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AND THE BEAT GOES ON
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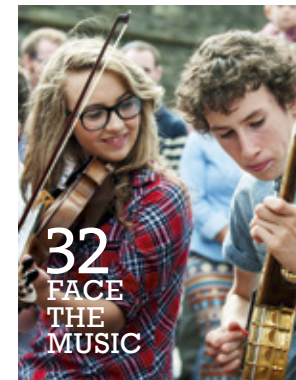
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WELCOME

So you want to get away from it all, try something new, shake things up a bit... well, the island of Ireland is just waiting for you. Waiting to blow you away with the captivating Wild Atlantic Way driving route, to grab your hand and pull you up to dance at a traditional céili, to thrill you with its incredible haunted castles and then to spoil you with its excellent culinary delights. Don't stand on the sidelines, come on...

Jump into  Ireland



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PICTURE THIS...

As you look out over this landscape, you could only be in Ireland. Where else would you find vibrant green fields divided by ancient stone walls; a coastline characterised by its jagged inlets and tiny islands, and a sky that changes every time you glance up at it. You'll find wonderful scenery no matter where you are on the island, but this particular view is of The Skelligs in County Kerry, a place where land and sea collide to stunning effect.

The Skellig Islands, County Kerry

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IRELAND ESCAPE

Island adventures

The islands around Ireland's coast are something truly special. Why not head to the Irish-speaking Arans off County Galway, the birdwatching paradise of Rathlin off County Antrim, or Tory island off north Donegal, which even has its own King. It doesn't get any better than this.



The Rock of Cashel

Dominating the Tipperary landscape from its hilltop perch, the Rock of Cashel is a spectacular cluster of medieval chapels, churches and a cathedral, whose history is steeped in tales of St Patrick and Ireland's high kings. Not to be missed.

DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT

In Ireland the magic is all around you. From regal island outposts to lunar landscapes, this is your chance to embark on the ultimate escape with mind-blowing adventures you won't forget



International Appalachian Trail

If you're looking for a walking experience like no other, then this unique route that stretches from Donegal across Northern Ireland is a definite must-do. Expect inspirational scenery, friendly locals and an authentic edge-of-the-world feel.



The Burren

At first sight this limestone landscape in County Clare looks as barren as the moon's surface. But look closer and you'll see thriving flora and fauna, and lively villages such as Kilfenora and Kinvara. And when you hear the traditional music, you'll know you're in Ireland!

Belfast food trail

Belfast has one of the hottest restaurant scenes in Europe right now, and a food trail is a great way to get right to the heart of the city's culinary scene. The Belfast Bred Walking Tour offers insider knowledge, local foodie trivia and gourmet treats along the way!

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Blackhead Lightkeepers' House, County Antrim



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Adare Manor, County Limerick



Dromquinna Manor, County Kerry



Martello Tower, Sutton, County Dublin

STAY SOMEWHERE DIFFERENT

No matter what your tastes, Ireland has the perfect place for you to stay during your holiday. So why not try something a little bit different?

If your idea of luxury is decadent drawing rooms, four-poster beds and a spot of falconry in the afternoon, then an Irish castle will make for an unforgettable stay. Just look at gracious Luttrellstown Castle near Dublin where David and Victoria Beckham tied the knot; the grand elegance of Dromoland in County Clare; Crom Castle in County Fermanagh and Adare Manor in County Limerick, one of the most distinguished hotels in the world. But if you're thinking an Irish castle comes with a five-star price, think again. Ireland has lots of historic castle properties with self-catering options, including the romantic Barbican Gatelodge in County Antrim – a hideaway just for two.

For a very different experience, try glamping amidst Ireland's beautiful landscape. Take Cape Clear Island, off the

coast of West Cork, for example. On this Irish-speaking island, you can retreat to a pretty tent or yurt overlooking the glistening sea. It's an escape like no other.

Some of Ireland's historic manors are now using their grounds for a spot of glamping so you can get the essence of luxury for a fraction of the price. Dromquinna Manor offers stunning views over Kenmare Bay in County Kerry, with comfortable tents surrounded by woodland. Or how about the sylvan atmosphere of Tepee Valley Campsite in County Armagh, with its tepees, cute caravans and rustic log cabins?

Ireland's glamping spots generally adhere to an ethic of sustainability, but eco accommodation on the island is easy to find. There are yoga retreats on quiet islands (Clare Island); seaweed baths

and accommodation in County Down (SOAK); and the unique Gyreum Ecolodge in County Sligo, with views across six surrounding counties.

And for something really unforgettable, head to the coasts. Perched on the edge of precipitous cliffs, you can relax and unwind at Blackhead Lightkeepers' Houses in County Antrim, or the Loop Head Lightkeeper's House in County Clare.

Meanwhile, at the Martello Tower Sutton, a converted 19th century fort on the picturesque north County Dublin coast, you're guaranteed a room with a view. Luxuriously refurbished and still capable of withstanding cannonfire, this is the ultimate self-catering accommodation.

For more information on accommodation, visit: ireland.com

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Sally Gap, County Wicklow



Q&A CATHERINE FULVIO

Catherine Fulvio is an Irish TV chef, food writer and proprietor of Ballyknocken House & Cookery School in County Wicklow. She's an advocate of modern Irish cooking, with an emphasis on local and seasonal ingredients. Here she shares her favourite things to see and do on the island of Ireland

What makes Ireland special?

The weather! Mild winters mean gorgeous greenery and all this great grass results in delicious beef, lamb and dairy products. Oh, and the people, of course.

What is your favourite place on the island?

Glendalough in County Wicklow without a doubt, it is magic. It's my favourite place early in the morning and late in the evening, as the lake is always so still.

What is your favourite Irish dish?

My favourite would have to be a Baileys cream truffle torte – all that cream and Baileys. But is it traditional? Well, it is in my house anyway. Of course, in terms of a savoury choice it would always be Wicklow lamb, simply grilled with garlic and rosemary – delicious.

What is your favourite view on the island?

Sticking close to home I would have to say the view from Carrick Mountain at the back of the Ballyknocken Cookery School; from here you can see all the Wicklow Mountains and even Snowdonia across the Irish Sea in Wales on a clear day. I have visited the Causeway Coast also, and the views there are amazing. When you see pictures of the Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge and the Giant's Causeway, you can see why so many people are drawn to them.

What's your idea of a relaxing day out?

A picnic in Kilmaccurragh Gardens near our home village of Glenealy, County Wicklow. It is a slice of heaven especially when the hundreds of rhododendrons are in full bloom.

What are your favourite secret places?

I like to hike up the back of Powerscourt waterfall towards Djouce woods in County Wicklow, on a good day I might reach the top but I always end up in Poppies in Enniskerry for a hot cup of tea and sometimes a deserved slice of cake.

What would be your one essential thing to do on the island of Ireland?

A must-do on a visit to Ireland is visiting Sally Gap in the Wicklow Mountains, and the view over Lough Tay and Lough Dan.

How would you sum up Ireland in three words?

Magical, fun, delicious.



Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge, County Antrim

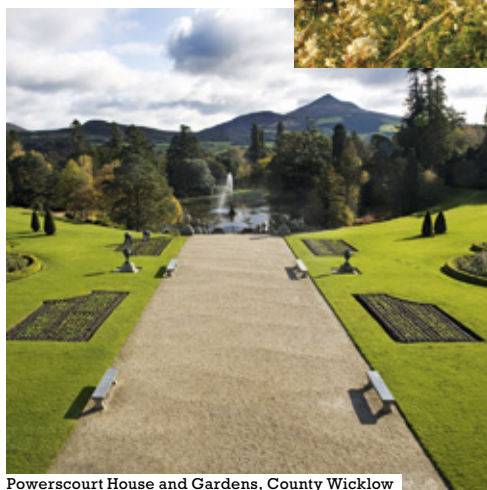
Sally Gap

Right at the heart of the heather-covered Wicklow Mountains lies the famous Sally Gap crossroads. This area is beloved by hill-walkers, with lots of trails to suit all abilities. If you do make it up this far, you'll be rewarded with wonderful views over Lough Dan and Lough Tay, with its dark waters and startling white sands.

Causeway Coast

As well as the Giant's Causeway and the Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge, the Causeway Coast has plenty of hidden gems. Whitepark Bay is a spectacular sandy beach sheltered by limestone cliffs. Perfect.

Whitepark Bay, County Antrim



Powerscourt House and Gardens, County Wicklow



Poppies, County Wicklow



Ross Castle, Killarney, Co. Kerry

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Galway



Waterford Quay



Temple Bar, Dublin



St Stephen's Green, Dublin

URBAN LEGENDS

Each of Ireland's cities is a legend in its own right; an unforgettable collection of quirky characters, dramatic stories, historic buildings and the odd secret or two tucked away amongst the stones. So take the time to get to know these urban legends... whether you've got a few days or a few hours, you're sure to find something to delight, even if you think you've discovered it all before!



The Mall, Armagh



River Lagan, Belfast



Guildhall, Derry-Londonderry



Ha'penny Bridge, Dublin



St Anne's Church, Cork

DUBLIN

It might be one of Europe's oldest cities, but Dublin flaunts its medieval and Georgian heritage alongside quirky modern cafés, innovative restaurants and traditional pubs

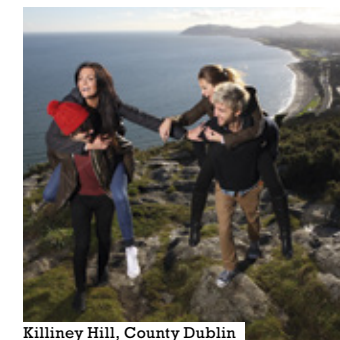
Start off with a trip back 1,000 years or so at the Dublinia exhibition, an interactive journey through Viking and medieval Dublin. History is hands-on here: you can try on Viking clothes, stroll down a noisy street and experience a very different Dublin. When you're done, leave via the archway to Christ Church Cathedral, founded around 1030AD.

A short walk down Dame Street will bring you to Dublin Castle, established in 1204. There's a fascinating spread of museums and architecture here. If you've time, visit City Hall, and explore the past with the Story of the Capital exhibition.

Dublin's foodie scene is sizzling, with hip eateries serving Irish produce in innovative ways, as well as an abundance of lively little cafés. Take time out for a lazy lunch at Coppinger Row, The Exchequer Gastropub and Rustic Stone.

Detour through Trinity College towards one of Dublin's great Georgian spaces, Merrion Square, overlooked by 18th century townhouses. A short walk from here is St Stephen's Green and the Little Museum of Dublin, which tells the story of the modern city through a treasure trove of eccentric pieces donated by members of the public.

As Dublin moves from day to night, the area between South William Street and South Great George's Street buzzes with pubs, restaurants and cafés. After dark, the city lights up with showpiece buildings such as the Custom House, the former parliament on College Green, and the Spire on O'Connell Street all beautifully illuminated. Finish the day with a wander through the cultural wonderland of Temple Bar before settling down in a traditional, well-worn Dublin pub.



Killiney Hill, County Dublin

Beyond the city

For an easy trip out of the city, jump on the Dart (Dublin's light rail) and escape to the coastal villages of **Dalkey** and **Killiney** in the south, and **Howth** and **Malahide** along the north County Dublin coast. Howth is particularly popular thanks to its attractive harbour, seafood restaurants and friendly atmosphere. For a blast of fresh air, walk along the sandy **Dollymount Strand** on the northern part of the city's coastline. Nearby is the Bull Island Nature Reserve, a UNESCO biosphere reserve and bird sanctuary. About 90 minutes from Dublin, the city of **Kilkenny** offers a lively craft and gourmet food scene with a medieval backdrop. Don't miss the excellent Smithwick's Experience Kilkenny (open March 2014).

Dublin Five to see

Book of Kells, Trinity College

This illuminated 9th century manuscript, consisting of the four Gospels in Latin, is arguably the most beautiful book in existence today.

Kilmainham Gaol

Experience this haunting tour of one of Europe's largest unoccupied gaols (jails), and learn about the dramatic role it has played in Irish history.

Guinness Storehouse

Discover the story of Guinness before heading to the Gravity Bar for great views of Dublin, and a pint of the "black stuff".

Jameson Distillery

Any questions you ever had about whiskey will be answered on the Jameson Distillery Tour. And yes... the tour ends with a wee dram!

National Museum

Marvel at one of western Europe's most exceptional collections of prehistoric gold artefacts, including the famous Tara Brooch.



Trinity College Library, Dublin



Belfast Black Taxi Tour

BELFAST

If you want to discover the real Belfast, then hitch a ride with a Black Taxi Tour. Fun, friendly and full of surprises... it's pretty much like the city itself

Belfast is a city with a big personality and bucket loads of charm. Whether you want to explore its incredible Titanic history, relax in its leafy University Quarter or enjoy yourself in its vibrant social scene, the city will win you over with its sheer exuberance.

Opened in 2012, Titanic Belfast is the world's largest Titanic visitor attraction and is every bit as awesome as it sounds. Located in the newly developed Titanic Quarter, it's a bright light in a city fast becoming famed for its architectural prowess, contemporary music and critically acclaimed restaurants.

To get in touch with Belfast's fascinating maritime history, take a seat on the Titanic Boat Tour, which brings you around the historic Harland and Wolff shipyards as well as intriguing sites within Belfast harbour itself. While you're in the area, make sure to step onto the restored SS Nomadic, Titanic's "little sister". The ship was used to ferry first and second-class passengers out from the shallow dock in Cherbourg, France, to the waiting Titanic.

Back on dry land, there's plenty to explore in the city: St Anne's Cathedral with its symbolic Spire of Hope; the Baroque beauty of City Hall; Belfast Castle with its unrivalled views of the city; and the leafy University Quarter, home to Belfast's Botanic Gardens and the Ulster Museum. The museum is free to visitors and with its rich collection of art, history and natural sciences, it offers something for everyone.

And the perfect place to toast your enjoyable Belfast experience? It has to be the Victorian-era Crown Liquor Saloon, not only one of the best bars in Belfast, but one of the best bars in the world!

Crown Liquor Saloon, Belfast



Beyond the city

Along the winding curves of the **Causeway Coastal Route**, one of the world's great driving routes, there is magic. Here you'll discover the **Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge**, where only a few wooden slats and some strong Antrim rope stands between you and the choppy waters below. Don't let an attack of nerves keep you from crossing. The views are worth the trip twice over. Move on to the **Giant's Causeway** for something really special – a UNESCO World Heritage Site of 40,000 basalt columns. If you head south from Belfast to the glorious **Ards Peninsula**, you can go kayaking or diving on Strangford Lough. Or visit **Downpatrick** in County Down where you'll find St Patrick's Grave in the grounds of Down Cathedral.



The Giant's Causeway, County Antrim

Belfast Five to see

City Hall

Enjoy a free tour of this iconic Baroque-revival building, with its sleek Italian marbles and lavish vaulted ceilings.

St George's Market

As you wander through this charming Victorian market (Fri-Sun) you'll be munching on a Fermanagh Black Bacon roll and swooning over a box of chocolate truffles.

Botanic Gardens

Take time to potter through this horticulturist's dream, from the fragrant rose gardens to the heady heat of the Tropical Ravine.

Titanic Belfast

Don't miss this stunning building and excellent Titanic exhibition. And while in the area, visit the newly restored SS Nomadic, the world's last White Star Line ship.

Ulster Folk and Transport Museum

Discover folk and transport history at this quirky museum, 15 minutes from Belfast.



Titanic Belfast



Cork by night

CORK

Compact and easy to explore, with a great mix of colourful markets, galleries, shops and heritage attractions, Cork is a city that feels perfectly made for exploring on foot

Author Patricia Schultz rates Culinary Cork as one of her 1,000 Places To See Before You Die, so start with brunch at the English Market. The tight-knit stalls, stuffed with everything from olives and artisan breads to shellfish and sushi, are right at the city's foodie heart. Queen Elizabeth II even dropped in on her State visit to Ireland in 2011.

After brunch, head north across the River Lee to the Shandon district and St Anne's Church, also known as the "Four-Faced Liar" because each of the tower's four clocks used to tell a different time. This may be one of Ireland's most important early 18th century churches, but its real selling point is the chance to ring the centuries-old bells. As you climb the tower, look out for the instruction sheets inviting you to send tunes like You Are My Sunshine peeling over the city's rooftops.

Another quirky gem in Shandon is the Cork Butter Museum, which tells the story of Ireland's butter trade. It's another sign that in Cork you're in one of Ireland's gourmet hubs, a place famous for its seafood and exceptional cheese. Fancy some fresh hake or rainbow chard with anchovy butter? A beetroot and wild garlic risotto, perhaps? Or what about some ice cream flavoured with Beamish stout? Well then loosen that belt. It's time for lunch, and Café Paradiso is waiting.

Later in the afternoon, walk back towards the city centre for an afternoon of indulgence in Cork's Huguenot Quarter – a buzzy matrix of streets and lanes breaking off French Church Street. The clutter of cafés, chocolatiers, boutiques and bookshops will keep you nicely entertained until it's time for an early evening tippie and a chance to enjoy some live traditional music. Putting one foot in front of the other was never so much fun.

English Market, Cork



Beyond the city

As the place of Titanic's final call on its tragic voyage, the fishing port of Cobh, about a 30-minute drive from Cork city, has written itself large in the archives of maritime history. The town boasts a Titanic Experience visitor attraction, and you can walk amongst its multi-coloured houses with the Titanic Trail heritage tour. Fota Island Wildlife Park is a green island expanse with cheeky lion-tailed macaques, elegant cheetahs and the insatiably cute red panda. Perfect for kids. And make sure to take a trip to County Cork's elegant gourmet town of Kinsale. Locally caught seafood is the speciality here, and the picturesque little port has attracted visits over the years from seafood maestros Rick Stein and Keith Floyd.



Kinsale, County Cork

Cork Five to see

Crawford Gallery

The Crawford Gallery's vaulted rooms chart art history from the 17th to the 21st century; a great collection in a beautiful space.

English Market

This incredible food market wows visitors with its sights, smells and excellent local produce.

Cork City Gaol

Cork's chunky Georgian/Gothic sandstone gaol (jail) housed prisoners in the 19th century, and featured heavily in the fall-out from the Irish Civil War.

Cork University

Don't miss the Stone Corridor scattered with ancient Ogham Stones. Find time, too, for a peek at the stars in the Crawford Observatory.

Walks along the River Lee

The River Lee Walkway slinks along the river, passing various points of curiosity including the urban oasis of Fitzgerald Park.



The River Lee Walkway, Cork



Galway

Four to explore

From bohemian beauty to medieval magic, the island of Ireland's cities are a fascinating mix of ancient intrigue and contemporary cool

GALWAY

Creative beauty

Galway dances to its own beat, with infectious creativity and effortless cool. From the quirky little shopping alley of Kirwan's Lane to the cracking old pubs, this western beauty effortlessly blends tradition with contemporary cool. The past lingers in the air here, and traces of old Galway, including the city walls and the distinctive Spanish Arch, give the city an ancient atmosphere. To get a sense of Galway's unique personality, try the Tribes Alive walking tour, a dramatic take on the city's medieval streets. Or just relax, take the city at your own speed, and settle down in a traditional pub such as Tigh Neachtain's on Cross Street, and An Púcán on Forster Street.

ARMAGH

Ecclesiastical delight

Did you know the island of Ireland has an "ecclesiastical capital"? It does and it's called Armagh. The city's title is no new thing either; this tree-loving, walkable spot has been sitting under the grand moniker for over 5,000 years, and is defined by two wonderful cathedrals.

The Roman Catholic cathedral's spires pierce the Armagh sky, and it is graced with intricate glass windows. Across from it, a Church of Ireland comrade has original medieval pillars and enigmatic gargoyles. And the one name that binds both of these magnificent edifices? St Patrick, of course. But Armagh isn't just about Ireland's patron saint. The contemporary heart of the city beats with great restaurants, lively pubs, cosy cafés and the Armagh Observatory where you can star-gaze in tranquillity.

WATERFORD

Viking surprises

What's in a name? Well, in Waterford's case, it's the key to Ireland's Viking past as it was derived from an old Norse word, Vadrefjord. The Norse overlords may not have been the toast of Ireland when they arrived but we do have them to thank for founding the city of Waterford in 914AD. Fancy seeing the oldest civic building on the island? We give you Reginald's Tower, whose history, as stated in the Irish Annals, stretches back to the rather incredible date of 1088. This year, Waterford celebrates its 1100th birthday and all are invited to the party. So if you find yourself at the bar of Waterford's oldest pub, T.H. Doolans, sharing the counter with a Viking, don't be alarmed – the Vadrefjord Vikings are a local re-enactment group. Well, we never said they left, now, did we?



Peace Bridge, Derry~Londonderry



City walls, Derry~Londonderry



Reginald's Tower, Waterford



Armagh Observatory

DERRY~LONDONDERRY

Walled wonder

Ever met a walled wonder? Allow us to introduce Derry~Londonderry. Standing stoic and stern, these 400-year-old walls are a rare breed in Europe and are the only example of their kind in Ireland. But if you think they're just bricks and mortar, think again. Think dramatic 17th century sieges. Think huge roaring canons watching over the River Foyle. Think how Ship Quay Gate earned its name – by welcoming 12th century pilgrims enraptured by the zeal of the city's patron saint, Columba. Move beyond the walls, if you can, and you'll find a city that's big on culture (Derry~Londonderry was the UK City of Culture 2013), with excellent galleries, artists' studios, a rich heritage and buzzing theatre spaces. That's not to mention live music spilling out onto the street from a great selection of pubs and music venues. If you want a lively time, Derry~Londonderry is the place to relax and enjoy a very cultural few days.



City of culture 2014

The first Irish City of Culture is a fantastic mix of Georgian architecture, old markets, lively little streets and some of the best galleries and museums around

LIMERICK

Cultural queen

For millions of readers worldwide, Frank McCourt's childhood memoir, Angela's Ashes, was a lively and poignant introduction to Limerick city. But now in 2014, Limerick is standing up as Ireland's first ever City of Culture.

Why Limerick? Well, apart from the obvious literary associations, there are plenty of reasons. The Limerick City Gallery of Art sings with those greats from the Irish art world: works by Jack B. Yeats, Paul Henry, Nathaniel Hone and Eva Hamilton are just the tip of the iceberg. The University Concert Hall's architectural lines have welcomed hordes of music lovers over the years, and the city has a lively traditional music scene that takes place

in traditional pubs. Looking for a museum with a difference? Try the Hunt, which has one of Ireland's greatest private collections of art and antiquities, as well as attractions that range from Stone Age Ireland and Ancient Egypt to drawings by Picasso. Located within an elegant 18th century Italian-style building, the Hunt is a reason to visit the city in itself, and boasts a great riverside restaurant overlooking the River Shannon.

Limerick, with 800-year-old King John's Castle at its heart, was always a city of culture – 2014 just makes it official.

To find out more about all of Ireland's cities visit: ireland.com



The Hunt Museum, Limerick



Welcome to The Dublin: Ireland's oldest and newest discovery trail.

The Dublin is a walking trail and the best way to trace the timeline of the City from its origins to the present day. Following the Dublin is the easiest way for you to see the City's top attractions including **The Book of Kells**, **Guinness Storehouse** and **Kilmainham Gaol** while also helping you discover many of the City's hidden gems along the way.

For more information visit www.ireland.com/dublin





THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

At the very edge of Europe, on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, the landscape has been shaped by the sea into something truly epic and unforgettable, as Pól Ó Conghaile discovers



Garnish Island, West Cork

Imagine driving along the absolute edge of western Europe. Imagine exploring a 2,500km/1,500 mile-long coastline dotted with beaches, harbours, headlands and over 150 stunning viewing points, as it nips and tucks from Cork to Donegal. Imagine stopping your car, feeling the salt spray on your face and getting stuck into the Atlantic surf. Imagine peering over the sheerest of cliffs, discovering Ireland's oldest traditions, boarding its only cable car and learning the secrets only the locals know.

You can do it all – and more – on the Wild Atlantic Way. This is one of the world's great long-distance driving routes, and it can be driven in whole or in part, dipped into for a few hours or a few weeks, enjoyed as a once-in-a-lifetime experience, or revisited again and again. Its scenic highlights are spectacular, but it gets under Ireland's skin, too – bringing you up close and personal with a unique culture and people as it travels through Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking) areas.

The route begins (or ends, depending on your direction) in West Cork, weaving its way through lively towns such as Clonakilty and Baltimore. Whale and dolphin watching are popular in these waters from May to November, with plenty of opportunity for trips to the islands of Roaring

Water Bay. Seafaring traditions are very much alive along the Mizen, Sheep's Head and Beara Peninsulas. These areas are rich with natural wonders, fishing villages, walking trails and clues to past ways of life such as deserted mining posts and old milk churn collection points. The Beara Peninsula is also where Cork leads into Kerry, with the Ring of Kerry the best-known coastal loop here, combining awesome scenery with ancient heritage, super-fresh seafood and exciting towns and villages as it circles the Iveragh Peninsula.

Continuing north, Kerry's Dingle Peninsula was home to the Antarctic explorer, Tom Crean, who retired to run the South Pole Inn in the village of Annascaul after adventuring with Scott and Shackleton. Modern-day explorers can find the same hostelry on a peninsula defined by its mountain ranges, heritage treasures and a famous dolphin named Fungie.

Dingle is the peninsula's biggest town – a cosmopolitan and festival-rich hotspot with acclaimed seafood restaurants and traditional grocery-pubs where you can buy everything from a pair of wellies to a pint. The town is a gateway to the historic Sleat Head Drive to Coumeenole, a fantastic sweep of beach bounded by craggy rocks and overlooking the romantic Blasket Islands, which have been uninhabited since 1953.

From here, the Wild Atlantic Way edges along the north Kerry coast, crossing the River Shannon to enter west Clare. Loop Head is breathtaking, a compilation of cliff-craggy coastline, churning surf, dramatic sea arches and isolated structures – a lighthouse here, a 15th century tower house there. So memorable is it that it ranks as a European Destination of Excellence.

West Clare's coastline continues past beaches such as Spanish Point, the surfing and golfing hub of Lahinch and the Cliffs of Moher towards the Burren National Park. And as you see the ancient limestone formations of the Burren's Atlantic coast, you may feel that you're looking at a moonscape rather than a landscape.

Hugging Galway Bay, the coastline continues



Inisheer, County Galway

Take it further

The Wild Atlantic Way is so good you might never want it to stop. And the good news is that it doesn't have to. As you travel along Donegal's magnificent coastline, you come to another great drive: the Causeway Coastal Route (193km/120 miles). Start off in the culture hub of Derry~Londonderry, and explore its ancient city walls. Next, it's the UNESCO World Heritage



Whiterocks Beach, Antrim coast



Coumeenole Beach, County Kerry



The Glens of Antrim

Site of the Giant's Causeway, and on to the Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge. The gorgeous Glens of Antrim, with their undulating green valleys that dip and peak through charming towns and villages are a visual thrill. The Gobbins Path is a great cliff-hugging path built in 1902, and due to be restored in autumn 2014. The route culminates in Belfast, a fitting end to a monumental journey where you can visit Titanic Belfast, and relax in the city's lively bistros.

into Galway city, a buzzing urban interlude along the Wild Atlantic Way. Why not break your journey here, and enjoy time-out at the Galway Arts Festival (July), the Galway Races (July/August) and the famous Galway International Oyster and Seafood Festival (September) before easing out along the Connemara coast?

It's hard to tell where the mainland stops and the islands start along the raw seascapes of Galway and Mayo, but highlights range from Irish-speaking enclaves such as Spiddal to remote beaches like Dog's Bay, the jaw-dropping majesty of Kylemore Abbey and the cone of Croagh Patrick overlooking Clew Bay. It was on this mountain that St Patrick is said to have banished snakes from Ireland, and pilgrims still climb its paths today.

Continuing north, you'll pass through the windswept Mullet Peninsula, before veering back east towards Killala Bay, where General Humbert launched the first French battle of the 1798 Rebellion. Killala is said to have been where St Patrick first arrived in Ireland, and the local diocese – the highlight of which is a beautiful round tower – dates back to the 5th century.

The next stretch of the Wild Atlantic Way skirts around Sligo Bay, a landscape dominated by Ben Bulbin mountain. The surfing village of Strandhill, the court tomb (megalithic chamber tomb) at Creevykeel and a walk around Mullaghmore Head, are all must-dos in these parts.

Donegal is the final (or first!) county on the Wild Atlantic Way. Its long and indented coastline swings around the northwestern corner of the island, throwing up adventures and surprises at every turn. It's an area that has a remote aspect, with edge-of-the-world highlights such as the Slieve League Cliffs (Sliabh Liag in Irish), the highest accessible sea cliffs in Europe. Walks around the peninsula here offer magical views.

Wherever you start, whenever you finish, Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way is an unforgettable long-distance driving route, a thrilling trip along the line where the island of Ireland meets the ocean and the epitome of the waters and the wild.



Slieve League Cliffs, County Donegal



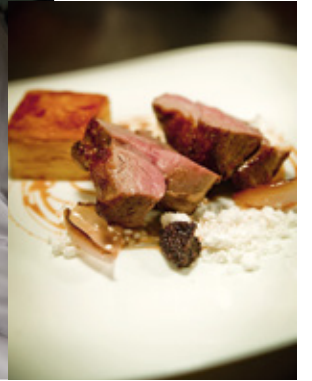
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The Greenhouse, Dublin



The Cliff House Hotel, County Waterford

Lough Erne Resort, County Fermanagh



Smoked salmon and boxty pancakes

FRESH FLAVOURS

Created out of exceptional artisan produce, using the very best ingredients from the land and sea and drawing on respected traditions, a new style of Irish cooking has been born. By Aoife Carrigy

Smoke signals

Smoked fish is just one of the local delicacies that the island of Ireland excels at producing. Acclaimed smokehouses such as the Burren Smokehouse in County Clare, the Connemara Smokehouse in County Galway, and Frank Hederman's Belvelly Smokehouse in Cobh, County Cork, provide smoked mackerel and salmon to some of the most prestigious restaurants in Ireland.

Surrounded by rich greenery in the tiny West Cork village of Ballylickey is a little deli that typifies what Irish food is all about right now. Sit outside Manning's Emporium in the late afternoon sunshine and life feels pretty good. In the warm summer breeze, you can tuck into a platter of local artisan produce: Gubbeen oak-smoked cheese, a sweet pepper relish from Janet's Country Fayre in County Wicklow, fresh crusty breads from The Breadcrumb in County Kerry. And to drink? An ice-cold Irish apple juice from The Apple Farm in County Tipperary.

Here, surrounded by the dramatic West Cork landscape, it's easy to see where Ireland's appreciation of gourmet food comes from – the pure countryside, respect for tradition and slower pace of life are perfectly tailored to a more measured, artisan-inspired approach, from the traditional smokehouses of Connemara to

the cider makers of County Armagh. The Slow Food Movement in Ireland, with its emphasis on counteracting fast food and fast life, has helped to drive this ethic of good, clean food. It chimes perfectly with an island where taking it easy is a national sport.

But you don't have to go foraging for seaweed on Irish beaches or rustle through the woodlands for wild fruit to appreciate the island's natural bounty. You only have to visit a deli, take a food trail, go to a market or enjoy a food festival.

In pubs around the island, menus reflect the emphasis on fresh local food with smoked fish platters and local cheese plates that match up nicely with craft beers, such as Belfast Ale or Galway Hooker. Meanwhile, in top restaurants, dynamic chefs are pushing the creative boundaries of how local produce can be used, and dishes at fine-dining hotspots such as The Greenhouse,



In pubs around the island, menus reflect the emphasis on fresh local food, with smoked fish platters and local cheese plates that match up nicely with craft beers such as Belfast Ale or Galway Hooker

Roundstone Harbour, County Galway

Dublin, The Cliff House Hotel in Waterford and Michael Deane's in Belfast have been known to leave customers lost for words. Quite an achievement on an island where people love to talk.

Stefan Matz of Ashford Castle, has been based in Connemara since the early 90s and believes that the food culture in Ireland has been transformed over the past 20 years: "I don't think the same passion levels for producing the best quality possible exist in other countries the way they do here," he says.

Ross Lewis of Dublin's Michelin-starred Chapter One couldn't agree more. Chapter One built its stellar reputation and, no doubt, achieved its coveted star, by seeking out the best of Irish produce for its diners. A meal here might start with carpaccio of Tom Durcan's spiced beef – a cured meat beloved in the southwest of Ireland from where Lewis hails – and finish with a characterful Cashel Blue cheese from County Tipperary.

This search for the best produce possible is by no means unique to Chapter One. Around the island, you'll find chefs with a similarly strong commitment to quality local ingredients and a love of "cooking through an Irish prism," as Lewis describes it.

Stephen Toman, head chef at one of Belfast's hottest restaurants, Ox, has been clocking up the critical acclaim and is equally passionate about what's available. "The quality and choice of Irish food is amazing," he enthuses. "We're serving Mourne Mountain lamb, which is fed on heather, and it's world class. We have outstanding dairy, amazing shellfish and the meat here is second to none; you're actually proud to work with it." From Ox's homebaked bread with local Abernethy Butter through to dessert of Bushmills' whiskey jelly and Armagh kemp apples, the local accent rings true.

"We do have something special in terms of our produce," says Paul Flynn of The Tannery Restaurant, guesthouse and cookery school in Dungarvan, County Waterford. "I've always tried >

At the market

Permanent indoor markets such as Cork's English Market and Belfast's St George's Market (Fri-Sun) have served Irish shoppers for centuries. Similarly, across the island regular country markets have long subsidised the household income for Irish farmers and their families selling baked goods or farmyard produce. But in the late 1990s, the arrival of the outdoor weekly or monthly farmers' market proved to be something



Balloo House, County Down



Ard Bia Café, Galway

From the relaxed, boho vibe of the Ard Bia Café in Galway city to Balloo House, a 19th century coaching inn in County Down, you'll find dishes on the menu that reflect traditional flavours



English Market, Cork

of a game-changer for producers and consumers of quality Irish artisan fare.

One of the charms of a morning spent at these hubs of great food is the chance not only to graze your way through samples of local produce, but to talk with the producers themselves about what you're tasting. The Irish, of course, love to chat – so give yourself a generous timetable for what can prove a very sociable couple of hours.

In Dublin, Dun Laoghaire's People Park (Sun), Howth (Sat and Sun) and Temple Bar (Sat) in the city centre all have lively markets, as do Galway city and Mahon Point in Cork city. Or you can head to the Tyrone Farmers' Market on the first Saturday of each month. In Waterford city, Slow Food Ireland hosts the Merchant's Quay indoor market every Saturday and Sunday.



Orchard Acre Farm, County Fermanagh



St George's Market, Belfast

to look at vegetables like turnip in soft focus; to take hearty, staple veg and do something exciting with them. It's all about how you do it."

This simplicity is at the heart of cooking in Ireland, as Flynn explains: "The thing I love about Irish food is that it doesn't have to be expensive. We're on a journey to learning to appreciate our simple food traditions."

And it definitely looks that way. From the relaxed, boho vibe of the Ard Bia Café in Galway city, to Balloo House, a 19th century coaching inn in Killinchy, County Down, you'll find dishes on the menu that reflect both local and traditional flavours: treacly soda bread and seafood chowder, bacon and cabbage, smoked salmon. You can try a "blaa" (a soft white roll) in Waterford; feast on the Ulster fry for breakfast in Belfast; and snack on dulse (salty seaweed) in coastal areas. Then there's Irish stew, award-winning black pudding, crab claws, and a staggering range of chutneys, jams and relishes. And let's not forget the potato...

"People sometimes make fun of the fact that we are still so obsessed with the potato," says chef Liz Moore, formerly of Belle Isle Cookery School in County Fermanagh. "But look at the amount of amazing dishes that are derived from it: champ (oniony, buttery, pure comfort food), fadge (potato cakes), boxty (potato pancake), colcannon (mashed potato with creamed kale) and more."

And while colcannon would traditionally have been eaten by families at Halloween, it's now on the menu at fashionable urban restaurants, such as Dublin's Fade Street Social. Nip into Gallagher's Boxty House in Temple Bar, meanwhile, and you'll find a veritable altar to the potato, with light potato pancakes cooked on a hot griddle. Delicious.

This traditional and local trend has been given a very contemporary twist in some of the island's >

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IRELAND FOOD



Johnnie Fox's pub, County Dublin

coolest eateries. Downstairs in the Georgian "Irish kitchen" of Hatch & Sons on Dublin's St Stephen's Green, hip city locals and relaxed families enjoy velvety beef and Guinness stews, smoked fish boards, and Waterford "blaas" filled with Kettle bacon from Fermanagh. While in Galway's only Michelin-starred restaurant Aniar, you can enjoy the fruits of foraging, with starters of wild asparagus, nettle, goat's curd and hen egg, and desserts garnished with sorrel.

And what happens in the big cities always filters across the island because – put simply – good taste spreads. Take the likes of The Moody Boar in Armagh's Palace stables; its home-cured beetroot with salmon and hot creamed leeks on wheaten bread has to be tasted in person for the full range of sensory appreciation.

From small, local villages with thriving markets to the island's hippest cities, tradition and a commitment to quality is going strong. And in a world where food trends are becoming homogenous, Ireland is keeping it authentic.



Belfast Taste & Music Fest

Food Festivals

Nothing quite beats an Irish food festival for atmosphere, taste and downright good fun.

Belfast Taste and Music Fest

Set in Belfast's Botanic Gardens in August, this festival brings together two of the city's great loves: music and food.

The Galway International Oyster and Seafood Festival

Seafood and fun come together at this Galway classic in September with seafood trails, oyster hotspots and oyster shucking championships.

Kinsale Gourmet Festival

The gourmet town of Kinsale in County Cork comes alive every October with a massive celebration of all things foodie. A beautiful setting for a great festival.



Irish farmhouse cheeses

Foods to look out for

Country butter

The island of Ireland produces superlative dairy, and new producers such as the Abernethy Butter Company in the hills of County Down are exploring this potential.

Fermanagh Black Bacon

Try this delicious traditional dry-cured bacon from rare-breed pigs, which roam free on a small herb-heavy island on Lough Erne in County Fermanagh.

Irish stew

A bowlful of slow-cooked Irish lamb, potato, carrot and barley goodness is like a hearty hug from an Irish mammy. Try it in The Brazen Head, Dublin's oldest pub.

Milleens cheese

Produced in County Cork today by the son of pioneer Veronica Steele, this original Irish farmhouse cheese remains one of the best around.

Seafood chowder and fresh soda bread

You'll find versions of Ireland's take on seafood chowder in most coastal towns, but McGann's in Doolin, County Clare, nailed it as the standard to beat by blog site Irish Fireside. It's essential to enjoy chowder with traditional brown bread.



Smoked fish platters

Sally Barnes's Woodcock Smokery in County Cork is one of the finest of Ireland's fish smokers, featuring wild salmon, mackerel, haddock and tuna.

Spiced beef

Traditionally served at Christmas and New Year, spiced beef is an Irish favourite. Seek out Tom Durcan's stall in Cork's English Market.

Blaa

A fresh white bread roll unique to Waterford and best eaten mid-morning filled with bacon.

Soda farl

A flattened dough bread that can be eaten fresh from the griddle with butter and jam or cooked until golden and served alongside the traditional full Northern Irish breakfast, the famous Ulster fry. Delicious no matter how you eat it.



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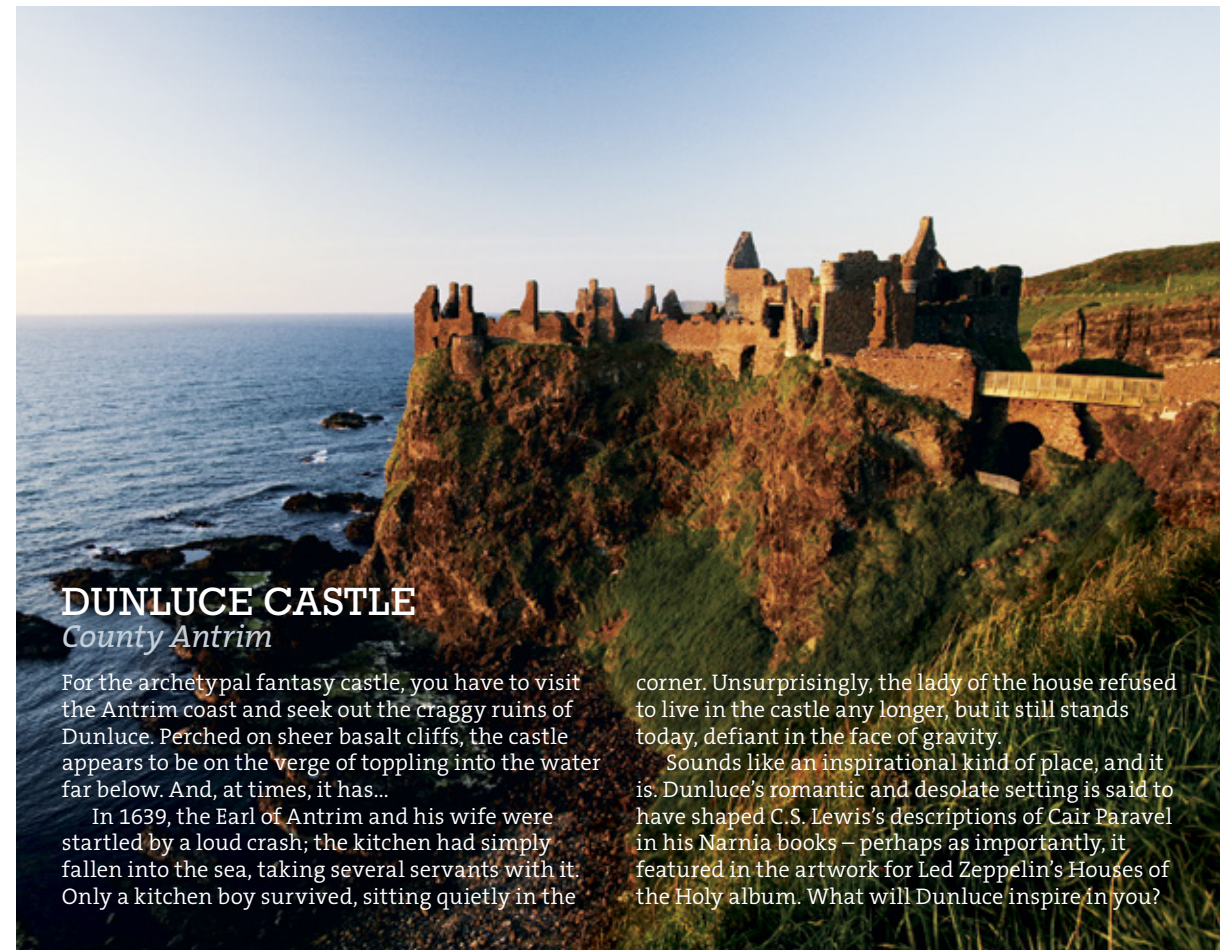
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Cork 1 hr 30 mins
Shannon 2 hrs 20 mins
Belfast 3 hrs 30 mins



GREAT TALES

From wild fairy tales and blood-soaked battles to Titanic-era glamour, Ireland's great castles are straight out of a fantasy novel, while the island's handsome manor houses and their grand gardens reveal an aristocratic age of elegance, says **Vanessa Harriss**

Blarney Castle, County Cork



DUNLUCE CASTLE

County Antrim

For the archetypal fantasy castle, you have to visit the Antrim coast and seek out the craggy ruins of Dunluce. Perched on sheer basalt cliffs, the castle appears to be on the verge of toppling into the water far below. And, at times, it has...

In 1639, the Earl of Antrim and his wife were startled by a loud crash; the kitchen had simply fallen into the sea, taking several servants with it. Only a kitchen boy survived, sitting quietly in the

corner. Unsurprisingly, the lady of the house refused to live in the castle any longer, but it still stands today, defiant in the face of gravity.

Sounds like an inspirational kind of place, and it is. Dunluce's romantic and desolate setting is said to have shaped C.S. Lewis's descriptions of Cair Paravel in his Narnia books – perhaps as importantly, it featured in the artwork for Led Zeppelin's Houses of the Holy album. What will Dunluce inspire in you?

BLARNEY CASTLE

County Cork

One of the most famous castles on the island, Blarney is a romantic partial ruin set in glorious County Cork countryside. Built on the site of a 10th century wooden structure, the castle grounds are filled with wooded hollows, strange rock formations and a sleepily flowing river. Croften Clark, a 19th century writer, described it as “indeed a fairy scene... I know of no place where I could sooner imagine these little elves holding their moon-light revelry”.

At the heart of Blarney Castle lies one of its quirkiest attractions. Kissed by world statesmen, literary giants and famous film stars, the huge Blarney Stone is said to impart the gift of eloquence or, as we say in Ireland, “the gift of the gab”. Thankfully, these days you don't have to be held by the ankles and lowered over the battlements to plant your lips on this legendary piece of rock, as happened in the past. A gentle lean backwards assisted by a trusty guide will do the trick just as well. Promise.

When it comes to the stone's origins, the debate rages... some say it was a pillow for a saint; others that it was a chunk of Scotland's Stone of Destiny brought back to Ireland by Cormac McCarthy, King of Munster. Go ahead and kiss it – see what stories you come up with.



RUSSBOROUGH HOUSE

County Wicklow

Near the Blessington Lakes in County Wicklow stands Russborough House, one of the island's most beautiful manor houses. Built in the 18th century, the house entered its own age of elegance in the mid-20th century when Sir Alfred Beit bought it after spotting an ad in Country Life magazine. Beit – heir to a South African mining fortune – liked the look of Russborough so much he didn't even visit before he signed the deal. And in 1953, once he had moved in, he set about installing a phenomenal art collection, including works by Vermeer, Rubens and Gainsborough. Despite no less than four dramatic (if botched) robberies, the collection remains largely intact. There's no doubt that Lord and Lady Beit brought unrivalled glamour to the house – the wide circle of friends they hosted at Russborough included Jackie Onassis, Fred Astaire and the Guinnesses. To enjoy it to the full, book an overnight stay in its West Wing.



HUNTINGTON CASTLE County Carlow

It seems a little unfair to have to share your 17th century family home with a pack of lively ghosts, but that's exactly what the Durdin-Robertson family endures. Besides a sprinkling of monks who date back to the 13th century Franciscan monastery, the Durdin-Robertsons' Huntington Castle is also frequented by the spirit of Aoife Esmonde, who fled an unhappy marriage with her son, only for her husband to replace her speedily (and bigamously) with wife number two.

The family also has to endure a Bishop of Limerick who died in 1770, and a 17th century spy whose disguise proved so successful a colleague shot him by mistake.

Beyond the ghosts, Huntington is a treasure trove of oddities – and that's without counting the temple to the Egyptian goddess Isis in the basement. Don't forget to wander around the grounds where you can enjoy the formal Italian gardens, water features and the 600-year-old yew tree walk.



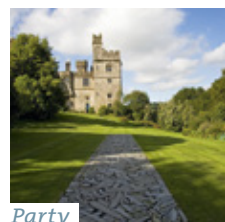
PHOTO: THE NATIONAL TRUST BERNIE BROWN

CASTLE WARD County Down

When it comes to quirkiness, you can't get much more unique than Castle Ward in Downpatrick. This is one of the instances where "castle" actually refers to a large house, but whether it is Palladian or Gothic depends on your point of view. Literally. Set in a stunning location on the edge of Strangford Lough, and boasting spectacular gardens, this 18th century house was commissioned by Lord Bangor and his wife, who accommodated their very different tastes by making one side of the house classical, all columns and pediments, and the other side crazily Gothic with battlements, finials and pointed arches.

The same rules apply inside. The house is split down the middle lengthways – one side filled with Gothic twiddles; the other ruled by classical austerity. Elegant, exciting and rich with imaginative eccentricities – if this is what the house is like, it must have been quite a marriage.

Castles to enjoy Like castles so much you want to eat, dine and party in one? You're in luck, the island's castles aren't just for looking at...



Party

Exclusive and exceptional, **Lismore Castle** in County Waterford was once owned by Sir Walter Raleigh and boasts Ireland's oldest gardens. The castle can be hired out for weddings and lavish parties, with accommodation for up to 27 guests.



Luxury

Luxury – and the chance to meet a ghost or two – is on offer at the eccentric **Castle Leslie** in County Monaghan one of Ireland's great castles. Here you can either book a room (as Rolling Stone Sir Mick Jagger did) or stay in one of the converted outbuildings.



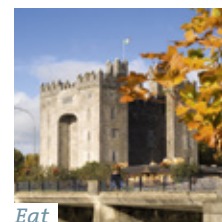
Sleep

Stay in the historic battlements of **Killyleagh**, County Down, the oldest inhabited castle in Ireland, parts of which date back to the 12th century. Its owners, the Hamiltons, even host occasional performances from the likes of Northern Irish legend Van Morrison.



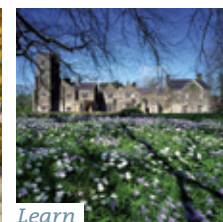
Play

The five-star **Ashford Castle** is one of the island's most distinguished luxury castle hotels. Here you can really maximise your downtime, with clay pigeon shooting, archery, falconry and horse riding all available on the vast estate grounds.



Eat

If you want to get a fun feel for history, **Bunratty**, a 15th century castle in County Clare, has a folk park and holds medieval banquets throughout the year. Quite simply, it's one of the finest examples of an authentic medieval castle you'll ever see.



Learn

You'll find a great cookery school at **Belle Isle Castle** in County Fermanagh, on the shores of beautiful Lough Erne. During your stay here you can brush up on your culinary skills while enjoying the extensive grounds and real 17th century castle surrounds.

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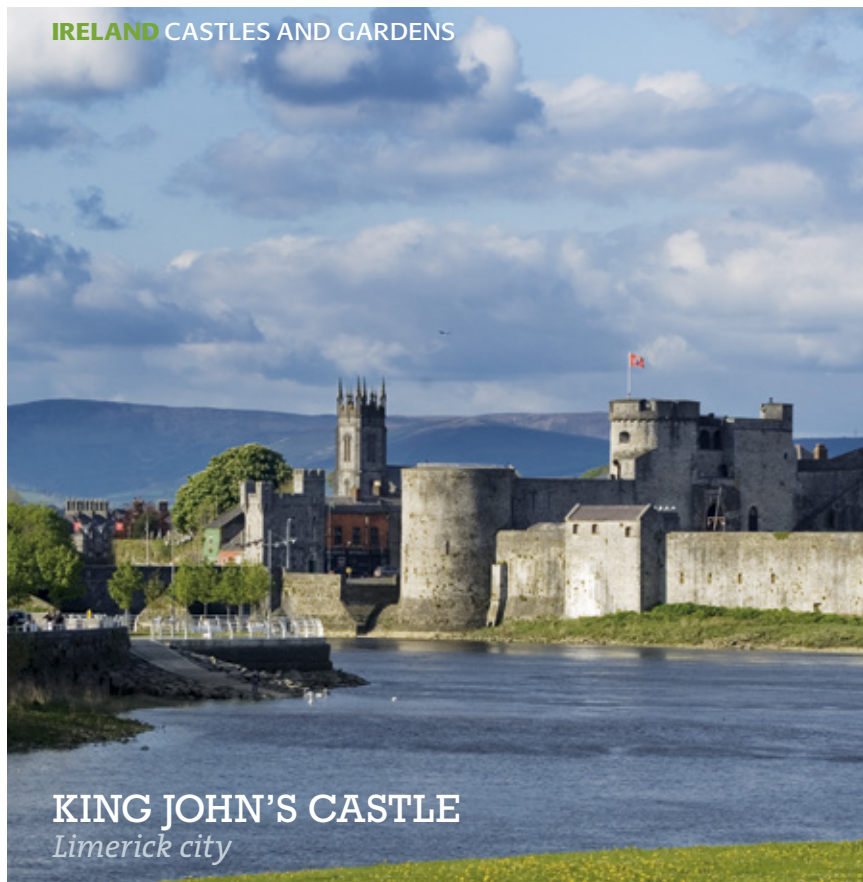
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KING JOHN'S CASTLE
Limerick city

If you believe all history is living, then head for Limerick city's King John's Castle on the banks of the River Shannon, and you can practically live through its 800 years of drama. This mighty fortress at the heart of medieval Limerick is wired for 21st century technology with a stunning new visitor centre. Touch-screen points bring to life tales of torrid sieges and warfare, along with ghostly projections to make the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end! Move out into the courtyard where you can discover the castle's remarkable archaeology and wander through scenes from a 17th century siege, while costumed guides reveal the secrets and scandals of castle life.



TRIM CASTLE
County Meath

Trim Castle, an imposing Norman stronghold on the banks of the River Boyne, has been glowering out at the surrounding landscape for almost 800 years, ever since it was built on the land awarded to Hugh de Lacy, Lord of Meath, by Henry II of England.

The Irish, headed by their high king, Ruadri Ua Conchobair (Rory O'Connor), burned down the original wooden fortifications. But De Lacy was not easily deterred. He simply

switched to building with stone and his handiwork, completed by his son in 1224, still stands as the largest Anglo-Norman castle in Ireland.

De Lacy's high opinion of himself was not always shared by those around him. He irritated Henry II by marrying without permission, and was finally finished off by an axe in the back, wielded by an aggrieved mason on his next building project, another castle at Durrow in County Laois. Several centuries later, Trim was sold by one Arthur Wellesley, better known as the Duke of Wellington, and eventually its austere beauty served as a backdrop for Mel Gibson's 1995 film, *Braveheart*. If you're looking for a castle with cinematic quality, this is most definitely it.

Mount Stewart House and Gardens, County Down



Gardens to enjoy

The island of Ireland's castles and manor houses boast stunning gardens that whisk you away into a luscious otherworld. From herbs to flowers and from manicured formality to natural-style planting, the escape starts here

Herb-rich beauty

Herbs are the cornerstone of the gardens at **Kilgraney Country House** overlooking the Barrow Valley in County Carlow. Areas are devoted to teas and infusion, kitchen plants, aromatics for cosmetics, medicine, and a medieval monastic garden. Produce from the gardens is used to create a creative and contemporary effect in the great restaurant here, too.

Grand designs

Compared with the homespun folk knowledge at Kilgraney, the grandeur of the gardens at **Curraghmore** in County Waterford is a world away, but the formality complements the 18th century classical architecture of the house. Ancient oak forests, an ornamental lake and pristine lawns carry an air of manicured perfection, but the scale is breathtaking.

Literary vision

Home of the talented literary Pakenham family, **Tullynally Castle** in County Westmeath offers a walled flower garden, a grotto, a Chinese plant collection, woodlands full of exotic trees and a vast kitchen garden with two Regency hothouses – and some llamas to keep the grass under control. Adorably eccentric.

A lady's delight

The mild climate beside Strangford Lough in County Down, the imaginative planting of Edith, Lady Londonderry and her remodelling of the grounds throughout the 1920s and 30s have produced an astonishingly varied garden at **Mount Stewart**, which is now being proposed as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Wild at heart

Also in County Down is the informal **Rowallane Garden**, planted by Reverend John Moore with exotic species that date right back to the 1860s. Truly spectacular rhododendrons and azaleas along with wildflower meadows, a rock garden wood for shade-loving plants and a walled garden mean there is something for all seasons.

Walled wonder

Similarly informal, mature trees, winding paths and natural lawns give a relaxed, slightly haphazard air to the gardens at **Florence Court** near Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, in perfect keeping with the mountain views. The three-acre walled garden and famous yews are a draw, and you should try and make time to look around the 18th century house.

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Dungarvan Tradfest, County Waterford

FACE THE MUSIC

From high-kicks and high-jinks to the best places to enjoy Irish traditional music, Jonny Lucey delves into the world of fiddles, bodhráns and up-tempo tunes

We all remember our first time. The first time you hear the beat, the first time you watch the musicians' hands moving at the speed of light, the first time you get swept up in it all. As experiences go, our first introduction to a real traditional Irish music session is one to remember. The place was Sherkin, a small island with an artistic character, off the west coast of County Cork. Three of us headed off, bags packed and hopped on the ferry for the short trip from Baltimore to enjoy a weekend of camping.

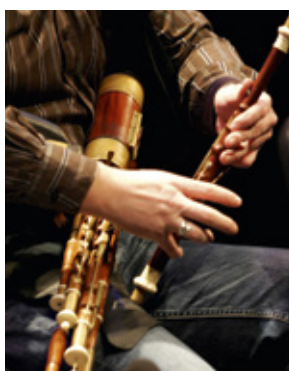
Sherkin is the kind of place where you should expect the unexpected; the weather changes quickly here and a dramatic sunrise can often be interrupted by a swirl of dark clouds. This is not the kind of place you want to discover that someone has forgotten the tent poles. And as a light drizzle started to descend on us, it seemed only natural that we moved our "debate" over whose fault it was inside to the local pub, Murphy's at The Islander's Rest.

Rich with an amber glow, flickering candles and low lighting, Murphy's feels like a typical Irish pub, the kind of place that fuels your imagination. As we walked through the door, people were dancing, laughing and swirling around a group of musicians

playing fiddles, guitars, bodhráns (hand-held Irish drums), banjos, concertinas and tin whistles. From that point on, it was clear we were going nowhere. Local islanders, Americans, Germans and Swedes chatted, danced and clapped; the music never stopped, one song racing into the next as the tempos got faster and faster. The jumpy, vibrant melodies put a flutter in the feet of everyone in the pub, and we lost ourselves in the music and the people. Truth be told, we forgot all about our dire sleeping situation.

Therein lies the magic of traditional Irish music. Though its origins are distinctly Irish, it has the ability to cross cultural borders with its spirit. No one in the pub knew the right dance steps to the jigs being played that night, and no one cared. It was just about joining in.

But Irish music is more than just something to enjoy with abandon. Within its lyrics and notes lie Ireland's aural traditions and culture. For the most part, the ancient Irish didn't write things down, but they did put their stories into song. These songs evolved over the years, rolling like tumbleweeds from one generation to the next, picking up new characteristics and styles. >



Learning by ear
Irish traditional music has always been part of the country's rich aural culture. Music was rarely written down. Instead it was taught by ear and passed down from one generation to the next.

IRELAND MUSIC



Musicians enjoying a trad music session



The John Hewitt Bar, Belfast

**Trad music pubs:
Six to try**

A mini guide to some of the island of Ireland's favourite trad music pubs...

**THE JOHN HEWITT BAR
Belfast city**

Named for a local legend, the John Hewitt Bar is the place to go for trad music in Belfast city's Cathedral Quarter. With excellent food, great "craic" (fun), as well as local and global craft beers, it's an ideal place to spend an evening. The bar rocks to the sounds of trad every Wednesday and Saturday night and there's plenty of space for dancing, too.

**AN SPAILPÍN FÁNACH
Cork city**

An Spailpín Fánach (translated as The Travelling Workman) in Cork city has earned a reputation for legendary trad sessions. Although right in the heart of the city, this feels like a typical country pub with a great atmosphere.



**O'DONOGHUE'S
Dublin city**

For Dublin's take on the trad session, it has to be O'Donoghue's on Baggot Street, where the walls are covered with photos and drawings of the famous musicians who have played there. This much-loved Dublin pub earned its musical stripes back when traditional Irish music icons The Dubliners played there, and it still attracts high-quality musicians from all over Ireland and abroad.

**MONROE'S
Galway city**

With the musical heritage of the Connemara Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking region) flowing into this small medieval city, Galway is a must for trad seekers. There's no shortage of pubs, but we'd recommend Monroe's. Cosy and atmospheric, you'll find open fires, stained glass windows and wooden flooring that's well-worn from decades' worth of céilís (traditional Irish dance events) that have had the crowds dancing away. Trad is played every night.

**THE HOUSE OF MCDONNELL
Ballycastle, County Antrim**

Established in 1766, The House of McDonnell in Ballycastle is one of County Antrim's oldest pubs and began life as a grocery shop. The interior is original 1870s in style, with tiled floors, wooden bar counters and nostalgic ornaments. Every Friday and Saturday night local musicians make their weekly pilgrimage here for some serious trad.

There's an old expression that goes "As fast as a fiddler's elbow". And if you're ever at a trad session in Sligo, you'll soon see where the phrase came from

You may not know it, but the term "trad music" (traditional music) is an umbrella phrase. Each corner and county of Ireland has developed its own indigenous style of playing. Similar to accents, regional trad styles have their own little inflections and characteristics that define them.

Take County Clare, for example. The drama of the Cliffs of Moher aside, things are actually quite relaxed in Clare. This is reflected in the type of trad music flowing from the region. In this pocket of the west, they're famed for their flute and fiddle playing. Renowned local fiddler Martin Hayes sums it up nicely: "We take things a little slower here, our music, too."

The free-flowing style of Clare can be heard all year round in pubs such as O'Donoghue's in Fanore and Minogue's in Tulla. Towns such as Doolin and Lisdoonvarna offer up pub trad sessions every night of the week. For those in the know, Clare is a trad music haven.

Move north up to County Sligo, and you'll soon learn that here the fiddle is king. There's an old expression that goes "As fast as a fiddler's elbow". And if you're ever at a trad session in Sligo, you'll soon see where the phrase came from. The style of fiddle-led trad music in Sligo is bouncy, fast and intricate. The melodies dip and twist, >



St Patrick's Day
The St Patrick's Festival in Dublin city (14th-17th March 2014) offers an ideal introduction to traditional music, with lots of exciting events and performances both on the street and in pubs and venues around the city.

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Playing the bodhrán



The Lambeag drum

Sounds of Northern Ireland

When it comes to trad music, the six counties of Northern Ireland have a mix of cultural influences

Ulster-Scots, Irish, Scottish and English traditions combine to create a distinct northern style with a spirit entirely its own.

Northern Ireland has its own signature instruments, too. The uilleann pipes were once used to rattle the nerves of the enemy in battle. These days, they rattle the rafters of many a pub session. They can create a sombre, droning air or a vibrant, lively tune.

If you want to catch some world-class piping while you're in Northern Ireland, make sure to check out the William Kennedy Piping Festival in Armagh city in November. Pipers from every corner of the globe are invited to the city to revel in a huge piping party.

In terms of percussion in Northern Irish music, there's only one contender. The undeniable king of the drums is the lambeag. Lambeag drums are massive two-headed drums played with a baton-like drumstick. Think of the bass drum turned on its side, strapped to a drummer's chest and you've got it.

Some accounts trace the drum's origins to lambeag in County Antrim; others claim the drum was brought over from Holland by King William's troops during the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. You can catch some drumming first hand at the enjoyable Clady Day competition (late July) in Markethill, County Armagh.



Irish dancing

Festivals to watch out for...

Ireland's cultural calendar lights up with exciting music events throughout the year. Try some music or dance classes at the Willie Clancy Summer School in Miltown Malbay, County Clare, in July; or how about the Féile an Phobail traditional festival in West Belfast in August, a week-long event of music and "craic" (fun). And for 2014, don't miss the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, the biggest traditional Irish music festival held in Ireland, in Sligo town.



Enjoying the Fleadh, Cavan town

inducing fast-paced, lively dancing. If you happen to be in the area in August, check out the James Morrison Traditional Music Festival. Taking place in Riverstown, the festival honours the famous musician credited with creating the "Sligo style" of fiddle playing. It's a genuine slice of traditional Irish festival fun.

Back at the southern tip of the island in County Cork, particular pride is taken in the bodhrán, a one-sided handheld drum, played with a cipín (wooden stick). Bodhráns provide the essential percussion in a trad session. Due to their one-sided construction, they're surprisingly versatile in sound.

One man who plays a mean bodhrán is Dan Sullivan of Inchigeelagh, County Cork. Dan is a regular player in the Briar Rose Pub session there. "A session without a bodhrán is like a trailer missing a wheel, it just doesn't drive right," he says. "The bodhrán is an ancient instrument. It developed from a farm tool used to separate grain from the chaff." The bodhrán gives a pulsing yet lively beat. And the mark of a truly great trad session is a pounding bodhrán solo.

It's hard to think of anything more "Irish" than a good old-fashioned traditional music session. Pints of stout wobble precariously next to lively musicians, knees are slapped in time to the beat, and an air of hushed reverence descends as an elder member of the community begins to sing.

Our trip to Sherkin was long ago, and we can't remember who did forget the tent poles. But what we do know is that what started out as a camping trip became a musical adventure that's engrained in our minds forever.



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Portunna Castle & Gardens, Portunna, Co. Galway



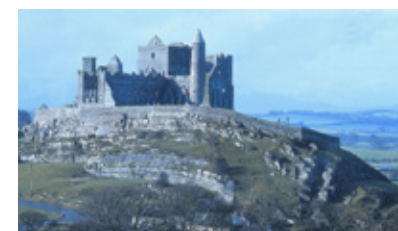
Parkes Castle, Fivemile, Bourne, Co. Leitrim



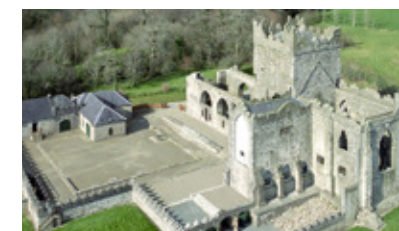
Jerpoint Abbey, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny



Ardfert Cathedral, Ardfert, Tralee, Co. Kerry




Rock of Cashel, Cashel, Co. Tipperary

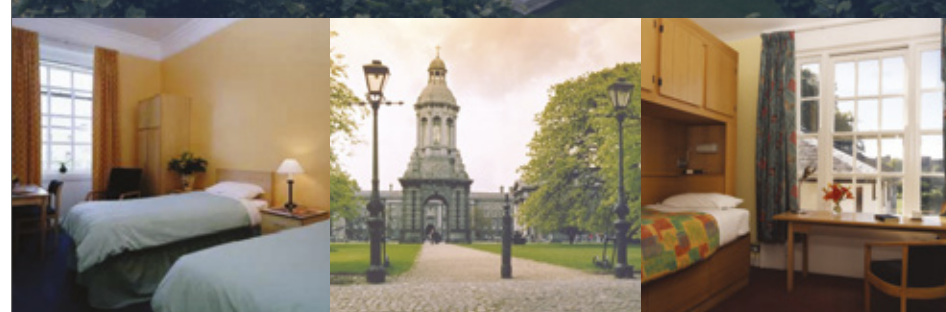


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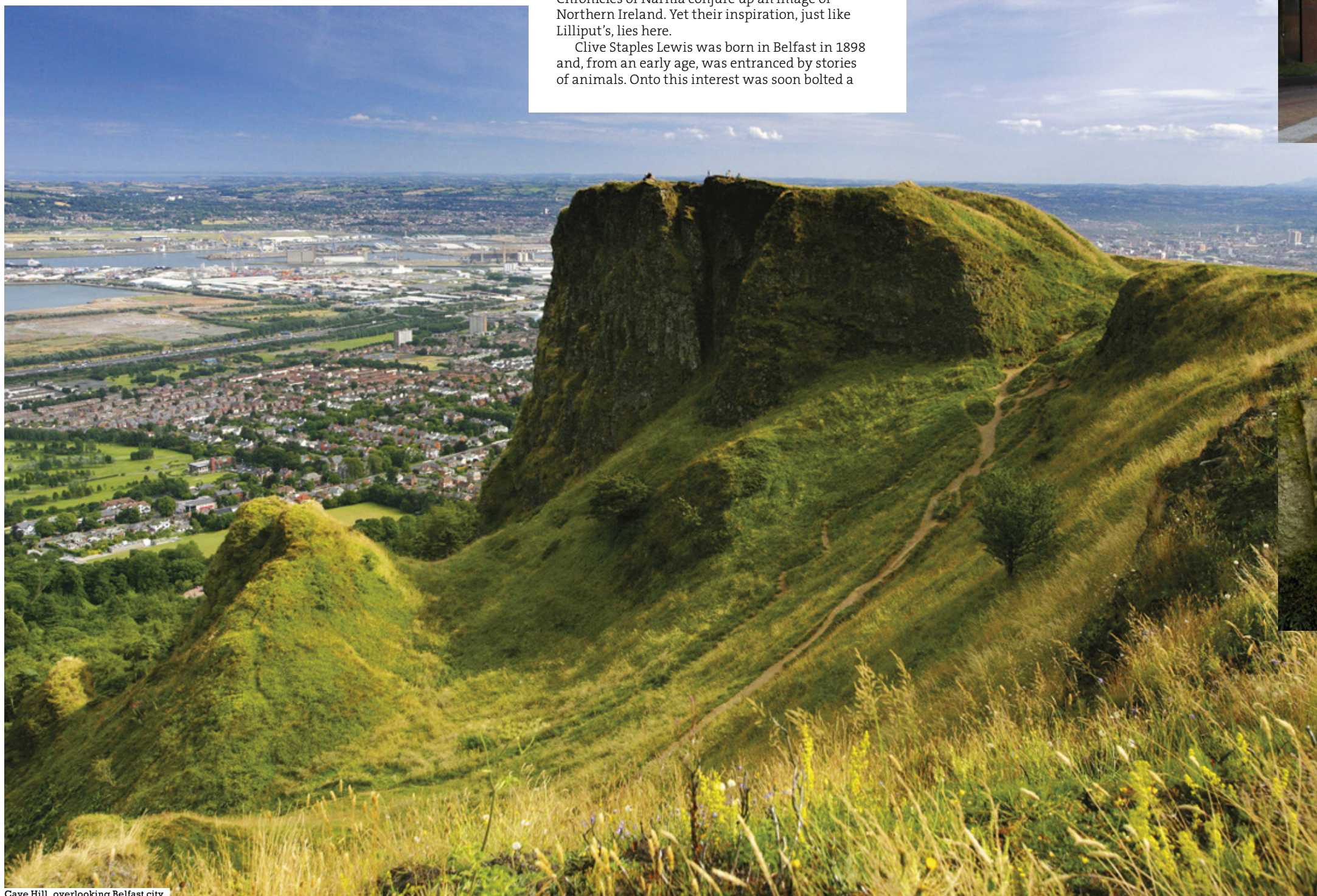
DISCOVERING NARNIA

Mal Rogers enters a magical kingdom filled with incredible stories, and home to landscapes so stunning they will send your imagination soaring

Belfast is no stranger to legends. After all, this is a city that has given us iconic footballer George Best, musical genius Van Morrison and the ill-fated luxury liner, Titanic. It has also nurtured one of literature's most famous travellers, Jonathan Swift, vicar and writer, who regularly passed Cave Hill en route to his parish on the northern shore of Belfast Lough. This huge volcanic outcrop resembles a sleeping giant, and we may assume Swift looked up, jotted down a few notes, and Gulliver's Travels was duly born.

Few people, however, when reading The Chronicles of Narnia conjure up an image of Northern Ireland. Yet their inspiration, just like Lilliput's, lies here.

Clive Staples Lewis was born in Belfast in 1898 and, from an early age, was entranced by stories of animals. Onto this interest was soon bolted a



Cave Hill, overlooking Belfast city



C.S. Lewis Centenary Sculpture, Belfast

Is this Aslan?

It's not known what C.S. Lewis's exact influences were for the character of Aslan in the *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, but clues are dotted around. Could it be he got the idea from this stone lion, which is part of a fountain in the Tollymore Forest Park?



Linen Hall Library, Belfast

dimension of mysticism and spirituality: he was equally fascinated by the Icelandic sagas, Greek mythology and Irish folklore. From this literary and supernatural cauldron emerged the fantasy land of Narnia, first encountered in the book *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*.

Lewis was deeply proud of the city he grew up in, and today the author is honoured with the C.S. Lewis Tour, which begins at the Linen Hall Library, home to a unique archive of Lewis material. His statue, *The Searcher*, outside Hollywood Road Library on the city's east side, is similarly a place of pilgrimage; while Campbell College, his old school, which still operates as a post-primary boys' school, can be visited by arrangement. >

Linen Hall Library

Founded in 1788, the Linen Hall Library in Belfast is a centre of literary history in the heart of the city. The C.S. Lewis Tour begins here and the library has a unique collection of the author's material.

IRELAND LITERATURE



Tollymore Forest Park, County Down



C.S. Lewis Tour, Writer's Square, Belfast

along with pretend sentry boxes and faux hermitages. The whole park is like one big folly, and it brims over with romance, beauty and plenty of natural curiosities for the curious spirits to enjoy.

From the edge of the arboretum here, an astounding view of the Mourne Mountains leads the eye to Dundrum Bay, the Irish Sea and on towards the Isle of Man. From this viewpoint you can also glimpse the Horn Bridge straddling the Azalea Walk, which leads down into the forest. With its tiny turrets, crenellations and battlements in a shamrock shape, the bridge does an uncanny impersonation of an overgrown toy castle.

It's not too much of a stretch to imagine Lewis gazing down at this fantastic structure, set against a stunning background of exotic trees and towering mountains, and pausing for thought. Then his attention will have been drawn to the small, classical fountain set into the wall. On it is an almost life-sized head of a stone lion, through which water spouts – according to local legend, this is Aslan. >

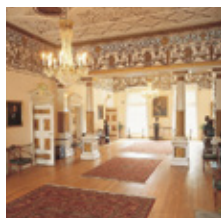


St Mark's Church, Belfast

There are many things around Belfast that may have influenced the young Clive Staples to create his infamous kingdom. The rectory near to St Mark's Church, Dundela, where he was baptised, has a doorknob shaped like a lion. But Lewis's inspiration for Aslan may just lie a little further south than his home city of Belfast.

Tollymore Forest Park in Castlewellan, County Down, stands on the southerly slopes of the Mourne Mountains, an estate packed with horticultural A-listers – think of dawn redwoods, black junipers and magnificent cork oaks. Scattered throughout the estate are Gothic extravagances, grottos, obelisks and barbicans,

Six Literary Experiences



Dublin Writers Museum
Dublin

See manuscripts and memorabilia from Bram Stoker (Dracula) and Jonathan Swift (Gulliver's Travels), as well as Ireland's four winners of the Nobel Literary Prize – W.B. Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, Samuel Beckett and Seamus Heaney.



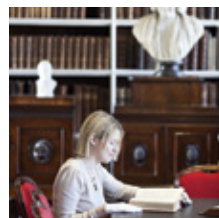
James Joyce Centre
Dublin

Dedicated to all things Joycean, this little museum in Dublin city centre has the original door from 7 Eccles Street on show. This was Leopold Bloom's home in the novel Ulysses; sadly the house itself was demolished last century.



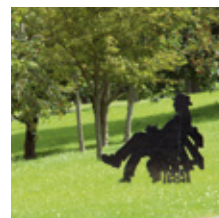
Frank McCourt Museum
Limerick

This museum focuses on the famous Pulitzer Prizewinning author of Angela's Ashes, Frank McCourt. Situated in the writer's former school in the Georgian Quarter of Limerick city, it contains photos, manuscripts and memorabilia.



Armagh Public Library
Armagh

In leafy Armagh city, you'll find one of the oldest public libraries in Ireland. Established in 1771, the library is also a museum, and houses a fine collection of first editions and beautifully illustrated manuscripts.



Patrick Kavanagh Rural & Literary Resource Centre
County Monaghan

The Patrick Kavanagh Centre can be found in the historic St Mary's Church, next to the cemetery where the beloved Irish poet is buried. It contains an interesting archive on Kavanagh's life and work.



Kerry Writers Museum
County Kerry

Kerry has produced an abundance of world famous writers – from J.B. Keane to Maurice "Quiet Man" Walsh. The museum honours over 80 Kerry-based writers, as well as many national and international figures in the world of literature.



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– John Boyne,
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The Cloughmore Stone, Rostrevor, County Down

In a letter to his brother, Lewis wrote: "That part of Rostrevor which overlooks Carlingford Lough is my idea of Narnia"

have supported. Turn around, though, and you'll see an incredible view across the glacial fjord of Carlingford Lough – it was this panorama that particularly attracted the interest of the author. In a letter to his brother, he wrote: "That part of Rostrevor which overlooks Carlingford Lough is my idea of Narnia."

Looking south across the waters, he'll have seen the Cooley Mountains of County Louth – themselves major players in the most ancient of Irish sagas, The Cattle Raid of Cooley. And small wonder that this place has spawned so many incredible tales.

No matter what the weather, the land around here is ethereal, with mountains rising out of the sea and rock formations creating images of hags and giants. No wonder it has taken its place in one of the world's most famous works of fantasy; when you visit the Mourne, there's magic about.

Finding Narnia

A view of the Mourne is something to behold, but to truly experience the landscape you need to enter this mystical territory itself. Along the journey here, past the Tollymore Forest Park, several more unusual curiosities appear – the tiny Foley's Bridge, which crosses a torrential waterfall; a stone chair engraved with Alexander Pope poetry; a glacial erratic (a huge split boulder) with biblical text inscribed.

Onwards, and soon the open mountain appears before you. C.S. Lewis said of the area in his essay On Stories: "I have seen landscapes, notably in the Mourne Mountains and southwards, which under a particular light made me feel that at any moment a giant might raise his head over the next ridge."

And that's certainly the impression you get as you gaze at this behemoth. Part of the area's alluring appeal has to do with the incredible geology that exists here. Mighty battlements of solid granite rising around you, and crags twisted into fantastic shapes by millions of years of heavy weather seem to appear at every turn. It feels like a place perfectly made for a fantasy novel. And everywhere you look, you'll find something that seems to ignite the imagination.

It's pretty obvious that the Cloughmore Stone, a 40-ton granite boulder standing on a mountain ridge 1,000ft above Rostrevor, must have arrived there through the work of a giant. It was probably thrown at Fionn mac Cumhaill (Finn McCool), hero of the Ulster sagas, during an argument with another giant. Giants, it seems, were always prone to fighting with each other.

Of course, there are always a few doubting Thomases around – in this instance the entire scientific community – who describe the stone as a deposit from the ice age. Deep down, we know which theory C.S. Lewis was likely to

Ireland's Literary Landscapes

Dublin

UNESCO City of Literature

Dublin has given us some of the world's most celebrated writers and playwrights: Bram Stoker, author of Dracula; Oscar Wilde; Brendan Behan; Nobel prizewinner Samuel Beckett; and creator of Pygmalion, George Bernard Shaw. Most famously, the city is the setting for James Joyce's Ulysses. On 16 June 1904, the hero of the book, Leopold Bloom, wanders through the city, meeting some of its extraordinary characters. Joycean fans regularly retrace Bloom's footsteps and in Davy Byrne's pub on Duke Street, they will partake of some gorgonzola cheese – just like Leopold did. It's traditional to order a glass of burgundy with your gorgonzola; but nobody will mind if it's a Guinness.

Sligo

W.B. Yeats Country

William Butler Yeats – even his name sounds like a piece of poetry – is strongly associated with the grandeur of the Sligo landscape. W.B. Yeats and his brother Jack described this corner of Connacht, their childhood home, in literature, poetry and painting. Mrs Yeats's two lads did so well in this endeavour that W.B. won a Nobel Prize for Literature, and Jack, back in the days when such a thing existed, picked up an Olympic medal for painting.

Ben Bulbin, the Curlew Mountains and the surrounding landscape all cast their spell on the poet W.B., awakening



Ben Bulbin, County Sligo

an interest both in old Irish legends and the occult. His sublime poem The Lake Isle of Innisfree was inspired by the sparkling waters of Lough Gill, which Yeats described as a paradise where he could "live alone, in the bee-loud glade".

The Aran Islands

John Millington Synge

Ringed by great cliffs, the mystical Aran Islands greatly influenced the work of John Millington Synge, one of Ireland's greatest playwrights. Synge contributed to island legend in his own inimitable way; the legend of Aran sweaters having a distinctive pattern as a means of identification in case of drowning probably originated from his play Riders to the Sea. A drowned fisherman is recognised by his sister because of a dropped stitch in the socks she knitted for him. The myth soon became part of folklore.

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WALKING the coasts

"I've done a lot of coastal walking, but there is nothing else like the north Antrim coast. It tops them all," Toby Edwards, a National Trust Warden, tells UK newspaper the Guardian. "My favourite part is the highest section of the cliffs, which gives an incredible 360-degree view of the area, leaving you in awe of the forces of nature."

For those who may not know it so well, the north Antrim coast includes one of Ireland's most famous sights, the Giant's Causeway, all geometric columns of basalt and crashing waves.

Head up to Donegal and you can test your nerves with some of Europe's highest sea cliffs, the Slieve Leagues (Sliabh Liag). Here, you feel like you're standing on the very edge of the world.

The island of Ireland's coastal walking highlights don't stop there, either. The west of the island has given rise to some truly spectacular scenery where you can really get away from it all. Out in the gorgeously wild west of Connemara, you'll find mile after mile of craggy landscapes that crash down to the sea, villages that are built upon a bohemian spirit and golden stretches of sand slotted in between.

Walking trails are plentiful around the island, from the tranquil Wexford Coastal Path to the drama of the Ards Peninsula in County Down. For a feeling of splendid isolation, try the Beara Way in counties Cork and Kerry. This trail weaves along glorious stretches of sea cliff, through the colourful villages of Allihies and Eyeries, and past historical and archaeological sites. You can even detour off to the islands of Bere and Dursey. And the highlight? Well, just wait till you see the scenery!



Walking on the Antrim coast



Doonbeg Golf Club, County Clare

GOLFING in County Clare

Go west to County Clare and you'll see why Ireland is world-famous for its golf courses. Here, on Ireland's rugged Atlantic coast, sits Doonbeg Golf Club, a prestigious link course located a handy 40 miles/64km from Shannon Airport. Designed by Australian pro Greg Norman, Doonbeg features spectacular 100ft sand dunes and a particularly tricky 14th hole. All against a backdrop of tumbling waves rolling into Doughmore Bay.

And just to prove that County Clare is a golfer's dream come true, half an hour or so down the road is the famous Lahinch Golf Club, which dates back to 1892. Lahinch has it all: a great location overlooking picturesque Liscannor Bay, a challenging links course... and a surprising number of goats, who act as weather forecasters; if they're sheltering by the clubhouse, you know you're in for a wet round. The club is also home to the South of Ireland Championship, a well-respected amateur golf tournament whose past winners include Graeme McDowell and Darren Clarke.

If you want a change from links golf, then you can head inland to try one of Clare's wonderful parkland courses: Shannon, East Clare, Woodstock or the fine course at Dromoland Castle, where you can also enjoy a well-earned rest in the luxurious castle hotel. If it's a good game of golf you're after, you know where to come.



Lahinch Golf Club, County Clare

Sounds like a golfer's paradise? Why not try these:



Royal County Down

Ireland is known as one of the best places in the world for golf, as the island boasts exceptional championship courses beloved by top golfers such as Rory McIlroy and Graeme McDowell. Try **Royal Portrush Golf Club**, near the Giant's Causeway on the rugged north Antrim coast. Or how about teeing off on the mighty **Royal County Down Golf Club**, nestled right at the foothills of the spectacular Mourne Mountains.

CRUISING the Shannon-Erne Waterway

It seems almost unfair that one of Europe's smallest countries should enjoy both salt and fresh water playgrounds. Unfair maybe, but nothing is impossible on the island of Ireland.

Scan a map of the island and you can quickly see how the centre is split with a network of rivers and lakes that would set any cruising enthusiast packing their bags to visit. As Cruise Ireland notes, "From Belleek at the northern tip of Lough Erne to Killaloe at the southern end of the River Shannon, there are 300 miles/480km of inter-connecting rivers and lakes with endless possibilities".

Pick your cruiser up at Lough Erne and it's hello to the Fermanagh Lakelands, hello to White Island's ancient stone figures and hello to Devenish Island's crumbling monastery. Here, you'll glide past towns and villages that seem perfectly in tune with the waters onto which they front. Make time to explore Belturbet in County Cavan and Ballinamore in County Leitrim, where a tasty pub lunch makes a good break from the water. Soon you're slipping under a tiny ivy-covered horseshoe bridge into Lough Allen (anglers take note: bream and roach are in good supply here). Finally, glide into the broad body of the River Shannon with its whitewashed marina houses and cosy little pubs.

On the way, Lough Ree serves up stunning visual moments, as it opens up into a panorama of forested islands and glassy waters. And as you moor your boat for the final time and return to dry land, be sure to pat its hull and remind it that you'll be back – after all, you've only just skimmed the surface.



Cruising by Enniskillen, County Fermanagh

Quiet country horse riding



HORSE RIDING in County Kildare

Some folk might try and convince you that flat is bad; that without craggy mountains or sweeping valleys, landscapes get a bit, well, bland. But you only have to look at County Kildare to see how wrong they are. Fields here are divided up with mathematical precision, massing into a quilt of deep greens in summer and yellow stubble in autumn. This is Kildare, Ireland's horse country.

Making the most of the countryside is Abbeyfield Farm, with over 240 acres to its name. Saddle up here, take to the quiet lanes and pastures and you'll find that you're in equestrian paradise. Which is no surprise because this is a county whose heart beats with the sport of kings: horse racing.

Punchestown and The Curragh racecourses stretch themselves over vast distances and during event season they remain the heart of steeplechase on the island. Kildare's relationship with racing is no recent obsession either. Potter around the Irish National Stud, home to some of Ireland's finest thoroughbreds, and the most unusual story of this aristocratic sport plays itself out. This is where Colonel William Walker of the British Army employed the zodiac to gauge a racehorse's abilities. Visit and you can still see skylights that were put in the stables to allow the horses access to the moonlight and the stars.



The Curragh Racecourse, County Kildare

Want to go further on your horse riding adventure?

The spectacular landscapes of Connemara are prime horse trekking countryside, and the region even has its own breed – the super-gentle Connemara pony.

For something completely different, try some exhilarating beach riding with the Hill Farm Riding Centre in County Londonderry.



Take a laid-back break in County Limerick

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SURFING in County Sligo

What would the Yeats brothers – artist Jack and poet W.B. – have thought about big-wave surfing in their beloved county of Sligo? Would the sight of surfers at Mullaghmore slicing through 49ft walls of foam-flecked water have inspired them like their beautiful land did?

Some things we'll never know – but we do know why surfers come to Sligo: the waves here are immense. The village of Mullaghmore, sitting under Ben Bulbin Mountain and in the shadow of the Gothic Classiebawn Castle, is not the only slice of County Sligo attracting big-wave surfers. Track south through Sligo town, stay close to the county's Atlantic edge and you're at another beach, another castle and even more waves at Easkey, a favourite with pro-surfers. Nearby there are lots of smaller waves that offer a great beginner's introduction to the Atlantic surf.

Sligo is brimming with attractions to enjoy once you get out of your wetsuit, too. Ancient abbeys and castles, a long jagged coastline, the charming villages of Enniscrone and Strandhill, and waters that turn from silver to emerald in seconds make this place a first-class scene-stealer.

Like the sound of that? Try these:

Bundoran in County Donegal has attracted surfers from all over the world, beginners and pros alike, and has a lively surf scene centred around the town.

Head to picturesque **Portrush** in County Antrim, meanwhile, for consistent waves that strike a good chord with beginners. There are two great beaches here: West Strand and East Strand.



Surfing along the west coast

Enjoying County Fermanagh's quiet country roads



CYCLING the Kingfisher Cycle Trail

"There's nowhere like Ireland for cycling," says Rory Wyley, president of Cycling Ireland. "The incredible network of roads and boreens (small roads) means you can go out with no planned route in mind and follow your nose." That fact is not lost on the many cyclists that come here. And from 9-11 May 2014, the island is also welcoming one of the world's biggest bike races, the Giro d'Italia, which kicks off in Belfast before racing to Armagh and Dublin.

If you're not in the professional league, don't panic. You can still take it easy as you watch lots of fluorescent Lyrca speeding past you! Try the Kingfisher Trail, which travels through counties Fermanagh, Cavan, Donegal, Monaghan and Leitrim. This is Ireland's original long-distance cycle trail and is still one of the best. The whole trail is 298 miles/480km, but there are six smaller loops along the way where you can see everything from manor houses and little islands to glassy rivers and the 650-million-year-old Marble Arch Caves.

If you want to pick up the pace, try mountain biking in the Ballyhouras and the Mourne. Rostrevor Forest in County Down is popular among XC bikers, while Castlewellan Forest Park, also in Down, has trails suitable for all ages and abilities. You can get more information on these trails at mountainbikeni.com



Cycling in Connemara

On your bike with two more cycling routes:

Lonely Planet nominated County Clare as one of the best places in the world to cycle, and who are we to argue? Enjoy lovely little villages, castles, coastline and highlands, too.

The 26 mile/42km **Great Western Greenway** is great for families, and is the longest off-road cycle trail in Ireland, stretching all the way along the old Westport to Achill Railway line in County Mayo.



Cycling the Great Western Greenway

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THE QUIET LIFE

David Mills looks at the legacy left by the early Irish pioneers, from incredible neolithic burial sites to extravagant Celtic art



Beehive huts, Skellig Michael

Imagine setting up camp at the edge of the known world. Or how about hacking into the wilds of Wicklow, just for the pleasure of sleeping in a cold, damp cave?

No, these aren't options for an adventure holiday on the island of Ireland. They're just a taste of the challenges that faced the men and women who followed St Patrick to establish Early Christian outposts in Ireland. Christianity began to be organised at monastic settlements on the island, and many of them were located in the wildest corners imaginable.

Take Skellig Michael, a shard of rock bursting from the Atlantic Ocean off Bolus Head in County Kerry. It looks inhospitable. It is inhospitable. Journey the 8 mile/12km by boat out of Portmagee, and you'll be faced with a remarkably preserved cluster of 6th century beehive huts, oratories, stone crosses and a chapel, lashed by the winds and waves of the Atlantic.

And then there's Glendalough, perhaps the most famous Early Christian settlement on the island. Today, the Wicklow Mountains are dotted with hikers in walking boots, but when St Kevin founded his 6th century monastery here, things were very different. The hardy Kevin slept in a cave and endured countless tribulations, but the city he built in the "glen of two lakes" spent 500 years as one of Europe's great ecclesiastical centres and its remains are still there today.

Nendrum Monastery on Mahee Island on Strangford Lough, County Down, was another impressive beauty spot, chosen by St Machaoi in the 5th century. Today, the monastic remains sit within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. >

Boat trip to Skellig Michael, County Kerry



PHOTO: CORBIS.COM



Janus figures, Boa Island, County Fermanagh

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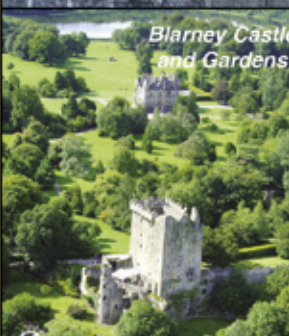


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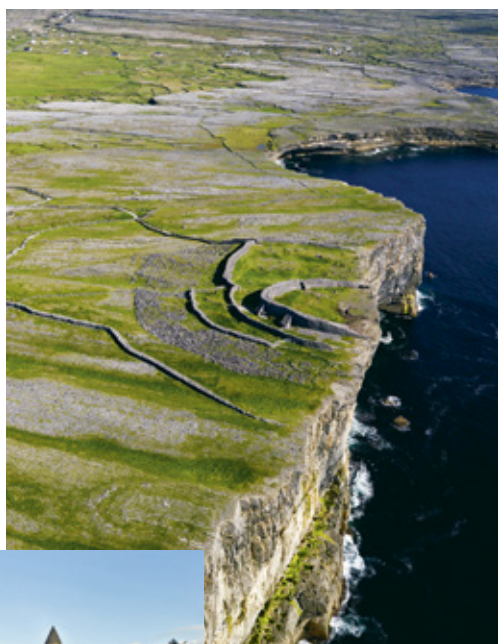



For true drama, head west to the stunning site of Dun Aengus. On the very edge of Inishmore, the largest of the three Aran Islands, this Iron Age stone fort is simply incredible. Enclosed on three sides, the fourth side is a sheer cliff that drops down into the Atlantic Ocean below. It's a real showstopper.

Making the journey to places such as these is what lifts them off the page and lets them come alive. Amid the lush greenery of County Meath, you'll find one of the most important historical areas in all of Europe: the Boyne Valley (Brú na Bóinne). Here, amid a patchwork of vivid green fields, is the place that hosted Ireland's High Kings, the Hill of Tara. And the very stone at the centre of their inauguration, Lia Fáil (pronounced Leeya Foil), still stands there today.



Clonmacnoise, County Offaly



Dun Aengus, Inishmore

Creep into the heart of Newgrange, which resonates with 5,000 years of history, and you can experience something truly unique – a prehistoric light show

The greenery of this lush valley has made its way to the roof of the island's most famous prehistoric rock star, Newgrange. Even before the pyramids were a glint in Egyptian Pharaohs' eyes, building had begun and finished on this sprawling passage tomb. No picture of Newgrange will ever do justice to experiencing its incredible architecture first-hand. Creep into the heart of the chamber, which resonates with 5,000 years of history, and you can experience something truly unique – a prehistoric light show. Every year, at the winter solstice, sunlight arcs down the passage and illuminates the chamber; a lottery system picks the chosen few lucky enough to attend, but any tour of Newgrange treats visitors to a simulation. It's an unforgettable experience – an amazing feat of engineering from ancient times.

Equally haunting are Boa Island's Janus figures (400-800AD). Here, deep in the watery heartland of County Fermanagh overlooking Lower Lough Erne, mysterious figures with blank stares and huge heads rise out of the grassland. It's no surprise that this place is known for making the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end – look closely and you'll see the statue has two faces, one male and one female. The Celts who carved it not only felt they were doubling the power of their god, but they also believed strongly in the potency of twins.

These stone figures may be remarkable for their simplicity, but Celtic Ireland is most famous for its decorative swirls and intricate art. Just take a look at the magnificent 9th century Muiredach's Cross at Monasterboice, County Offaly, with its elaborate scriptural scenes (a copy of which can be seen in the National Museum Dublin); the crosses at Clonmacnoise; and the 10th century sandstone Ardboe High Cross in County Tyrone.

Neolithic monuments, incredible monastic settlements, and some of the best Celtic art in Europe; when it comes to surprises, Ireland's got plenty up its sleeve.



Glendalough, County Wicklow

Monumental moments
From the high crosses at the monastery of Clonmacnoise to the quiet contemplation of Glendalough, Ireland's Christian sites are usually found in areas of tranquil beauty. But for pure drama, head to the Iron Age fort of Dun Aengus, perched at the edge of Inishmore, off the coast of County Galway.

St Patrick's Island...

Ireland's patron saint first arrived on the island of Ireland as a slave in the 5th century. He went on to be a missionary and then a bishop, and ultimately had a day devoted to him on 17th March. Across the island, you'll find many interesting sites associated with this roving religious pioneer.

St Patrick's Trail is a fascinating 92 mile/148km-tour in Northern Ireland, taking in saintly sights such as Saul Church in Strangford (where Patrick began his mission), Down Cathedral (where he is buried) and the Holy Well at Struell (where he is said to have sung psalms).



St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh



Saul Church, County Down

Croagh Patrick in County Mayo is where Patrick is said to have fasted for 40 days and where he banished snakes from Ireland.

And for pure fun, make sure you're in Ireland on 17th March. There are celebrations everywhere, from a massive four day street-party festival in Dublin to a 10-day festival in Armagh (where Patrick founded a church), and a 6am parade in Dingle, County Kerry.



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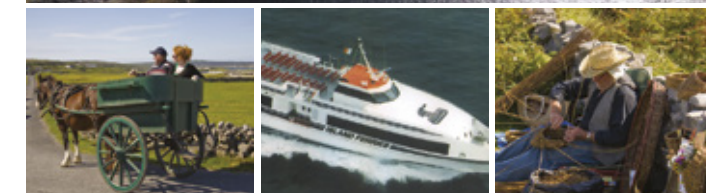
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GENERAL INFORMATION & PLANNING YOUR TRIP

GEOGRAPHY, POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

304 miles/486km long and 172 miles/275km wide, the island of Ireland is divided into four historic provinces – Ulster, Munster, Leinster and Connacht – and 32 counties, of which 26 are in the Republic of Ireland and six are in Northern Ireland. The Republic of Ireland is a parliamentary democracy headed by the President of Ireland; Northern Ireland has its own regional/local government and is part of the United Kingdom. The population of the island is approximately six million, with over 4.3 million living in the Republic of Ireland and 1.7 million in Northern Ireland.

LANGUAGE

Irish (Gaelic) and English are the official languages of the Republic of Ireland: street and road signs are all bilingual. In Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking) areas, road signs may only be displayed in Irish and Irish is spoken daily, though everyone speaks English as well. In Northern Ireland, English is the official language. The Irish language is also taught in many schools and summer schools. Ulster-Scots, spoken in Northern Ireland, is also on the increase.

PASSPORT/VISA REQUIREMENTS

While UK citizens do not require a passport or visa to enter Ireland, most air and sea carriers require some form of photographic identification (ID), such as a passport or driving licence. Visitors are advised to check which form of ID is required with the individual airline, ferry company, tour operator or travel agent before travelling. Non-UK nationals must have a valid passport or national ID card as appropriate. Visitors of other nationalities should contact their local Irish Embassy/Consulate or their local British Embassy, High Commission or Consular Office in Northern Ireland with any queries.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
For further information contact:
The Department of Foreign Affairs
Tel: +353 (0) 1 478 0822 or the
Passport and Visa Office
114a Cromwell Road
London SW7 4ES
Tel: 0207 373 4339
For a list of Irish Embassies, visit dfa.ie and embassyofireland.co.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

Further information is available from your local British Embassy or Consulate.
For British details contact:
The Foreign and Commonwealth Office
gov.uk

MEDICAL

Vaccines are neither compulsory nor necessary unless you are travelling from an infected country. British visitors to the Republic of Ireland are covered under an agreement with the Department of Health, but some form of identification or a European Health Insurance Card (which has replaced the E111 form) is necessary. British visitors to Northern Ireland require no documentation and will receive treatment as they would in Britain.

Visitors from all other EU countries travelling to Ireland should obtain a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) prior to departure. Visit ehic.org.uk for further information. For visitors from non-EU countries travelling to Ireland, private medical insurance is highly recommended.

VISITORS WITH DISABILITIES

Ireland extends a warm welcome to visitors with disabilities. Many public places and visitor attractions are accessible to wheelchair users, and an increasing number of hotels and restaurants are well equipped to accommodate guests with disabilities.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

National Disability Authority
Tel: +353 (0) 1 608 0400; nda.ie

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Adapt NI
Tel: 028 9023 1211; adaptni.org
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Tel: 028 9029 7880; disabilityaction.org

PETS

There are no restrictions on pet cats, dogs or ferrets being brought into Ireland from Britain or vice versa. Pets entering the UK from the EU can travel into Ireland without quarantine, provided they satisfy the requirements of the UK Pet Travel Scheme and are cleared on arrival in the UK. Tel: 0845 933 5577 or visit gov.uk/take-pet-abroad for more information.

Pets entering Ireland from countries other than the UK must comply with Ireland's requirements under the EU Pet Passport System to avoid quarantine. For further information contact:

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REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Tel: +353 (0) 1 607 2000; agriculture.gov.ie

NORTHERN IRELAND

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
Tel: 028 9052 4999; dardni.gov.uk

CURRENCIES

In the Republic of Ireland the currency used is the euro (€) and in Northern Ireland the currency used is the pound sterling (£).

VAT AND TAX REFUNDS

As the UK is part of the EU, residents are not entitled to any VAT or tax refunds.

TELEPHONE

Mobile phones

Only digital phones with GSM subscriptions and a roaming agreement will work on the island of Ireland. Visitors should consult with their supplier before travelling.

Pay phones

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NORTHERN IRELAND
 Contact the local police station where support will be available.
 Tel: 0845 600 8000
 Email: info@psni.pnn.police.uk; psni.police.uk

EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBERS

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
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 Tel: 112 or 999

NORTHERN IRELAND
Emergency Services (Police, Fire, Ambulance, Coastal & Mountain Rescue)
 Tel: 999

PUBS

The legal drinking age is 18 years. Some pubs will insist patrons are over 21 years and carry some form of identification. Legislation in the Republic of Ireland stipulates that children under 18 years are not allowed in premises that serve alcohol after 21.30hrs.

SMOKING RESTRICTIONS

Smoking is not allowed in public areas and workplaces including pubs, restaurants, hotels and taxis, in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS 2014

New Year's Day	1st Jan
St Patrick's Day Holiday	17th Mar
Good Friday (NI only)	18th Apr
Easter Monday	21st Apr
May Bank Holiday	5th May
Spring Bank Holiday (NI only)	26th May
June Bank Holiday (ROI only)	2nd June
July Holiday (NI only)	14th July
Aug Bank Holiday (ROI only)	4th Aug
Aug Bank Holiday (NI only)	25th Aug
Oct Bank Holiday (ROI only)	27th Oct
Christmas Day	25th Dec
St Stephen's Day (ROI)	26th Dec
Boxing Day (NI)	26th Dec

Good Friday is not an official public holiday in the Republic of Ireland, although most shops and businesses are closed.



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Bournemouth	Dublin	Aer Lingus Regional
Bristol	Belfast International	easyJet
	Cork	Aer Lingus Regional
	Dublin	Aer Lingus Regional
	Ireland West Airport Knock	Ryanair
Cardiff	Dublin	Aer Lingus Regional
	George Best Belfast City	Flybe
East Midlands Nottingham	Cork	Ryanair
	Dublin	Ryanair
	George Best Belfast City	Flybe
	Ireland West Airport Knock	Ryanair
Edinburgh	Belfast International	easyJet
	Cork	Aer Lingus Regional
	Dublin	Aer Lingus Regional
	George Best Belfast City	Flybe
	Ireland West Airport Knock	Flybe
	Shannon	Aer Lingus Regional
Exeter	Dublin	Flybe
	George Best Belfast City	Flybe
Glasgow International	Belfast International	easyJet
	Cork	Aer Lingus Regional
	Donegal	Flybe/Loganair
	Dublin	Aer Lingus Regional
	George Best Belfast City	Flybe
	Shannon	Flybe
Glasgow Prestwick	City of Derry	Ryanair
	Dublin	Ryanair
Inverness	George Best Belfast City	Flybe
Isle of Man	Dublin	Aer Lingus Regional
	George Best Belfast City	Citywing
Jersey	Belfast International	easyJet, Jet2.com
	Cork	Aer Lingus
	Dublin	Aer Lingus
	George Best Belfast City	Flybe
Leeds Bradford	Dublin	Ryanair
	George Best Belfast City	Flybe
Liverpool	Belfast International	easyJet
	City of Derry	Ryanair
	Cork	Ryanair
	Dublin	Ryanair
	Ireland West Airport Knock	Ryanair
	Shannon	Ryanair



DEPART	ARRIVE	AIRLINE
London City	Dublin	CityJet
London Gatwick	Belfast International	easyJet
	Cork	Ryanair
	Dublin	Aer Lingus, Ryanair
	George Best Belfast City	Aer Lingus, Flybe, easyJet
	Ireland West Airport Knock	Aer Lingus
	Shannon	Ryanair
London Heathrow	Cork	Aer Lingus
	Dublin	Aer Lingus, British Airways
	George Best Belfast City	Aer Lingus, British Airways
	Shannon	Aer Lingus
London Luton	Belfast International	easyJet
	Dublin	Ryanair
	Ireland West Airport Knock	Ryanair
	Kerry	Ryanair
London Southend	Dublin	Aer Lingus Regional
	Belfast International	easyJet
London Stansted	Belfast International	easyJet
	City of Derry	Ryanair
	Cork	Ryanair
	Dublin	Ryanair
	Ireland West Airport Knock	Ryanair
	Kerry	Ryanair
	Shannon	Ryanair
Manchester	Belfast International	easyJet
	Cork	Aer Lingus Regional
	Dublin	Aer Lingus, Ryanair
	George Best Belfast City	Flybe
	Ireland West Airport Knock	Flybe
	Shannon	Aer Lingus Regional
	Waterford	Flybe
Newcastle	Belfast International	easyJet
	Cork	Jet2.com
	Dublin	Aer Lingus, Ryanair
	George Best Belfast City	Flybe
Southampton	Dublin	Flybe
	George Best Belfast City	Flybe

AIRLINE CONTACT DETAILS

AIRLINE	TELEPHONE	WEBSITE
Aer Lingus	0871 718 5000	aerlingus.com
British Airways	0844 493 0787	britishairways.com
CityJet	0871 663 3777	cityjet.com
Citywing	0871 200 0440	citywing.com
easyJet	0843 104 5000	easyjet.com
Flybe	0871 700 2000	flybe.com
Jet2.com	0871 226 1737	jet2.com
Loganair	0871 700 2000	loganair.co.uk
Ryanair	0871 246 0000	ryanair.com

All direct routes/information correct at time of going to press but may be subject to future operator changes. Airlines may also operate connecting/change code sharing and operator franchise agreements. Please see websites for details. Calls to airlines may incur local or national call charges.



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 F: +353 (0) 66 713 6008
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 www.tralegolfclub.com





REGIONAL AIRPORTS AND FLIGHTS

The following internal flights are available within Ireland.

DEPART	ARRIVE	AIRLINE	TELEPHONE	WEBSITE
Dublin	Donegal	Flybe operated by Loganair	0871 700 2000	flybe.com
	Kerry	Aer Lingus Regional	+353 (0) 818 365 044	aerlingus.com



TRAVELLING FROM DUBLIN AND BELFAST AIRPORTS INTO CITY CENTRES

DUBLIN

Arriving in Dublin Airport, the options to get into the city centre are by bus or taxi. Buses and taxis are located just outside the arrivals hall. A taxi can cost between €15-25* depending on where you are travelling within the city. Dublin Airport is located on the north side of the city so fares to this part of Dublin will normally be cheaper than if you were taking a taxi to the south side. Direct buses to the city centre and bus and train stations are available from Dublin Bus Airlink; €6* single and €10* return. Children travel half price.

city centre with buses departing regularly throughout the day; €7.50* single and €10.50* return. The bus leaves from the bus stop located opposite the terminal exit. A taxi fare to the city centre is approximately €30*.

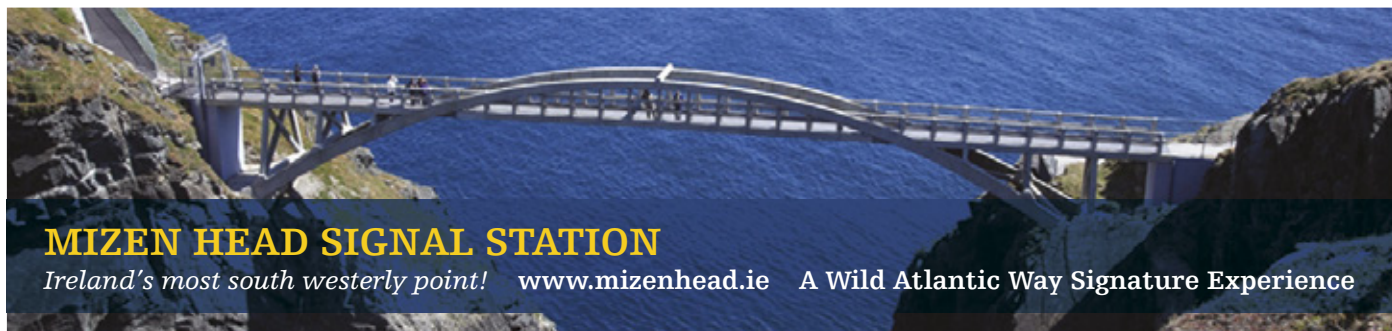
BELFAST

Belfast International Airport
The airport is situated just 18 miles/29km outside Belfast city centre and you can take a bus or taxi into the city. Airport Express 300 now operates a 24-hour service between the airport and Belfast

George Best Belfast City Airport
Airport Express 600 into the city centre runs on the hour (every 20 minutes during peak time); €2.20* single and €3.30* return. A taxi fare to the city is approximately €10*. Trains run from adjacent Sydenham station near the airport to Belfast and beyond.

*Prices are subject to change.

For information on access to and from airports and ferry ports throughout the island of Ireland, log on to ireland.com



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TRAVELLING TO IRELAND BY SEA

The island of Ireland has five main ferry ports – Belfast, Dublin, Dun Laoghaire, Larne and Rosslare.



SEA ROUTES

DEPART	ARRIVE	CARRIER	VESSEL	DURATION
Cairnryan	Larne	P&O Ferries	Express	1hr
	Belfast	Stena Line	Superfast VII/VIII	1hr 45mins
Fishguard	Rosslare	Stena Line	Stena Express Superferry	2hrs 3hrs 30mins
	Holyhead	Dublin	Irish Ferries	Cruise Ferry
Holyhead	Dublin	Irish Ferries	Dublin Swift	1hr 49mins
		Stena Line	Superferry	3hrs 15mins
Dun Laoghaire	Dublin	Stena Line	HSS Fast Craft	2hrs
		Isle of Man	Belfast	Steam Packet Company
Isle of Man	Dublin	Steam Packet Company	Fastcraft	2hrs 55mins
		Liverpool	Dublin	P&O Ferries
Liverpool (Birkenhead)	Belfast	Stena Line	Stena Lagan	8hrs
		Stena Line	Stena Mersey	8hrs
Pembroke	Rosslare	Irish Ferries	Cruise Ferry	3hrs 45mins
Troon*	Larne	P&O Ferries	Fastcraft	1hr 49mins

*Mar-Oct. All information correct at time of going to press.

FERRY AND COACH OPERATORS CONTACT DETAILS

FERRY COMPANY	TELEPHONE	WEBSITE
Irish Ferries	0871 730 0400	irishferries.com
P&O Ferries	0871 702 3477	poferries.com
Steam Packet Company	0872 299 2992	steam-packet.com
Stena Line	0844 770 7070	stenaline.co.uk
Eurolines Coach & Ferry	0871 781 8181	eurolines.co.uk

All information correct at time of going to press but may be subject to future operator changes. Calls to sea/coach operators may incur local or national call charges. Please see websites for details.

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 www.clissmannhorsecaravans.com

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UK TOUR OPERATORS (Cont.)

COMPANY	TELEPHONE	WEBSITE	Accommodation only	Angling	Coach	Cruising	Culture/heritage	Cycling	Equestrian	Gardens	Golf	Motoring	Self-catering	Short breaks	Spa	Walking	Watersports	Other	
In the Saddle	01299 272 997	inthesaddle.com																	
Irish Ferries Holidays	08717 300 400	irishferries.com																	
Just Go! Holidays	08448 111 126 08435 159 687	justgoholidays.com																	
Kings Angling and Activity Holidays	01708 453 043	kingsanglingholidays.co.uk																	
Kirker Holidays	0207 593 1893	kirkerholidays.com																	
Lastminute.com	+353 818 300 064	lastminute.com																	
Laterooms	0844 774 1001	laterooms.com																	
Leger Holidays	08445 046 251	leger.co.uk																	
Leisure Link Golf Holidays	01708 339 300	leisurelinkgolf.com																	
Links Golf St Andrews	01334 478 639	linksgolfstandrews.com																	
McKinlay Kidd Ltd	0844 804 0020	seeirelanddifferently.co.uk																	Wildlife & whiskey tours
National Holidays	08444 779 990	nationalholidays.com																	
North British Tours	01461 337 799	northbritishtours.com																	
On Course Travel	01372 451 910	ireland-oncourse.co.uk																	Horse racing
Opodo	0871 277 0090	opodo.co.uk																	
Osprey Holidays Ltd	0131 243 8098	ospreyholidays.com																	
PAB Coach Holidays	+353 1 871 9819	pabtours.com																	
Parrys International Tours	01922 414 576	parrys-international.co.uk																	
Pitchup.com	-	pitchup.com																	Camping & caravanning
Ramblers Worldwide Holidays	01707 331 133	ramblersholidays.co.uk																	
Responsible Travel.com	01273 823 700	responsibletavel.com																	Adventure, eco breaks
Saga Holidays Ltd	0800 096 0074	saga.co.uk																	
Shearings Holidays	0844 824 6351	shearings.com/ireland																	
Skills Holidays	0845 666 5544	skillsholidays.co.uk																	
Stena Line Holidays	08445 768 889	stenaline.co.uk																	
Superbreak	0871 2213344	superbreak.com																	
Take the Family	-	takethefamily.com																	
Tangney Tours	01732 886 666	tangney-tours.com																	Pilgrimages
Tayleur Mayde Golf Tours	0131 524 9554	tayleurmayde.com																	
The Camping & Caravanning Club	024 7642 2024	campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk																	Camping & caravanning
The Caravan Club	01342 318 813	caravanclub.co.uk																	Camping & caravanning
Titan Travel Ltd	0800 988 5823	titantravel.co.uk																	
Travel Republic	0208 974 7200	travelrepublic.co.uk																	
Travelling the Fairways	01334 460 789	tfgolf.com																	
Travelzoo	-	travelzoo.co.uk																	
Wilkinson Golf & Leisure	01383 629 940	wilkinsongolf.com																	

For the most up-to-date list of operators visit ireland.com/touroperators. All information correct at time of going to press but may be subject to future operator changes.

MAP & ROUTE MILEAGE PLANNER

Roads in Ireland range from modern motorways to narrow country lanes, and driving in Ireland can be a magical experience, with scenic treasures around every corner.



Whilst every care has been taken to ensure accuracy in the compilation of this map, Tourism Ireland cannot accept responsibility for errors or omissions. Due to the small scale of this map, not all holiday centres can be shown. The information on this map is correct at time of going to press. © 2014 Tourism Ireland. Map creation by Michael Schelling, www.maps.andocan.com | Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors, CC BY-SA

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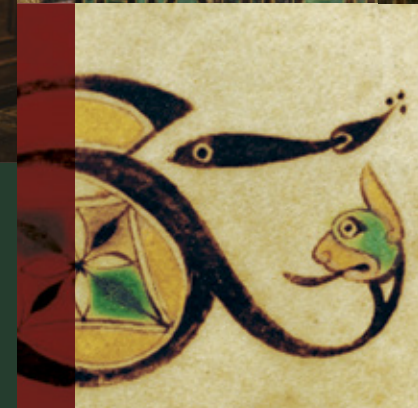
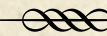
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