

DESTINATIONS

BRITISH ISLES | NORTHERN IRELAND



CLARE MCKITTERICK, DUTY MANAGER, THE GOBBINS CLIFF PATH

INTERVIEW BY Alice Barnes-Brown

Q. What can visitors expect at The Gobbins Cliff Path?

A. The three-mile walk is one of Europe's most dramatic coastal paths, with a series of cliffside bridges. No two visits are the same – especially with our Northern Irish weather. Wintertime is my favourite because it's more atmospheric, with the sound of the waves and the wind blowing through the cliffs. There are also some blowholes on one part of the path – when we have kids doing tours, we say it's like a dragon or a dinosaur breathing.

Q. The path has just reopened after a rockfall – what's new?

A. We reopened on March 20, after some repairs. We've had a recruitment drive for new guides, which means we can increase our tour offering. We've also gained funding from the Shared Island Fund to upgrade our exhibition area, and we're looking at making the cliff path more accessible, including with a British Sign Language tour.

Q. What is the history of The Gobbins Cliff Path?

A. It was built in the early 1900s by a railway engineer, Berkeley Deane Wise, and all the steps on the path were hand-carved by workmen. The bridges have been restored and reimagined, so they're very similar to what was there before, especially the famous tubular bridge, which looks like a railway tunnel.

Q. Who can agents sell it to?

A. We've had visitors as young as six and as old as 96. You do need



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a certain level of fitness, so for those living with conditions such as diabetes, asthma or any heart or joint conditions, we ask them to think carefully about whether they are up to doing the path.

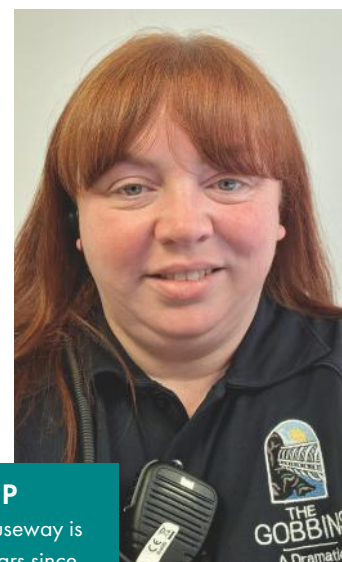
Q. What wildlife can clients see?

A. During the peak summer season, we have quite a range of birds – from kittiwakes and cormorants to puffins and guillemots. Puffins are a big draw because we're one of the very few places on the mainland that has them. A lot tend to be on islands such as Rathlin on the Causeway Coast, but we have three or four nesting sites at the very end of The Gobbins – and you can see the puffins diving into the water. We also have dolphins, porpoises and seals that pop their heads up. Sometimes, the tour commentary goes out of the window because we

all stand and look at these amazing animals that follow us along the path so it goes longer than two-and-a-half hours because we're all enjoying the show.

Q. Tell us about your day-to-day role.

A. I'm one of the duty managers running daily operations. I meet every visitor coming through the door because they have to check in for their tours with us. We also organise staffing and training, source and stock products for the gift shop, and arrange special touches such as proposals or birthdays. The visitor centre is a big community hub, so we are involved with a lot of events that happen around the local area too.



TOP TIP

The Giant's Causeway is marking 40 years since being named a Unesco World Heritage Site, and can be combined with The Gobbins as part of the Causeway Coastal Route. Find out more at discovernorthernireland.com/travel-trade

Q. How do you access the path?

A. Access is only via guided tour. We take a maximum of 15 guests, so they can all fit in the minibus from

the visitor centre, which ensures the tour is as personal as possible. It's nice to get down there with a tour guide, as most of them are local – one actually lives by the path. People from Northern Ireland and Ireland are generally very welcoming and helpful.

Q. How can agents book The Gobbins?

A. They can book via a tour operator that has a contract with us [which include cruise, touring and tailor-made operators such as Princess Cruises, Viking and Wilderness Ireland]. **TW**