



Fitzgerald's Irish Bed & Breakfast / Fitzgerald Tours

Fitzgerald's Irish Bed & Breakfast

47 Mentor Avenue
Painesville, Ohio 44077
(440) 639-0845
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Voted Top 15 B&B's of North America
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Just 28 mi. east of downtown Cleveland



Don't you know you'll cleanse your soul with a walk in the Irish rain?

The notion is tempting, and captures the essence of stepping off the plane onto Irish soil—you have left home on a journey home. There are homes and there are houses, but once in a while, that journey brings you to a grande house that lives and breathes the Irish national identity of friendliness, welcome, song and laughter. You are home.

Fitzgerald's Irish Bed & Breakfast is the gentle mist like heaven's kiss that tugs at your soul every time you think of Ireland. Like Ireland, gorgeous settings filled with greenery, water, living history and loads of opportunity to do whatever you want—after all, you are on vacation—abound, in and around Fitzgerald's.

Located in the Painesville Historic District, a half hour east of downtown Cleveland, the peaceful and picturesque home has been renovated and restored by owners Debra & Tom Fitzgerald as more than "just" a labor of love. Time and circumstances show that it is what they were meant

to do. From the first time seeing the house to all the joys that are sure to accompany a restoration project amazingly crafted, that feeling of destiny has never left them.

"I have a feeling in here," Debra said, touching her heart, "we are supposed to be here. We bought the house in September of 1998. We didn't mean to buy it. We



had been married for four years, had a new house.

"We were training for a marathon and saw it for sale. We asked a realtor friend to show us the house. It had been vacant for five years. We moved on, looked at others. Then one night Tom woke up and said 'We gotta look at the house again.'

"We called the realtor and back we went. The house has character. We made a low ball offer, never expecting it to be accepted. The realtor came back and said 'He took it'.

Fate was persistent and the Fitzgerald's former house sold in four weeks. They gutted the kitchen of their new purchase before they even moved in. Tom's mom saw the house, went home and cried, she was so shocked by what she had seen.

"There were fifty-five original windows, some were broke and couldn't close," Debra said. "We replaced fifty-three of them. There was one light, in the whole house. The 1st thing was to get a gas grill going

so we could eat once in a while. We just felt things were supposed to happen this way.

"We used to sit on the porch to air out the house, talk. The house next door was built in 1817; this was part of the farm. People would walk by and ask if they could look inside. We said, 'We oughta charge admission.'"

That thought never quite left their mind, and the inner pull to create an Irish Bed & Breakfast percolated.

"We had traveled to Ireland, seen BnB's, soknewwhattheauthenticoneswereabout. We took a class at OSU Extension on how to own and operate a BnB. In May, 2000, we had our 1st customer. We didn't know what to expect: waiting for guests, doing everything between our day time jobs. We grew with the business."

"When you have been in the car traveling all day, then get here, you can just park the car and all you need for mind and body is just a walk away."

—Tom Fitzgerald

"You can literally walk to everything, church, grocery store, library, a lot of restaurants, anything we need is right here. Lake Erie is three miles away—there are Friday cruises; there are all kinds of events on the square; Painesville Party on the Square, which is Ohio's largest free music festival; a new library, school; park system, there are tons of small little parks nearby; the area has the most public access beach front in Lake County.

"Holden Arboretum, which is the largest continuous arboretum in the United States is near; a lot of people come to see President Garfield's house, which is just down

the street; Gallery One, one of the largest retailers of art in the United States is close by, but of course, the biggest attraction for people coming to stay with us are the wineries, there are over twenty-five within fifteen minutes of FitzGerald's B&B.

"I love it (giving two thumbs up). I love meeting different people. We entertain a lot outside of the business as well. We love to have people over; there are people here every day. We still have dreams for the house. There is always something to do.

"Duties/jobs have developed over time—we are well matched—we found our way, and it works."

The Fitzgerald's past "to do" list included all new electrical, plumbing, heating, hot water heater, lights and more. The machinery and power in the house is all new, but the Fitzgerald's respect for the elegance and history of the home shines through. Wood abounds throughout the house, ancient and masterfully crafted to highlight both age and beauty, and the unexpected turns, corners and rooms found throughout are startling, and stunning.

Historians will love that they can see live the progression of the American home heating system right in the basement: coal bin, oil bin and gas furnace each has left a piece of history in the home. Tom discovered a patio in the large backyard and new landscaping has created an oasis perfect for a cup of tea, a conversation or losing yourself in a book. Back inside, as we are talking, the grandfather clock is toning—the most visible sound of a very musical house. A harp sits nearby, Tom's sister plays.

Over a few feet lies a fiddle—Debra's mom was German, her dad of Irish & Welsh descent. Her Grandfather was a fiddle maker in Ireland—yes, the crafter of the fiddle that sits in the Fitzgerald's living room.

When Cherish the Ladies stayed with the FitzGerald's while performing nearby for a fundraiser, Joanie and crew dispersed to the living room after dinner and the fiddle got a good workout, getting high praise.

Tom's family hails from Killeagh, County Waterford. They were Famine Irish, coming through Castleton, N.Y. then to Cleveland. Tom's great grandfather came over in 1854 and brought his wife over in 1856, living on Irish Bend and working as a laborer.

Owning a B&B is not for everyone. There are so many part-time B&B owners who have seen too many Bob Newhart shows and thought it would be an easy life, sitting around sipping coffee with their guests. They don't realize the work, the planning, flexibility, willingness to allow people to walk through your life and your kitchen. Debra and Tom excel, because they are so well suited to the business, and to each other, complimenting the finer points of success with each person's strengths, willingness to

meet each other 100/100 and constant communication.

If that isn't enough, on vacations from their day time jobs; Debra is a Marketing Analyst with ISK Biosciences Corporation, Tom is a Bio-Analytical Scientist, Tom & Debra develop, design, coordinate and lead international tours.

Fitzgerald Tours

In 2002, Debra & Tom were training for the Dublin (IRL)

Marathon. A friend said that they ought to do a tour. They started first in Ireland, but now guide guests throughout the world.

They got so much repeat business, and requests to create tours to other areas: Italy, Wales, Scotland, France, Spain, Austria, Hungary, Germany, Slovakia, England and more have highlighted the customary two annual tours Debra & Tom coordinate, that their obvious skill and gift for creating memorable experiences for their guests

carried right over from the B&B to the tour packages.

All packages are all-inclusive, other than lunch and tips. Of course, Ireland holds a special place in their hearts, and a return trip with a spring tour is planned. Debra has sent out one email regarding that trip, and more than 1/2 the seats are already taken.

The itinerary is planned ahead—always ten nights, eleven days; always leave on Wednesday, return on Sunday, and back to work on Monday. At least one night in a castle is always included. All tours are "ad hoc", customized to Debra & Tom's interests and desire to share special people, places and moments in history with their guests.

"The tour has built up over the years," said Debra. "Our experiences on tours and other travels teach us, we scout locations for another tour, vet hotels, castles, sites to make sure they will meet the standards our guests have come to expect from us. What we want to provide for people is the opportunity to meet, to spend time with, the people of Ireland; hear their stories in the pubs and on the streets.

"It is the people who have made Ireland so special, so soulful, to American relations, friends and visitors. They come home with more than just a glimpse and a photo, more than just a brief memory. They experience Ireland."

Another signature event of the FitzGerald Tour is the pre and post tour party. In the pre-departure party, guests meet and get the chance to build relationships. They are going to spend ten days

together. The majority are from Northeast Ohio, but also come from across the U.S.

"We tell them what is going to happen and how it is going to happen. We give travel and tour tips – how to exchange for Euro, let your credit card company know you will be traveling, etc. We give a rain jacket to everyone – it is our insurance against rain!" said Debra.

"The after-tour gathering is a picture party held three to four months later. Everyone brings their photos from the trip, has a beer, shares pics, stories and

memories. It kind of relives the whole tour.

"I think they like knowing they are going with people who have been there before, have traveled internationally. It alleviates nervousness.

"From that group of those who tour with us, past and present, has come a lunch club and a book club. Friendships, lifetime active friendships, are born, nurtured.

"I feel, I really do feel, that we are blessed. We have met so many people. None of it was planned, but it has all worked out. I am the luckiest person I have ever met."



Fitzgerald Tours
Owners Debra & Tom Fitzgerald

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