird smells.

Jess: Yeah. No, it did smell. I was a little worried when we got out of the car cuz I was like, "Am I going to have to smell poop while I'm eating my ice cream?" But luckily, I couldn't smell it from inside.

Alex: That's good. And then how long did it take like if someone's going to do the Golden Circle? And I know you do a lot of stops in there, but about how long are you spending in the car?

Jess: We were gone from the hotel for 13 hours.

Alex: Oh wow.

Jess: So it was a long day. Um, we left around 7, we got breakfast at 7, and then we left the hotel around 7:45 and we got back around 8, between 8:30 and 9:00. So, yeah, it was a really long day, but it's daylight the whole time. So like you don't, you don't feel tired because it's like, "Oh, it feels like it's 3:00 in the afternoon," you know? But it is a long day. That's why someone was messaging me and saying, "What age do you recommend for Iceland?" And I'm like, "Once your kid can spend 13 hours in a car for a day, like that's, that's the age that I recommend." But yeah, I mean we were just constantly stopping. We weren't, I don't think there was ever more than like an hour, hour and a half where we were, you know, in at one time.

Alex: Yeah.

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Jess: So, lots of chances to stop and get out. The next day we had like a Reykjavik chill day and it's funny cuz when I talked to Eric, he was like, "Are you sure you don't want to do like another long drive?" And I was like, "No, for my family, we need like one day where we do a lot, kind of like a more chill day near the hotel and then we can have another day where we do a lot. But I cannot do three go-go-go days in a row." Like just knowing myself, knowing my family, like that's not our vibe.

And so we went to Sky Lagoon, which is sort of similar to Blue Lagoon, which I think is the more, the more famous one. This one, Sky Lagoon is closer to Reykjavik. They do have an age limit. You have to be 12 or older. You can be turning 12 in the year that you go. So like they said it was fine for Molly to go. She's technically 11. She turns 12 later this year, but she was totally fine to go. She didn't end up going because she got sick, but she could have gone if she, if she were well. But it was really, really cool. We bought tickets for the first entrance of the day, which was 9:00 AM. And so we got to be there when it was a little less crowded.

They have a 7-step ritual where you like go to a cold plunge and then you do the sauna and then you do a cold mist and then you do a body scrub and then you rinse it off and then you get back into the lagoon. So it's just a really cool experience and way to kind of relax and recharge after our very long day the day before. We also did a walking tour with Your Friend in Reykjavik. Again, I will link all this in the show notes. That was also recommended by Eric. He also got us a discount on that.

The canopy location is great. We never took any sort of public transportation or Ubers or taxis or Ubers, like we just walked everywhere. And so we walked to this tour. We did it. It was a 2-hour walking tour, a lot of history of Reykjavik, and then we got to like feed ducks and swans and it was just really cool. I highly recommend that if you just want to kind of get a little bit of the history of Reykjavik. And then Molly was feeling better because I recommended we go to a cat cafe. And so she was, she was ready to go. And so we found a cute little cafe um, where you can get a latte or hot chocolate and then they had 4 little

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cats that live there and you could pet them while you drink your coffee. And so I discovered that in Reykjavik. We did that to cap off the day.

And then the next day was our last full day, and so we did another go hard, gone 12 to 13 hour day. We drove to the South Coast. We saw a ton of waterfalls. There was a really cool one you get to actually walk behind the waterfall. And so that was probably my favorite of all the waterfalls we saw. We did a glacier hike. I'll link that in the show notes. It was amazing. The minimum age for that is 8, so it's 8+. It's around 2 and a half hours of hiking, but it's easy, easy hiking. And then we drove,

Alex: Was it cold? Was it cold?

Jess: It wasn't. I mean, I was not wearing gloves and I was fine. Like I was not cold.

Pam: Okay.

Jess: I was just wearing my rain, my Vuori rain jacket and like a long sleeve shirt underneath and then they provide, you can rent hiking, you can rent boots from them and they provided the crampons for your boots because I was like, "I'm not, y'all know I carry on. I'm not packing, I'm not using up half my carry on bag with hiking boots. Like I'll just, I'll just suffer."

Pam: Do you even own hiking boots?

Jess: No.

Pam: Cuz I don't own them.

Jess: Not, I mean, well I do own like the, I own Doc Martens. Those might work, right? Like Doc Martin's boots. Um, but I'm not, I was like, I live in Texas, I'm not spending money on hiking boots. I'm not using up valuable space in my luggage. And so luckily we were able to rent boots from them and they provided

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the crampons. So I was not cold during the hike. Like at no point was I like, "Oh my gosh, shivering or anything like that." So it was actually surprising how not cold it was. We all loved that.

Pam: You know what, you're convincing me. If I could get the weather that you got, maybe I need to go the exact same time that you went next year.

Jess: Yeah.

Pam: I'm kind of intrigued now.

Jess: I, you know what? I think, Pam, I think, and I know that you have gone on trips with your other grandkids, you know, the older grandkids and they seem to really enjoy like the nature and the adventure and I think they would really like it if you, but I know you can't take all 21, so you'd have to pick some favorites, I guess.

Pam: Yeah, that would be, that would be fun. We already do the Hawaii trip every year. I don't know if we could start Iceland.

Jess: You need like 10 rooms at the canopy. Um, but and then Ella's big thing was she was like, "I want to see puffins, I want to see puffins." And so I asked Eric, I said, "Where can we go to see puffins?" And so he gave us,

Pam: What are puffins?

Jess: They're like penguins kind of. They look like, they're like birds, they're birds, right? They have an orange, they have an orange beak. Um, so but you can only see them in certain places. You can't. And so Iceland happens to be one of the places where you can see them. So he gave us the name of a spot and was like, "Go here and hopefully you'll see some." And so we saw puffins. We saw a puffin pooping and I got it on camera and so it was just like Ella, so Ella got her wish, her dreams came true in Iceland.

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And so, yeah, that is it. I was telling Alex and Pam that we were talking, you know, we were having our debriefing session and I said, "Y'all, I really loved Iceland. What did you think?" And Ella, Ella said, "It's my favorite country. Like it's my favorite country I've ever been to, more than Japan." And I was like, "Whoa, that is high praise." I think it's, it's definitely in my top 3. Um, it's getting hard. You know, the more places you go, the more you're like, "Oh, this is really amazing."

Alex: So what else is in your top 3? Japan and Australia and Iceland?

Jess: Japan, definitely Japan, definitely Iceland. Australia probably is number 3.

Pam: What is- no Greece?

Jess: I also love Scotland.

Alex: Scotland. Yeah, Scotland was always your big.

Jess: But Iceland, some parts of Iceland actually reminded me of Scotland. Um, but yeah, like if you love nature, if you love animals, if you love being outside. And it's funny cuz like I would never have been like, "I'm a nature lover."

Alex: I was just going to say that. I'm like, wait, is this the same Jess?

Jess: But I think it's because you can drive so much. No, here's the thing. I think it's because you can like drive and park in a parking lot and just like walk a little bit and see the thing. It's not like you're like constantly outdoors hiking and stuff.

Alex: You don't actually have to go on hikes. You just have to go on a small walk.

Jess: Yes, it's a small walk. It's not a hike. And the glacier hike was a legit hike, but it was fun and like interesting and our guide was really great. And so,

Alex: But when ever do you go on a glacier hike? Like that's just amazing.

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Jess: I've got a question for you though. Did you feel like 4 nights was enough or if it's like, no, if you have a week, go for a week or do you feel like, no, that was good?

Jess: I think it was a good intro to Iceland. I feel like we got way, we saw way more than I was expecting to see because when I first said, "Okay, I'm just doing a stop over, I'm only there for 4 nights," I really wasn't expecting much. Like if we had only seen what we saw the day we drove the Golden Circle, I would have been like, "This was a success." But then we saw way more than that. So I think that's where having Eric help really came in clutch because if I were doing it myself, I wouldn't have thought we could do all that in one day. You know, I would have said, "This is way too much."

I think if you want to, we, if you look at a map of Iceland and you look at where we were, we were in a very small segment of Iceland. We, there was so much we didn't see. There are people who will drive the entire ring road, like around the entire, I would love to do that sometime. I think you'd need to go a little bit later, like maybe July. I think June, some of the roads might still be closed due to ice in like the northern part of Iceland. But if you want to see the whole, if you want to drive the ring road, I think you need at least a week to do that. But I thought for, for the time we were there, we really did maximize our time and saw a lot.

Alex: That's nice.

Jess: All right, so shall we move on to Ireland? Like I said, that flight from Reykjavik to Dublin was included in my original 27,500 Alaska mile booking. It's only a 2-hour flight from Reykjavik to Dublin. And so, super easy flight. We did not rent a car in Ireland and we did do some hotel hopping. And so I knew we were going to be hotel hopping in Ireland and that's why I said I don't want to also do that in Iceland. I don't want to stay at like 8 different hotels over the course of this trip.

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And so Stephanie said, "You can, you can rent a car, but the roads are windy and they drive on the left." And I was like, "Nope, let's do, let's do your recommendations for transportation." And so, I will link all this in the show notes. She had someone she knew who could give us transfers from the airport to the Conrad. We stayed 1 night at the Conrad in Dublin. I knew we only had 1 night in Dublin, so I was kind of going back and forth between the Hyatt Centric and the Conrad. Pam, I know you stayed at the Hyatt Centric and you really liked it. Um, but she said, she, she just said, you know, if you have the free night certificates, the Conrad location is a lot better. And so I said, "Okay, we'll do, this will just be a Hilton trip. Sorry, Hyatt."

And so I got us 2 rooms at the Conrad. I redeemed one free night certificate for me, one for Ted. Emailed them ahead of time again and said, "Hey, sorry, we're going to have a third person. Is there a way that we could pay to upgrade?" And they were actually really kind and said, "Oh, we see that you're a diamond member, we'll go ahead and bump you up to a junior suite just as a complimentary upgrade for your status." So that was a really pleasant surprise because I was prepared to pay cash for an upgrade there. They took us, so this elite transfers Dublin picked us up, had my, had a little board with my name on it waiting for us when we got out of the airport. They drove us to the Conrad and I thought the Conrad was great. It was one of the older Conrads and so it's not, like I stayed at the Conrad Tokyo and that one is like, whoa, this is amazing and like very luxurious. This is a little bit more like understated luxury, but it was great for what we needed it for.

The location was amazing, right next to St. Stephen's Green. And so we basically had this huge park that we walked through every time we wanted to go somewhere in Dublin. And so I really liked the location. The service was great. The we got breakfast included. That was great. It was a buffet with a lot of different options. And so, um, yeah, we really, we really enjoyed our time in Ireland. We were in Dublin for less than 24 hours. So I can't comment a ton on it, but it's a very cute city, very walkable. We also did not take any sort of public transportation or Uber in Dublin. We just walked everywhere. So...

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Pam: I don't think you need much time in Dublin. I think I stayed there 2 or 3 nights and it was, you know, and we did a tour outside the city. There isn't, it's, it's cute.

Jess: It's cute.

Pam: I think you know, one night there is fine, you know, or whatever.

Jess: Well, and that's what Stephanie said. She said, she said, "You could see all of Dublin in like 2 days." You know? And so, even though you're going to be there for less than 24 hours, you're going to be able to see a lot of it just because it is pretty compact and walkable.

Then we took the train from Dublin to Galway. Super cheap. It was like a 2 and a half hour train ride. Adults were 14.99 euros, and Molly was only 8 euros for this train ride. I was like, this is, and Ireland in general felt dirt cheap after coming from Iceland. I was like, like we had McDonald's for lunch and I was like, "I really think we spent less on this one meal than like one person would have cost at a restaurant in Iceland." This was a day I was really excited about.

We stayed 2 nights at Glenlo Abbey. This is an SLH property, so again, used to be bookable on Hyatt points. Now is bookable with Hilton points. It's about 15 minutes outside of Galway, so it's like a little bit removed from the city. Super pretty, 80,000 points a night. Again, room occupancy for standard rooms is 2. I emailed them and they said it was going to be 40 euros a night to upgrade us to a room that had a sofa bed. and I was like, "Done, that seems like a steal." And so we paid 80 euros total um, for our 2 nights to have room for 5.

Alex: Again, I think that's a great tip though that you've did for people because it's always like, "Oh, in Europe, like I can only get a room for 2." And you had 5 and you made it work at every hotel by getting 2 rooms just by emailing the hotel ahead of time. So I think that's a really good tip for people who are like, "I have, you know, a bigger family, how are we going to make this work?" And if you're willing to pay cash to upgrade, it sounds like they were pretty accommodating.

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Jess: They were super accommodating. There was not a single hotel out of any of these that I had to push back on. And it's also a good tip if you're traveling with 3 people because you know, maybe, maybe you just want to get one room for if it's two adults and one kid, maybe you just want to try to all get into one room versus having to book two rooms. And so, um, it could work also, you know, if you're traveling, if you're traveling with 3 people. So, just something to keep in mind, always ask, the worst they can do is say no. 80,000 Hyatt points a night, 2 rooms. So, again, 160,000 points a night.

We took the taxi, so you can't really walk any, the downside of Glenlo Abbey is because it's a little bit removed, you can't really walk anywhere. So we took um, taxis or Uber, they have an app in Ireland called Free Now. That's like their Uber app. And so that's the app you want to get if you're going there and want to use a ride share. So we took a taxi into Galway into the city. So cute. Like when you think of a cute little Irish town, this is what you think of, like little flags hanging from the streets and like performers singing and playing instruments in the street and cobblestone. I don't know, it was just super cute.

And so we did that for 2 nights and then the last night, so we had a, we had like an 11:00 AM flight out of Dublin the day we were leaving. And Stephanie said, "Okay, you can either go back to Dublin, you could stay at the Conrad or the Hyatt, but that's going to be like 40, 45 minutes to the airport in the morning, or you can stay in Malahide, which is a cute little coastal town outside of Dublin and it's only 15 minutes from the airport." And so you get like a little bit of taste of something different, but there are no hotels that take points in Malahide. So I did pay cash for 2 rooms at the Grand Hotel Malahide.

I'm really glad we stayed there. Um, it was a bit of a splurge paying cash for it, but after our trip and how busy it was, it was really nice to be able to just like walk outside of our room and like walk down the coast and we didn't go to the beach, but um, there were people at the beach. It's still a little too chilly for me to go to the beach and get in the water, but you know, just being able to like walk

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around and go to a pub for dinner and be 15 minutes from the airport was really nice. And so I really like her recommendation of the Grand Hotel Malahide.

And then as far as things to do in Ireland, I kind of already went through what we did in Dublin. We walked through Trinity College, the St. Stephen's Green, we went to the Little Museum of Dublin. And then in Galway...

Pam: Hey, wait a minute. Jess.

Jess: What?

Pam: I got to stop you. All the pubs in Dublin, are you telling me that you guys didn't go to any of the pubs that Dublin is so famous for? You have to.

Jess: Oh, like the, the what's that one called? The something...

Pam: The Guinness...

Jess: Is there? Oh, I don't drink Guinness. I don't like beer. I had no desire to go to the Guinness storehouse. And then there's a couple of other pubs, but they're like tourist traps.

Pam: I just see anybody who goes to Dublin. I mean, I don't drink so that isn't what I did, but we sat and took some pictures by some of them because they were really cute. And I'm like, "I can't believe that Jess went to Ireland and wasn't in the pubs ever."

Jess: Stephanie, we did go to pubs, but they were like more local friendly pubs, not like the touristy pubs.

Pam: Okay.

Jess: So we did not go to like, we definitely did not go to Guinness. That was, that was a no.

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Pam: Okay.

Jess: Then, like I said, in Galway, we kind of just explored the little city and walked around. We did do a full day trip from Galway to the Cliffs of Moher. We hired a driver for the day through Stephanie's recommendation. It was 650 euros for 8 hours and they picked us up and dropped us off from Glenlo Abbey. We went to a sheep dog demonstration that was so cute. It's crazy how these sheep dog do this. There were 4 different dogs and the, I don't know what the guy, the leader, the, the Shepherd, is that what they're called? Like the, the person who directs the dogs had a whistle and he would blow the whistle and each dog knew their whistle call. And so he could like direct the dogs based on how he blew the whistle. I was like, this is crazy. So again, animal loving family.

Alex: You know, and I can't get my dog to not even bark when someone knocks on the door.

Jess: So the animal loving family, you know, sheep, dogs, everyone was happy um, with the sheep dog demonstration. And then we went to the Cliffs of Moher and we did a tour through Ollie's tours. Cannot recommend this enough. If you are going to be at the Cliffs of Moher, you have to do a tour with Ollie. This, the one that we did is actually not open to the public. You have to email him about it. And so, here's, here's crime dog Jess giving you a little insider tip. I also got his information from Stephanie.

So again, another person I never would have found if I didn't have someone helping me plan these trips. But it was amazing because as you know, the Cliffs of Moher is one of the most desirable places to go in Ireland, which means it's also very crowded. And so we got to the visitor center and I was like, "Wow, there's a lot of people here." But Ollie was like, "Wait, I got a private path to take you on for this tour." And so we said, "Okay." And so he took us on this private little path and we got this amazing view of the cliffs with no, not a single other person around us. And so...

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Alex: Yeah, your videos made it look like literally no one else was there.

Jess: Yeah, yeah. It was so worth the 200 euros. It was around an hour and a half, this hike, super easy. Molly did it easily. She's not the most athletic person. And so, um, if she did it, you could do it, your kids could do it. Um, he was great, so entertaining. And he was, I love when you have a guy that's like, "Give me your phone, let me take a family picture of you. Let me take videos for you." It just makes it so nice to have to be able to be in the pictures and the videos and not always be the one taking them yourself. And so he was great with kids, super knowledgeable about the cliffs and about Ireland in general. And so that was probably the highlight of our time in Ireland. And yeah, we just loved it. And then like I said, our last night, we stayed in Malahide and just, you know, relaxed, walked along the coast and went to a pub. So it was great. I loved Ireland. I would love to go back to Ireland. I feel like we barely scratched the surface of Ireland and there's a ton of, ton more that I want to see. So I'd love to go back there.

Pam: Well, Jess, you've convinced me. I think both places sound amazing. I've been to Ireland but just to Dublin and then a little bit outside. I loved it too. Didn't think I wanted to go to Iceland, but you know what? I think I got the FOMO. So, you know, I think it's amazing that by combining Alaska miles, Hilton points and Hilton free night certificates and British Airways Avios, you were able to score a 10-day trip to Ireland and Iceland for your family of 5. It blows my mind what it would have cost if you had to pay all cash.

So any of you that are listening, if you're ready to get started so you can turn your bucket list dream trip into a reality, be sure and sign up for our free webinar, How to Get Your Next Vacation for Nearly Free. We'll include a link to register in the show notes.

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