

# Ireland

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## WELCOME

So you want to get away from it all, try something new, wow yourself with incredible scenery? Well, the island of Ireland is just waiting for you. Waiting to blow you away with the captivating Wild Atlantic Way driving route, to pull you up to dance at a traditional céili, to thrill you with its ancient castles and spoil you with its culinary delights. Ireland's never been easier to get to, so don't stand on the sidelines, come on...

Jump into  Ireland



12  
URBAN  
LEGENDS







26  
GREAT  
TALES



20  
LOCAL  
HEROES

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## PICTURE THIS...

*As you look out over this breathtaking landscape, you could only be in Ireland. Where else would you find vibrant green fields divided by ancient stone walls; a dramatic coastline characterized 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 the Iveragh Peninsula in County Kerry, a place where land and sea collide to stunning effect.*



**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.

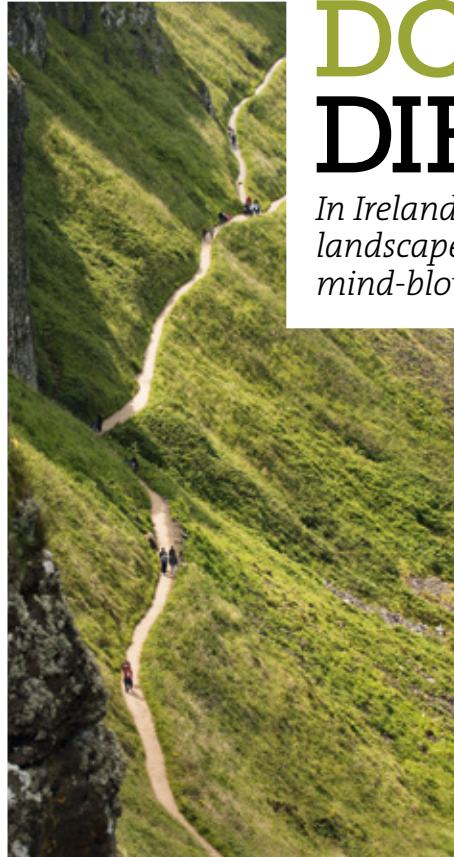


**Giant's Causeway**

Myths and majesty come together at the magnificent Giant's Causeway in County Antrim – a collection of 40,000 interlocking basalt columns created by an ancient volcanic eruption. Locals think that warring giants made it, what will your verdict be?

**DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT**

*In Ireland the magic is real. From giant creations to dramatic lunar landscapes, this is your chance to embark on the ultimate escape with mind-blowing adventures you won't forget*



**International Appalachian Trail**

Imagine a hiking trail that crosses an ocean! The International Appalachian Trail follows the ancient Appalachian Mountains and in Ireland it stretches from Donegal to Antrim, through some of the most astounding and dramatic scenery on the island.

**The Burren**

This limestone landscape in County Clare seems as barren as the moon's surface, but look closer and you'll see incredible ring forts and ancient dolmens (portal tombs) standing as silent reminders that in Ireland history is just a stone's throw away.

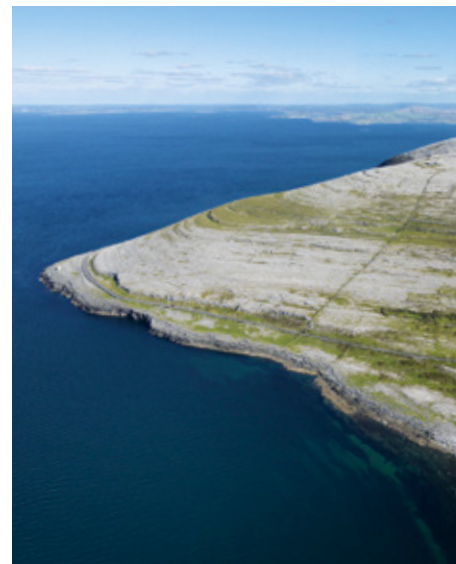


PHOTO: JAMES FENNEL

**Traditional pubs**

The conversation, the music, the roaring turf fires... there's beauty in an Irish pub. And you'll find one in every town and village in Ireland, from the Victorian splendor of Belfast's Crown Liquor Saloon to Dingle's grocery-style pubs. Order yourself a pint and enjoy!



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Ballyvolane House, County Cork



Crom Castle, County Fermanagh



Coolanowie Country House, County Carlow

PHOTO: BALLYVOLANE HOUSE JAMES FENNELL



Newforge House, County Armagh



Dromoland Castle, County Clare



Adare Manor, County Limerick

# STAY SOMEWHERE DIFFERENT

*World-famous hospitality and a wonderful range of unique places to stay – no matter what your tastes, Ireland has the perfect choice for your vacation*

As soon as you step inside a bed & breakfast on the island of Ireland, you'll know that the warm Irish welcome is not a myth. Here you can connect with Irish culture and people in wonderfully relaxed, high-quality accommodation that ranges from grand country houses, such as Newforge House in County Armagh, to cozy family homes such as Shealane Country House on Valentia Island in County Kerry. The one thing B&Bs have in common is the people: friendly, open and full of character, they'll welcome you like one of the family, and ensure you have a vacation to remember.

Fancy something a bit more rural? Try a farmhouse B&B nestled snugly among acres of pristine green fields. Take Coolanowie Country House and Organic Farm in County Carlow, for example,

or Lisnoe Old Farmhouse in County Antrim. You can have fresh farm produce for breakfast, walk through stunning landscapes in the afternoon and enjoy all the conveniences of great quality modern accommodation at any time of the day.

If your idea of luxury is decadent drawing rooms and strolls around fragrant Victorian gardens, then try a luxury Irish country house, such as Ballyvolane House in County Cork. Often owned by the original families, you'll find an abundance of charm and hospitality, with blazing fires, antique furnishings and captivating history.

And while Ireland's beautiful mansions make ideal places to stay, its castles also offer something unique. Surrounded by woodland, these incredible properties really amp up the glamour factor. Just

look at Dromoland Castle in County Clare, which has hosted US presidents over the years, and Adare Manor in County Limerick. Or why not try The West Wing, Irish-style? In Crom Castle, County Fermanagh, you can rent out the entire west wing of the castle.

Keep the historic theme going as you travel through Ireland's cities. Both Dublin and Limerick are known for their magnificent Georgian architecture, and boast gracious townhouse hotels such as No.1 Pery Square in Limerick and the architecturally dynamic Number 31 in Dublin, located in the center of the city. You'll not only sleep well in Ireland, you'll sleep in style.

For more information on accommodation, visit: [ireland.com](http://ireland.com)



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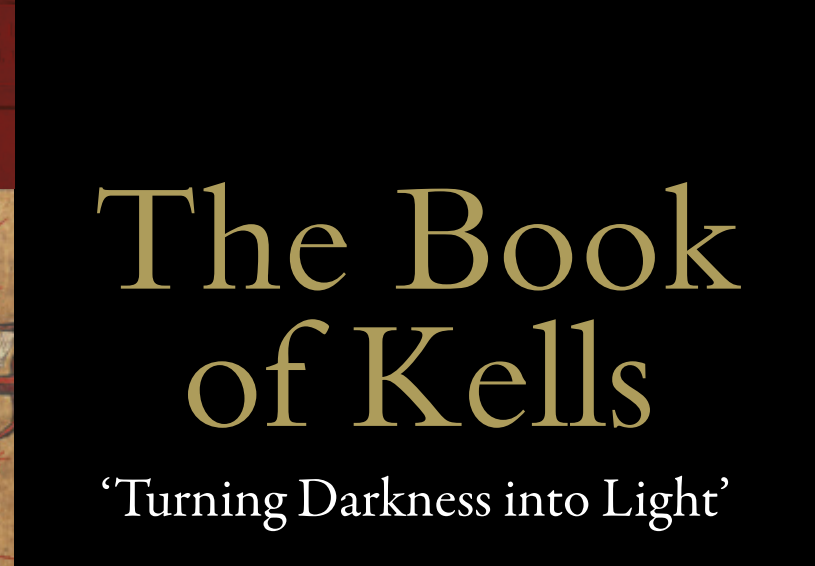
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The Skellig Islands, County Kerry



Inisheer, County Galway



Clodagh McKenna

**The Skelligs**

The incredible 6th century monastic settlement of Skellig Michael casts a spell on all who visit. This UNESCO World Heritage Site offers compelling history, exceptional views and a real adventure. Travel out by boat and explore the harsh conditions the monks endured in small beehive huts. Wildlife is abundant, with seals, basking sharks and Atlantic puffins all common to the waters here.

**Q&A**  
**CLODAGH**  
**McKENNA**

*Clodagh McKenna is an Irish TV chef and food writer, who cooks from the heart and is a champion of local artisans. We talk to Clodagh about her favorite places on the island to eat, relax and soak up the scenery*

**What makes Ireland special?**

I truly believe it's the spirit of the Irish people that makes Ireland so special. There's a warmth and welcome in Ireland that's hard to find anywhere else. And also the "craic," as we call it – Irish people are famed for their good old-fashioned sense of fun!

**What has been your best vacation in Ireland?**

One really memorable trip was to Skellig Michael off the coast of Kerry. We had a beautiful day and took a boat to the island where we explored the 6th century monastic settlement. The views, scenery and history were incredible.

**What are your favorite places on the island?**

I'm in love with Ireland's west coast – from the beauty of West Cork up to the rugged cliffs and scenery of the Burren in County Clare – there really are some breathtakingly beautiful spots. As a child, we would spend the summer in Lahinch, County Clare – my father would play golf and we would have endless days playing in the sand and surf. I have memories of enjoying ice cream along the promenade and eating bags of fresh periwinkles along the shore.

**What are your favorite places to eat?**

My own restaurants Clodagh's Kitchen in Blackrock and Arnotts Department Store in Dublin, obviously! I love Packie's in Kenmare, County Kerry, amazing fish; MacNeen House and Restaurant in Blacklion, County Cavan, owned by chef Neven Maguire; and Vaughan's Anchor Inn in Liscannor, County Clare – one of the best seafood pubs in Ireland.

**What's Ireland's best kept foodie secret?**

Earlier this year I discovered Hannan Meats' beautiful Himalayan salt-aged beef. The company, based in Belfast, cures their amazing beef in a chamber built entirely of Himalayan rock salt bricks, which produces the most exceptional flavor.

**What's your favorite view on the island?**

The Aran Islands from the air. In summer, you can take scenic air tours of the islands – it has to be one of the most spectacular views in the world.

**Favorite place for a weekend break?**

I love Doonbeg Lodge & Golf Club in west Clare. The accommodation oozes luxury and the spa treatments are fabulous.

**Describe Ireland in your own words.**

Stunning scenery, gracious people, Irish humor.

Doonbeg Lodge & Golf Club, County Clare



**Where's the beef?**

Northern Ireland is famous for its excellent beef, thanks to the countryside's lush green grasses that are grazed by herds such as those at Glenarm Castle Estate.



Cattle on the Glenarm Castle Estate, County Antrim



MacNeen House, County Cavan



Ashford Castle

Royal Irish Tours continues to provide quality vacations to Ireland. We have established a reputation as a leading tour operator to the "Emerald Isle". Unlike most of our competitors, we at Royal Irish Tours specialize in selling Ireland. We have dedicated staff in North America and in Ireland to ensure that you will have a memorable vacation. Take a look at some of our exciting packages...

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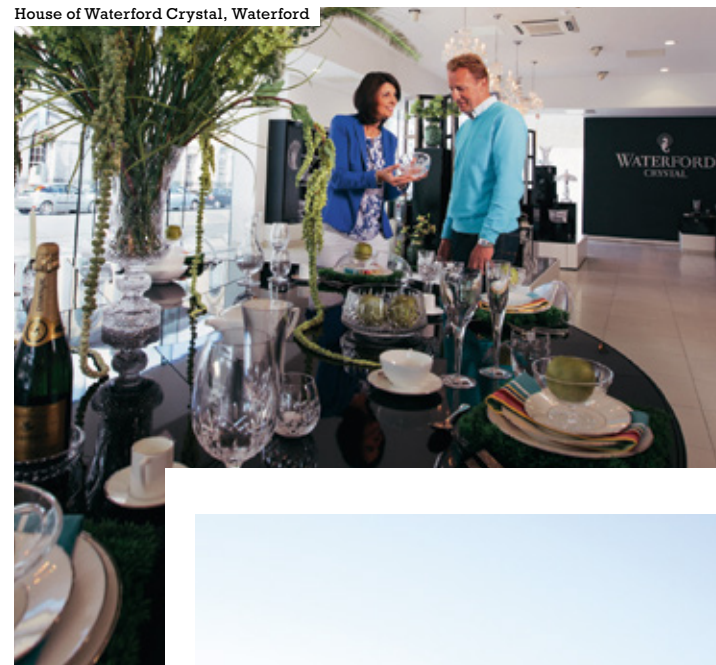
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Galway



House of Waterford Crystal, Waterford



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, and the odd secret or two tucked away amongst the stones. From the walled charms of Derry~Londonderry to the Georgian chic of Dublin, our cities are full of surprises. So whether you've got a few days or a few hours, you'll find plenty to explore, 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 by** turning the clock back about 1,000 years at the Dublinia exhibition, an interactive journey through the Viking and medieval city. History is hands-on here; you can try on Viking clothes, stroll down a bustling street and experience a very different Dublin. When you're done, leave via the archway that leads to Christ Church Cathedral, founded around 1030.

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

Head towards Grafton Street, for shopping, street entertainers and a spot of lunch. Dublin's foodie scene is sizzling, with hip eateries serving Irish produce in innovative ways. Take your time over lunch in Coppinger Row, The Exchequer Gastropub or Rustic Stone.

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

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, enjoy the beautifully illuminated city buildings such as the former parliament on College Green and The Spire on O'Connell Street. Finish the day with a wander through the bustling cultural wonderland of Temple Bar before settling down in a traditional Dublin pub for a well-earned pint.



Powerscourt, County Wicklow

## Beyond the city

**Powerscourt House and Gardens** in County Wicklow (about a 40-minute drive from Dublin) is a grand Palladian mansion on an estate that contains everything from formal walled gardens to rambling wild woods. Also in Wicklow you can explore the stunning valley of **Glendalough**, with its evocative monastic village; the adventure playground of the **Blessington Lakes**, beloved by water sports enthusiasts; and **Sally Gap**, a heather-flecked walker's paradise. County Kildare is Ireland's horse country and at the **Irish National Stud**, you can meet some of the island's most exceptional thoroughbreds, as well as visiting the Horse Museum and the Japanese Gardens, a marvel of rocks, water and inspired planting.

## 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.

### Temple Bar

Dublin's cultural quarter is a mix of food markets, tiny cafés, art galleries, street performers and some of the city's best pubs.

### Guinness Storehouse

See where it all began then finish up in the Gravity Bar for fantastic 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. The tour even ends with a whiskey tasting.

### National Museum

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



Trinity College Library, Dublin



Belfast Black Taxi Tour

## BELFAST

*If you want to discover the real Belfast, then take a Black Taxi Tour with a cab driver as your guide. It's fun, friendly and full of surprises... much like the city itself*

"She was fine when she left here," the driver quips as he drives towards the city's gleaming Titanic Quarter. He's talking about the ill-fated liner, of course. The crowning achievement of Belfast's famed Harland and Wolff shipyards is still a tangible presence in the city.

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 that is fast becoming famed for its architectural prowess, contemporary music and slick restaurant scene.

Your Black Taxi Tour will take in other well-known Belfast highlights such as City Hall, a beautiful Edwardian building right in the city center. And then of course there's Belfast's Peace Line and political wall murals, where the very stones tell intriguing stories of the history and culture of this incredible place.

Other Belfast must-sees include the gorgeous Victorian-era Crown Liquor Saloon, one of the most famous pubs in Belfast and undoubtedly the most beautiful. There's St Anne's Cathedral with its symbolic Spire of Hope, a 130ft stainless steel spire; Belfast Castle with Scottish Baronial turrets and unrivalled views of the city; not to mention the leafy University Quarter, home to Queen's University, the Botanic Gardens and the fascinating Ulster Museum.

The beauty of a Black Taxi Tour, of course, is that you're in your own private vehicle, driven by a guide who knows his or her city intimately, and who isn't shy telling you about it. So sit back and enjoy the trip. From the back of a black taxi, the city is yours to discover, and it's quite a city.

Crown Liquor Saloon, Belfast



### Beyond the city

About an hour from Belfast, the **Mourne Mountains** offer a magical escape and are one of Ireland's most scenic areas, with plenty of walking routes and forest parks. On the impressive Ards Peninsula you can visit **Mount Stewart House and Gardens**, with its stunning variety of plants from around the world, all carefully collected by the late Lady Londonderry and laid out in outdoor "rooms" bursting with color and texture. In **Downpatrick**, you'll find St Patrick's Grave and historic Down Cathedral. Alternatively, you can go north and follow the slowly winding curves of the famous **Causeway Coastal Route** to the Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge, and the Giant's Causeway – a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge

### Belfast Five to see

#### Ulster Museum

The breadth of the offerings here mark the Ulster Museum as something special with fine art, botany and ancient relics.

#### St George's Market

A charming Victorian market filled with delights such as Fermanagh Black Bacon rolls and delicious handmade chocolate truffles. (Fri-Sun)

#### Botanic Gardens

A horticulturist's dream. Enjoy the fragrant rose gardens and the heady heat of the exotic Tropical Ravine.

#### Titanic Belfast

This stunning building and exhibition are not to be missed. While you're in the Titanic Quarter, make sure to visit the newly restored SS Nomadic, the world's last White Star Line ship.

#### Ulster Folk and Transport Museum

Fifteen minutes east of Belfast you'll find this quirky museum, which tells the story of early 20th century Ulster.



Titanic Belfast



Cork by night

## CORK

*Ireland's second city (or its "real" capital, as any Cork person will tell you) is wonderfully compact and easy to explore, with a mix of markets, galleries, stores and heritage attractions within a stone's throw of each other*

**Kick off with** brunch at the English Market. Author Patricia Schultz rates Culinary Cork as one of her 1,000 Places To See Before You Die, and she's not wrong. The tight-knit stalls here offer artisan foods from an array of producers. If you're feeling adventurous, try one of the great local delicacies such as drisheen (a type of black pudding). The market is so esteemed, even Queen Elizabeth II dropped in on her State visit to Ireland in 2011.

Next, head north across the River Lee towards 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 opportunity visitors are given to ring the centuries-old bells. Look out for the instruction sheets inviting you to send tunes like You Are My Sunshine peeling over the 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 excellent seafood and artisan cheese. Fancy some fresh hake on rainbow chard with anchovy butter? Or some ice cream flavored with Beamish stout? Well, loosen that belt. It's time for lunch, and Cork's restaurants are waiting.

Later in the afternoon, walk back towards the city center for an afternoon of indulgence in Cork's Huguenot Quarter – a buzzy matrix of streets and lanes off French Church Street. The clutter of cafés, chocolatiers, boutiques and bookstores will keep you nicely entertained until it's time for some live traditional music. A perfect end to the day.

The English Market, Cork

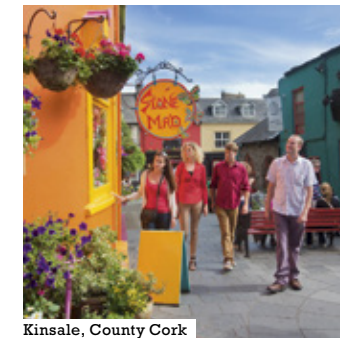


### Beyond the city

As Titanic's final footprint on its ultimately tragic voyage, the fishing port of Cobh, about a 30-minute drive from Cork city, has written itself large in the annals of maritime history. The Titanic walking tour along the multi-colored streets of the town is an ultra-informative treat, as is the Titanic Experience visitor center.

If you want to know where the Irish got their famous eloquence, pay a visit to **Blarney Castle** where (legend has it) one kiss of the iconic Blarney Stone will give you the coveted "gift of the gab."

No matter which narrow cobbled lane you wander around in the cute port of **Kinsale**, the waft of slowly cooking seafood will find you and make you want to stay.



Kinsale, County Cork

### Cork Five to see

#### Crawford Gallery

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

#### English Market

An incredible food market that wows visitors with its sights, smells and fabulous array of local produce.

#### Cork City Gaol

This chunky Georgian/Gothic sandstone edifice navigated its way through almost 100 years of Irish history and featured heavily in the fall-out from the Irish Civil War.

#### University College Cork

Don't miss the Stone Corridor here, scattered with ancient Ogham Stones. And find time for a look at the award-winning Lewis Glucksman Gallery.

#### 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, Ireland's cities are a fascinating mix of ancient intrigue and contemporary cool

### GALWAY

Go boho

Galway dances to its own beat, and what a beat it is. This city revels in infectious creativity with an artistic temperament and festival-filled character that's pretty much guaranteed to deliver a great time. From the quirky little shopping alley of Kirwan's Lane to the traditional pubs, this western beauty effortlessly blends tradition with contemporary style. 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. In contrast, lively bistros and modern delis, such as Sheridans Cheesemongers and Wine Shop, make Galway a perfect place to linger. So slow down, take it easy and enjoy the best this cosmopolitan city has to offer.

### DERRY~LONDONDERRY

Walled wonder

Ever met a walled wonder? Allow us to introduce you to Derry~Londonderry. Standing stoic and stern, the city's 400-year-old walls are a rare breed in Europe and are the only example of their kind in Ireland. Think they're just bricks and mortar? Think again. Think living history. Think 17th century sieges. Think huge cannons watching over the River Foyle, the most famous of which is the powerful Roaring Meg. Beyond the walls is a city that's big on culture (Derry~Londonderry was the UK City of Culture 2013), with a rich heritage, galleries, bustling studios and buzzing theater spaces. If you're looking for a lively time, Derry~Londonderry is definitely the place to come.



Peace Bridge, Derry~Londonderry



City walls, Derry~Londonderry

### KILKENNY

Medieval gem

Kilkenny wears its medieval history on its sleeve. In fact, the city is so immersed in the past there's even a "Medieval Mile" that stretches from the 12th century Kilkenny Castle to St Canice's Cathedral, an ancient ecclesiastical site with a round tower that is the oldest standing structure in Kilkenny today. The little cobbled lanes here feel like there are secrets waiting to be discovered around every corner. And there are. Once you've spent the morning exploring the historic sights, learning about the city's great craft scene (the Made in Kilkenny Craft trail is perfect for this) and unearthing its gourmet treasures, make your way to the Smithwick's Experience Kilkenny (open from March 2014), where you can learn all about the city's famous red ale. For anyone who ever considered history boring, we give you Kilkenny.



Kilkenny Castle



Armagh Public Library

### ARMAGH

Ecclesiastical delight

Did you know the island of Ireland has an "ecclesiastical capital"? It does and it's called Armagh. And the city's title is no new thing; this walkable, tree-loving spot has been sitting under its grand moniker for over 5,000 years, and is defined by two wonderful cathedrals. The Roman Catholic spires pierce the Armagh skies, while across from it, a Church of Ireland comrade features medieval pillars and enigmatic gargoyles peering down at the world below.

And the one name that binds both of these edifices together? St Patrick, of course. Most histories will have it that it was here, in the mid-5th century, that Ireland's patron saint had a stone church built. But Armagh isn't just about St Patrick; the city hums with excellent restaurants and busy pubs and cafés. Spend a few days here and 1930s travel writer Richard Hayward's description of the city will echo in your ears: "The beauty of Armagh is the beauty of an old woman who has aged gracefully."



### City of culture 2014

The first Irish City of Culture is a fantastic mix of impressive Georgian architecture, old markets, quirky little streets and some great galleries and museums

### LIMERICK

A cultural icon

For millions of readers worldwide, Frank McCourt's childhood memoir, Angela's Ashes, was a 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 literary associations, there are plenty of reasons. The Limerick Gallery of Art is packed with works from the greats of the Irish art world: pieces by Jack B. Yeats, Paul Henry, Nathaniel Hone and Eva Hamilton are just some of the attractions. Limerick University Concert Hall's architectural lines have welcomed many music lovers over the years, and the city has a lively traditional music scene taking place in great 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 the wonderful 800-year-old King John's Castle at its medieval heart, has always been a city of culture – 2014 just makes it official.

To find out more about all of Ireland's cities visit: [ireland.com](http://ireland.com)



The Hunt Museum, Limerick

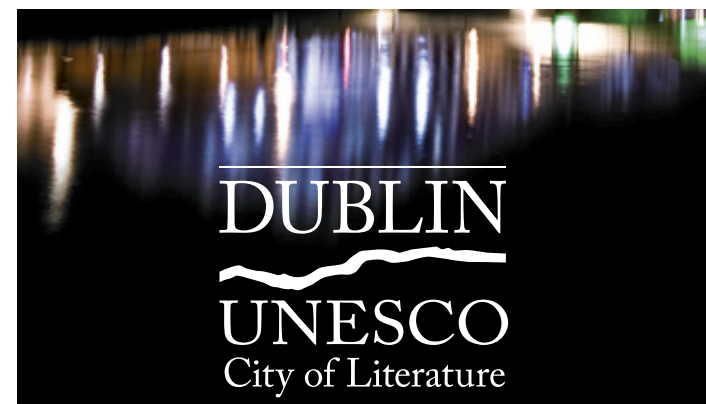


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– John Boyne,  
author of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*

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# 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 1,500-mile long coastline dotted with beaches, harbors, headlands and 150 stunning viewing points, as it nips and tucks from Cork to Donegal. Imagine stopping your car, feeling the salt spray on your face, 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, and 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, and to towns and villages where you're guaranteed to receive a famously warm Irish welcome.

The route begins (or ends, depending on your direction) in West Cork, weaving its way through lively towns and villages such as Clonakilty, famous for its great gastro pubs and legendary black pudding, and Baltimore, with a cosmopolitan

coastal atmosphere and a castle that dates back to 1215. Whale and dolphin watching are popular in these waters from May to November, and seafaring traditions are very much alive along the Mizen, Sheep's Head and Beara Peninsulas.

The Beara Peninsula is 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 quaint little villages, such as Sneem.

Continue north to Kerry's Dingle Peninsula, once home to the Antarctic explorer, Tom Crean. He retired to run the South Pole Inn in the village of Annascaul after adventuring with Scott and Shackleton. Modern-day explorers can find this pub on a peninsula defined by its mountain ranges, heritage treasures and a famous dolphin named Fungie. Dingle is the peninsula's biggest town – an enjoyable, festival-rich hotspot with seafood restaurants and old grocery-pubs that blaze with open fires and hum with conversation. 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 Blasket Islands, 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 golfing hub of Lahinch and the Cliffs of Moher towards the Burren National Park. This part of the island boasts an incredible limestone landscape and pretty villages such as Doolin, Lisdoonvarna and Ballyvaughan, all of which thrum with traditional music.

Hugging Galway Bay, the coastline continues into Galway city, a buzzing metropolitan interlude along the Wild Atlantic Way. Why not break your journey here, among the city's cobblestoned streets



Inisheer, County Galway

## Take it further

The Wild Atlantic Way is so magnificent you might never want it to stop. And the good news is that it doesn't have to. Not just yet anyway. As you travel along Donegal's stunning coastline, you encounter another of the best driving routes in the world: the Causeway Coastal Route (120 miles). Start off in the cultural urban hub of Derry-Londonderry, and explore its old city walls.



Whiterocks Beach, Antrim coast



Coumeenole Beach, County Kerry



The Glens of Antrim

Then head on to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Giant's Causeway, and the Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge. The Glens of Antrim are a highlight along the way, with undulating green valleys that dip and peak through charming towns and villages. The Gobbins Path is a dramatic cliff-hugging path, built in 1902, and due to be restored in fall 2014. The route culminates in Belfast, home of the Titanic and a fitting end to a monumental journey.

and rich history? You can 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 and Gurteen, 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 stony paths today.

Continuing north, you'll pass through the windswept Mullet Peninsula, before veering back east towards Killala Bay. 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. These days, Strandhill may be famous for its big-wave surfing, but the village also boasts great accommodation, fabulous places to eat, and lively traditional music pubs and festivals. Make sure to take in a walk around Mullaghmore Head – a definite must-do 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 challenges 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.

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.



Slieve League Cliffs, County Donegal



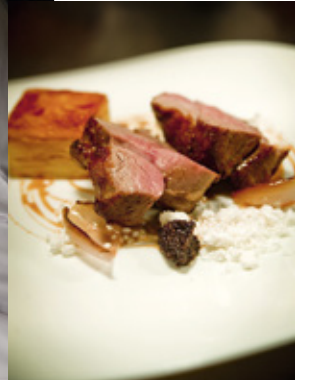
For more information visit: [ireland.com](http://ireland.com)

The Greenhouse, Dublin



The Cliff House Hotel, County Waterford

Lough Erne Resort, County Fermanagh



Frank Hederman

# LOCAL HEROES

*From award-winning smoked salmon to Connemara lamb, Irish food has a devoted band of chefs creating exceptional dishes in some of the island's most fashionable restaurants, pubs and bistros. By Aoife Carrigy*

### Smoke signals

Smoked fish is just one of the local delicacies that 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 Irish artisan produce: Gubbeen oak-smoked cheese, a sweet pepper relish from Janet's Country Fayre in County Wicklow, and fresh crusty breads from The Breadcrumb in County Kerry – washed down with an ice-cold Irish apple juice from The Apple Farm in County Tipperary.

Here, with the dramatic West Cork landscape around you, it's easy to see where Ireland's appreciation of artisan 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 in

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, and chimes perfectly with an island where taking it easy is a way of life.

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 are starting to reflect the emphasis on fresh local food with smoked fish platters and local cheese plates, which match up nicely with craft beers such as Belfast Ale or Galway Hooker. Meanwhile, in the island's 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, Dublin, The Cliff House Hotel in



*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

Waterford and Michael Deane's in Belfast have been known to leave customers lost for words. A bit of 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 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. And this search for the best produce possible is by no means unique. 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 here is ever present.

"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 to look at >

**At the market**

Permanent indoor markets such as Cork's English Market and Belfast's St George's Market (Fri-Sun) have served Irish consumers for centuries, and regular country markets across the island have long subsidized 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 across the island proved to be a game-changer both for producers and



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 flavors*



Ireland is famous for its fresh local produce



English Market, Cork

consumers of local Irish artisan food.

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, and tasty, couple of hours.

You'll find lively farmers' markets all over the country: Middleton in County Cork (Sat); Strokestown in County Roscommon (Sat); Birr, County Offaly (Sat); Kilruddery, County Wicklow (Sat); Tyrone Farmers' Market in Dungannon on the first Saturday of each month. And in Waterford city, Slow Food Ireland hosts the Merchant's Quay indoor market every Saturday and Sunday.



St George's Market, Belfast

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 on the island of 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 flavors: 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 legendary Ulster fry for breakfast in Belfast; and snack on dulse (salty seaweed) in coastal areas. Then there's Irish stew, award-winning black (blood) pudding, crab claws, and a staggering range of chutneys, jams and relishes. And let's not forget one of Ireland's most famous dishes, traditional soda bread. Made from unleavened flour with a cross in the top (which is said to let out the fairies), soda bread is served as an accompaniment to most appetizers and is a special favorite with soups, from leek and potato to seafood chowder. Ditty's Home Bakery in Castledawson, County Londonderry, is the place to pick up great fresh brown soda bread, as well as excellent local oat cakes, perfect with cheese.

One of the biggest trends on the island is the "traditional meets contemporary" twist popular in some of Ireland's coolest eateries. Downstairs >

# The Perfect Ireland Vacation Is Just A Few Clicks Away



### Luxury Castles of Ireland

- Roundtrip airfare to Ireland
- Car rental for duration
- 1 nt Dunboyne Castle, Meath
- 2 nts Kilonan Castle, Roscommon
- 2 nts Dromoland Castle, Clare
- 1 nt Fitzpatrick Castle, Dublin



### Ireland Experience by Rail

- Roundtrip airfare to Ireland
- Rail travel between cities
- 1 nt North Star Hotel, Dublin
- 2 nts Imperial Hotel, Cork
- 2 nts Malton Hotel, Killarney
- 1 nt Academy Plaza, Dublin



### Irish Genealogy Experience

- Roundtrip airfare to Ireland
- Car rental for duration
- 2 nts Brooks Hotel, Dublin
- 5 nights open B&B vouchers
- Dublin genealogist consult

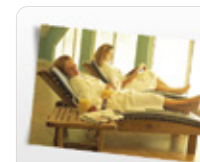
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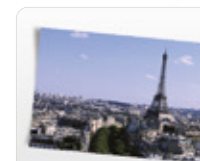
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## IRELAND FOOD



Johnnie Fox's pub, County Dublin

in the Georgian "Irish kitchen" of Hatch & Sons on Dublin's St Stephen's Green, stylish city locals and relaxed families enjoy beef and Guinness stews, smoked fish boards, and Waterford "blaas" filled with Kettle bacon from County Fermanagh. 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, as well as 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 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 hippest sections of the island's cities, tradition and a commitment to quality are alive and well. And in a world where food trends are becoming homogenous, it's good to know 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.

**August: 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.

**September: The Galway International Oyster & Seafood Festival**  
Seafood and fun come together each September at this Galway classic with seafood trails, oyster hotspots and oyster shucking championships.

**October: 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**  
Ireland is famous for superlative dairy produce, and small new buttermakers such as the Abernethy Butter Company, 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 big hearty bowl of slow-cooked Irish lamb, potato, carrot and barley goodness. 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 is one of the best.

**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, is one of the best. Enjoy it with Irish 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 or New Year, spiced beef is an Irish favorite. Try it at Tom Durcan's stall in Cork's English Market.

**Blaa**  
A fresh bread roll unique to Waterford and best eaten mid-morning filled with bacon. Soft, tasty and delicious.

**The soda farl**  
A flattened dough bread that can be eaten fresh from the griddle with butter and jam or cooked until just golden and served alongside the traditional full Northern Irish breakfast, the famous Ulster fry. It's really delicious no matter what way you eat it.



# WATERFORD Ireland's Oldest City



## It begins here...

Stroll through Waterford's picturesque streets, enjoy delicious Irish food and great shopping.

Take a guided tour of the world famous Waterford Crystal Factory where you can feel the heat of the furnace and marvel at the craftsmen.

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Discover hidden gems in the Viking Triangle such as the Victorian Theatre Royal.

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Shannon 2 hrs 20 mins  
Belfast 3 hrs 30 mins

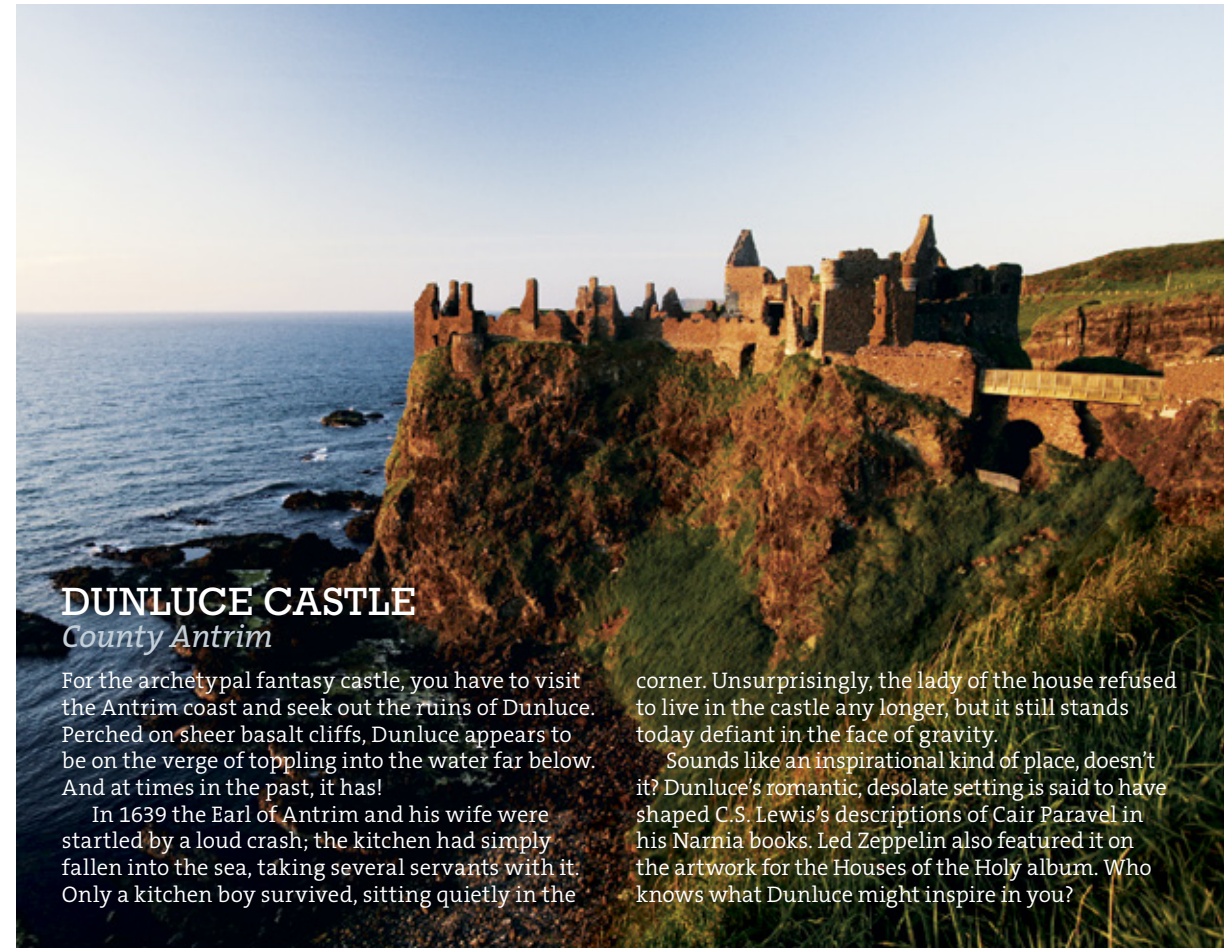


# GREAT TALES

From wild fairy tales and epic battles to Titanic-era glamour, Ireland's great castles are straight out of a fantasy novel, while the island's stately manor houses and their grand gardens reveal an aristocratic age of elegance sizzling with parties aplenty. **Vanessa Harriss** unlocks the stories behind some of the island's iconic buildings



Blarney Castle, County Cork



## DUNLUCE CASTLE

County Antrim

For the archetypal fantasy castle, you have to visit the Antrim coast and seek out the ruins of Dunluce. Perched on sheer basalt cliffs, Dunluce appears to be on the verge of toppling into the water far below. And at times in the past, 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, doesn't it? Dunluce's romantic, desolate setting is said to have shaped C.S. Lewis's descriptions of Cair Paravel in his Narnia books. Led Zeppelin also featured it on the artwork for the Houses of the Holy album. Who knows what Dunluce might inspire in you?

## BLARNEY CASTLE

County Cork

One of the most famous castles on the island, Blarney is a romantic partial ruin set in gloriously green County Cork countryside. The castle is built on the site of a 10th century wooden structure and 19th century writer Croften Clark 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." It truly is something special.

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 "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. A gentle lean backwards helped by a trusty guide will do the trick just as well. Promise.

When it comes to the stone's origins, the debate still rages... some say it was a pillow for a saint; others that it was a chunk of Scotland's historic Stone of Destiny brought back to Ireland by the King of Munster, Cormac McCarthy, in the mid-15th century.

Kiss it, and you might be able to come up with a few stories of your own.



## RUSSBOROUGH HOUSE

County Wicklow

Set near the Blessington Lakes in County Wicklow, Russborough House stands proud as one of the island of Ireland's most beautiful manor houses. Built between 1741 and 1755, the house entered its own age of elegance when Sir Alfred Beit bought it in the mid-20th century 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 truly phenomenal art collection, which included works by Vermeer, Rubens and Gainsborough. Here, in these splendid surrounds, the Beits' aristocratic glamour flourished – among the famous names that visited Russborough as guests of the couple were Jackie Onassis, Fred Astaire and the Guinness family.

IRELAND CASTLES AND GARDENS



**KYLEMORE ABBEY**  
County Galway

In 1852 successful financier Mitchell Henry and his new bride Margaret Vaughan honeymooned in Connemara in the heart of County Galway. Struck by the beauty of the place, Margaret commented on how wonderful it would be to live there. Thirteen years later a castle emerged, overlooking a glassy Connemara lake. That castle is Kylemore. For almost 10 years, Mitchell, Margaret and their nine children enjoyed their life here, but after a visit to Egypt, Margaret contracted a fever and died. Heartbroken, Mitchell built his beloved a beautiful and elegant final resting place – a small church by the lake at Kylemore. Today you can take a tour of Kylemore’s perfectly restored reception rooms and see for yourself how the Henrys lived. Make sure to visit the famous Victorian walled garden and Gothic church, or just wander around the grounds and enjoy what has to be one of the most beautiful places in the world.



PHOTO: THE NATIONAL TRUST / BERNIE BROWN

**CASTLE WARD**  
County Down

When it comes to quirkiness, you won’t get more unusual 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 relax in one? You’re in luck, these magnificent places aren’t just for looking at...



Luxury

**Ashford Castle** in County Mayo is one of Ireland’s most distinguished castle hotels, with an incredible history to match. Here you can enjoy every modern luxury in an authentic castle setting. You can also try the sumptuous Dromoland Castle in County Clare.



Entertain

Stay in the fortress of **Killyleagh**, County Down, the oldest inhabited castle in Ireland, parts of which go back to the 12th century. Its owners, the Hamiltons, host occasional performances from the likes of famous Northern Irish singer Van Morrison.



Relax

Character – and the chance to meet a ghost or two – is on offer at **Castle Leslie** in County Monaghan, where you can either book a room or stay in a cottage. Past guests include Rolling Stone Sir Mick Jagger. Why not horse ride around the estate or take afternoon tea in the drawing room?



Eat

If you want to get an informal feel for history and food, **Bunratty**, a wonderful 15th century castle in County Clare, holds medieval banquets, as does **Dunguaire Castle** on the shores of beautiful Galway Bay. Fun and lively, the banquets make a great evening out.



Learn

**Birr Castle’s Science Centre** in County Offaly is perfect for amateur astronomers, as this is where you can see the famous 19th century Great Telescope. There are acres of beautiful gardens to enjoy, with some of the rarest trees species found in Ireland and the world.



Explore

**Enniskillen Castle**, situated beside Lough Erne in County Fermanagh, was built by the Maguires who ruled Fermanagh in the 15th century. It now houses not one but two museums where you can visit exhibitions on the county’s archaeology, history and wildlife.

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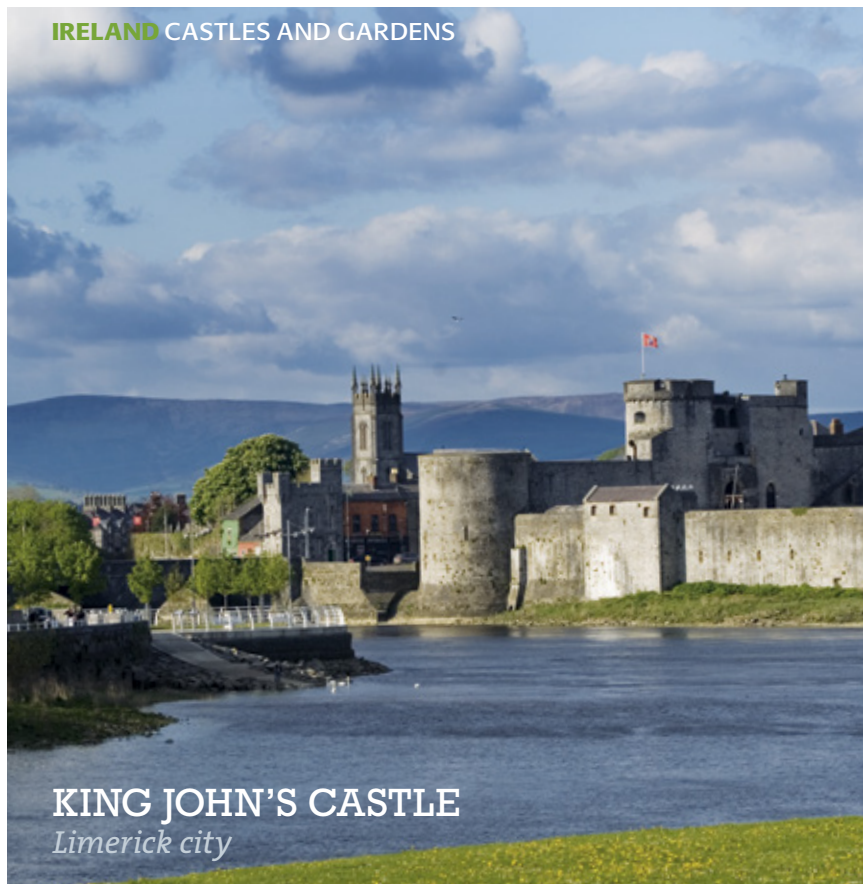
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**KING JOHN'S CASTLE**  
Limerick city

If you believe all history is living, then head for Limerick city's King John's Castle on the banks of the beautiful 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 center. Touch-screen points bring to life tales of torrid sieges and dramatic warfare, along with ghostly projections to make the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end!

Move out into the courtyard and you can wander through re-enacted scenes from a 17th century siege, while costumed guides reveal the secrets and the 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 Durrrow 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 film, Braveheart. Today, it's one of the most iconic castles on the island, with a craggy fairy-tale aspect.

Mount Stewart House and Gardens, County Down



**Gardens to enjoy**

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

**Cinematic beauty**

You might recognize the gardens at **Kilruddery House**, as they were used as a location for the Jane Austen film *Becoming Jane*. Get lost among the pretty mazes, twin canals and the fragrant woodlands – it's a different world.

**Exotic appeal**

In Ireland's southwest, the Gulf Stream creates a microclimate that allows all kinds of semi-tropical plants to flourish, as you can see on the island garden of **Garnish**, just off Glengarriff, West Cork. Or follow the **West Cork Garden Trail** to some of the area's lushest gardens including Bantry House, Glebe Gardens and Bamboo Park.

**A fabulous folly**

In County Westmeath, **Belvedere House** boasts Ireland's largest folly, the Jealous Wall. This massive "pretend ruin" was supposedly built to prevent the owner of the house, Robert Rochfort, from seeing his brother's bigger mansion nearby.

**Mini-jungle**

The Palm House at the **Belfast Botanic Gardens** is one of the earliest examples of a glasshouse and is filled with a "mini jungle" of exotic plants, including birds of paradise and frangipani.

**A lady's delight**

With views across the tranquil Strangford Lough, the world-famous gardens at **Mount Stewart** in County Down encompass 80 acres of woodland, ornamental lakes and formal gardens that are almost like outdoor "rooms", each with vibrant colors and a staggering variety of plants from all corners of the world.

**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**

In Ireland's horse country, County Kildare, you'll find the intriguing **Japanese Gardens**, right next to the **Irish National Stud**. Designed by Japanese master horticulturist Tassa Eida and his son Minoru in the early 20th century, this tranquil oasis uses trees, plants, flowers, lawns, rocks and water to symbolize the journey of life. It's a fabulous place to spend an afternoon.



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Portumna Castle & Gardens, Portumna, Co. Galway



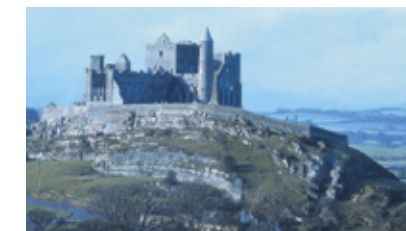
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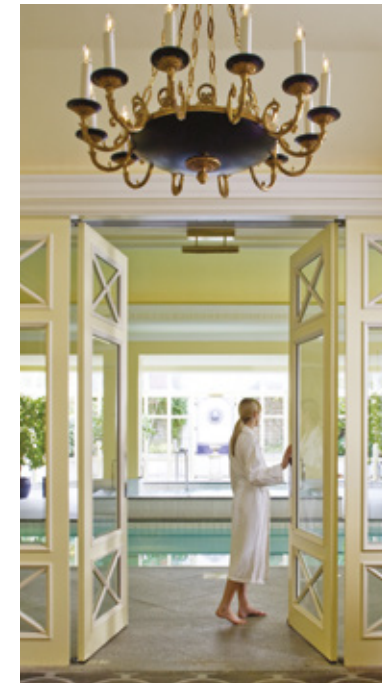


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Dungarvan Tradfest, County Waterford

# FACE THE MUSIC

*From knee-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*

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 is an unforgettable experience. And there's no doubt that my first introduction to a real traditional Irish music session was 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 for a weekend break.

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. And as a light drizzle started to descend, it seemed only natural that we ducked into 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.

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.

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



**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.



Musicians at a traditional music festival



The John Hewitt Bar, Belfast

### Trad music pubs: Six to try

A mini guide to some of Ireland's favorite trad music pubs

#### THE JOHN HEWITT BAR Belfast city

The John Hewitt Bar is the place to go for trad music in Belfast city. Located within the Cathedral Quarter and serving great food, as well as local craft beers, it's a perfect way to spend an evening in the city. Every Wednesday and Saturday night the bar sways to the sounds of trad and there's plenty of space for dancing, too.

#### AN SPAILPÍN FÁNACH Cork city

There's one pub in Cork city that's earned a legendary reputation when it comes to trad sessions. Its name is An Spailpin Fánach and the trad music is nightly. This lovely spot feels like a typical country pub. Nip in for one of these music sessions, grab a seat by the fire and enjoy a creamy pint of Murphy's.

#### 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 explorers. It's hard to choose one place from such a great selection of pubs, but twist our arms and we'd pick Monroe's in the city center. Cozy and atmospheric, with open fires, stained glass windows and well-worn wooden flooring, there's trad seven nights a week here, and set dancing every Tuesday.



#### O'DONOGHUE'S Dublin city

For Dublin's best take on the trad session, O'Donoghue's is a winner. The walls are covered with photos and drawings of celebrities, as well as musicians who have played in the past. And it still attracts musicians from all over Ireland and abroad.

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

Established in 1766, The House of McDonnell in the market town of Ballycastle is the place to go in the Glens of Antrim. With a traditional family feel, it's one of the area's oldest pubs and actually began life as a grocery shop. The interior is original 1870s in style and every Friday and Saturday night local musicians make their weekly pilgrimage here to let loose some serious trad.

#### CROTTY'S BAR Kilrush, County Clare

Relaxed and welcoming, this old pub is filled with ornate plate glass mirrors, knick-knacks and curiosities, and quiet snugs (cozy corners). From June to September there's live traditional music every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday night.



#### St Patrick's Day

The St Patrick's Festival in Dublin city (from March 14-17, 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.

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

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 traditional 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, 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 honors the famous musician credited with creating the "Sligo style" of fiddle playing. >

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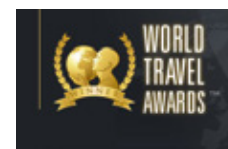
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Playing the bodhrán



The Lambeg drum

with a baton-like stick. Think of the bass drum from an ordinary kit turned on its side, strapped to your chest and you've got it. Some accounts trace its origins to Lambeg in County Antrim; others claim it was brought over from Holland by King William's troops during the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. It's also one of the loudest acoustic instruments in the world, and hearing it played is an incredible experience. Catch some drumming first hand at the Clady Day competition (late July) in the village of Markethill, County Armagh.

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 locals begin to sing.

Our trip to Sherkin was long ago. But what we do know is that what started out as a weekend getaway became a musical adventure that's engrained in our minds forever.



### 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 buzzing event full of music and "craic" (fun). And the major highlight for 2014? It has to be the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Sligo town, the biggest traditional Irish music festival and a strong community-based event.



Enjoying the Fleadh (Irish music festival), Cavan town

Back at the southern tip of the island in County Cork, they take particular pride 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. You won't be able to sit still.

Northern Ireland has its own signature instruments, too. Take the uilleann pipes, for example, a variation on the bagpipes and the star of many a trad session. They're notoriously difficult to master but in the hands of an expert, they'll make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up with their evocative sound.

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

But if you're talking drumming, there's only one contender in Northern Irish music. That's the Lambeg drum, the undeniable king of percussion. These massive two-headed drums are played

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# MAGICAL DRIVES

A big part of Ireland's appeal is that it is compact, making it perfectly suited to driving tours. You can go from mountains to sea within minutes, stopping off at all sorts of exceptional places along the way. Pól Ó Conghaile selects some to get you started

## THE RING OF KERRY

County Kerry

The Ring of Kerry in the southwest of Ireland is one of the island's quintessential touring loops, combining stunning coastal and mountain scenery with ancient heritage, tasty food and colorful towns and villages.

Starting from Killarney, head west towards Killorglin on the N72 and from there follow the N70. The road skirting along the north coast of the Iveragh Peninsula passes by the beautiful beach at Rossbeigh, and there are stunning ocean views of Dingle Bay as you approach Kells, where the subtropical Kells Bay Gardens are located.

Towards the tip of the peninsula, you'll find the staging post for day trips to the Skellig Islands, a pair of jagged rocks punching out of the ocean 8 miles off Bolus Head. Beehive huts clinging to the edge of Skellig Michael recall a monastic presence dating back to the 6th century, and local boats bring visitors out to explore this UNESCO World Heritage Site. Alternatively, you can simply visit the Skellig Experience nearby at Portmagee and venture across to Valentia Island by bridge.

Following the N70 back east, a necklace of beaches opens up along the southern shores of the peninsula towards Sneem, a quaint little village, with two squares, north and south, and a bridge in the middle.

Nearby is the equally picturesque Kenmare, a lively town with acclaimed restaurants, colorful

The Ring of Kerry

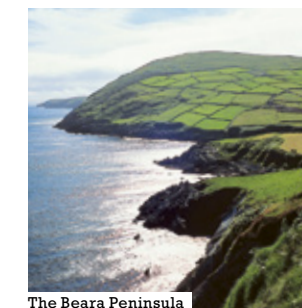
old pubs, traditional knitwear stores and a great range of luxury accommodation. It's a lovely place to linger for a few days.

The final stretch is, without doubt, the most exceptional and the scenery will leave you breathless. As you drive from Kenmare to Killarney, watch out for the famous Lakes of Killarney, best seen from Ladies View (named after Queen Victoria's ladies-in-waiting who visited in 1861). The Killarney National Park offers everything from a woodland stroll to a visit to Ross Castle, or even an unforgettable trip in a traditional jaunting car. Then you can finish up with an afternoon in the splendid Muckross House and Gardens.

Distance: 112 miles  
Time: 3-10 days



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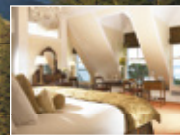
The Beara Peninsula

### The Ring of Beara Cork and Kerry

The Beara Peninsula lies just south of the Ring of Kerry, and its driving route is just as sublime, connecting Kenmare to Glengarriff (or vice versa) via a 68-mile loop. Highlights include fishing towns such as Castletownbere, mountain passes and the copper mining outpost of Allihies. Once you get to what feels like the ends of the earth, go even further and take a cable car to Dursey Island (estimated population: six).



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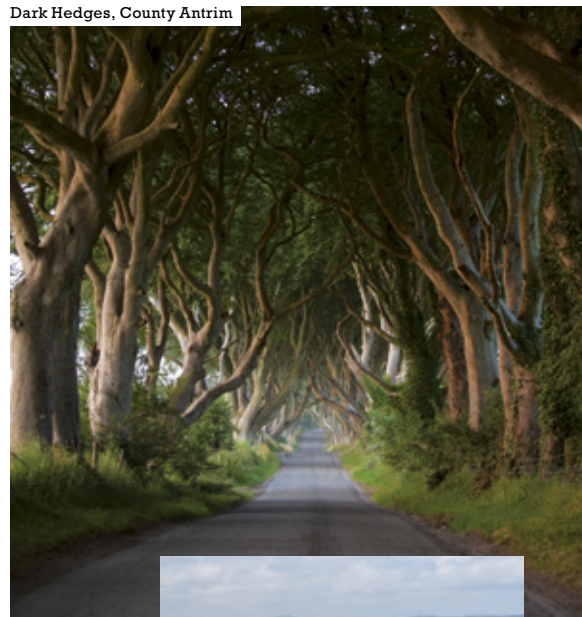
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# THE GAME OF THRONES TOUR

Northern Ireland



Dark Hedges, County Antrim



Causeway Coastal Route, County Antrim



Cushendun, County Antrim

presents sensational views – some of which you may recognize as Pyke and the Iron Islands from the series. When you get to Downhill Beach, look up and you'll see the 18th century Mussenden Temple perched on the cliff-top.

Belfast (where much of Game of Thrones is filmed in Titanic Studios) is a good place to overnight before you venture southbound the next day, with a 50-minute drive to Castle Ward. This 18th century mansion overlooking Strangford Lough provided Westeros with locations for its Whispering Wood and Winterfell. It's a wonderful mix of styles, with a vast demesne full of exotic gardens and woodland paths.

Nearby Tollymore Forest Park, which appeared in season three, is another treat – with follies including faux-Gothic gate arches and a barn dressed up as a church. To finish, take the car ferry from Strangford to Portaferry and return along the lakeshore towards Belfast via Newtownards... a perfect way to end your journey.



Distance: 108 miles  
Time: 2 days

**Westeros isn't just** a fantasy landscape. It's alive and thriving in Northern Ireland, one of the main filming locations for Game of Thrones, the hit HBO series. This driving tour takes in some of the highlights – not only for fans but for anyone who likes their scenery with a touch of fantasy.

Setting out from Belfast, the route takes in the 400-million-year-old caves at Cushendun, where a shadow was born amidst dramatic scenes in season two. Along the magical Causeway Coastal Route of the A2, you'll find Larrybane, AKA Storm's End – a walk along the base of the cliffs here towards the Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge offers epic views out towards Sheep Island.

At Ballycastle, detour south to Gracehill House, an 18th century pile best known for its Dark Hedges. This eerie avenue of beech trees was planted over 200 years ago, and is said to be haunted by a mysterious Grey Lady.

Head back north to Ballintoy and Antrim's Causeway Coast. The approach from Ballycastle

Like that?  
Try this:



Quiet Man Cottage, Cong

## Connemara Film Trail

Galway and Mayo

Ireland's Atlantic coast has a mythical feel, so it's no surprise that it has been a popular film location. Cong (The Quiet Man, 1952) on the border of Galway and Mayo, may be the most famous, but there are plenty of hidden gems here, too. Owen Wilson and Jennifer Aniston had their car blocked by sheep at Lough Na Fooley (Marley and Me, 2008). And when Gabriel Byrne headed Into the West (1993), this was where he went. The Connemara Film Trail lets you follow in the footsteps of screen legends such as John Wayne, Meryl Streep and even Ireland's own Brendan Gleeson. All from the comfort of your car!

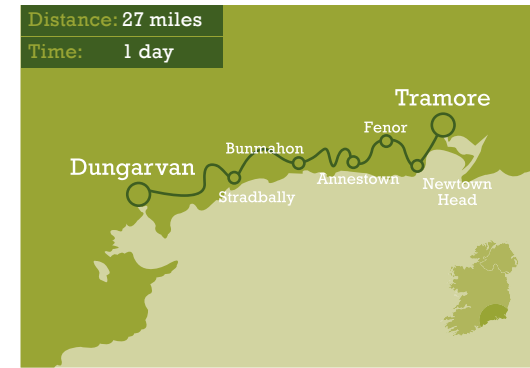


The Copper Coast

## THE COPPER COAST

County Waterford

Distance: 27 miles  
Time: 1 day



**The short blast** of Waterford coastline connecting Tramore and Dungarvan is one of Ireland's great seaside secrets. Stunning beaches and pretty villages are just some of the treats along this sweet driving tour in the sunny southeast.

Start off with a stroll through Tramore, a town that changed forever when railways brought the first Victorian holidaymakers in the 1850s. Today, Irish people still like to take their vacation here, enjoying the sandy beach that stretches on for miles, as well as the town's lively, fun atmosphere.

From Tramore, continue west along the coast road as it skirts around Newtown Head. If you've got your swimsuit, a dip at nearby Guillamene Cove is not to be missed.

The Copper Coast, a European Geopark named for its 19th century mining heritage, comes into its own along the R675. There are photogenic villages such as Fenor and Annestown, and hidden beaches lined with sea stacks. Crumbling cliffs, ancient smugglers' coves and, in winter, even the odd

Like that?  
Try this:



Saul Church, County Down

## St Patrick's Trail

Down and Armagh

Get to the heart of St Patrick's Ireland by following St Patrick's Trail as it winds its way through the counties of Down and Armagh. The perfect place to start is at the North Down Museum, located in a courtyard in the rear of Bangor Castle. Downpatrick has a number of interesting spots such as Saul Church, which is said to be on the site where St Patrick's mission to convert the Irish to Christianity began. Make sure to stop at the ruins of St Tassach's Church where the patron saint reputedly received his last rites. Finish up in Armagh, an ancient city with two cathedrals named after the saint.



Dunmore East, County Waterford

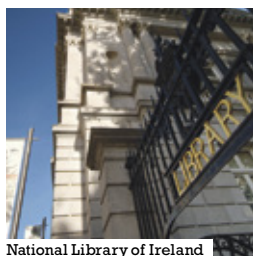
Dunbrody Famine Ship, New Ross, County Wexford



Statue of Annie Moore  
Annie was the first immigrant to be processed through Ellis Island on January 1, 1892. She left Cobh, County Cork (known at the time as Queenstown), at just 14 years of age and traveled to the US with her two brothers, Anthony (11) and Phillip (7).

# FAMILY TIES

Seeking out your family's roots and visiting the place where it all started is a life-changing experience. And with strong Irish heritage ties in the US, it's a journey people are embarking on more and more, as *Vanessa Harriss* discovers



National Library of Ireland

When it comes to the reason so many people decide to trace their family roots, the answer seems simple. "I think people like to see themselves as being part of history," explains historian Turtle Bunbury. "They like to know where they came from and how they fit into the past."

It's a truth that's not lost on American genealogist Megan Smolenyak, who explains that "studies have shown that roughly three-quarters of people of all ages are interested in their ancestry."

According to family historian Lesley Anderson, technology has really opened up the world of ancestry, making it accessible to a wide range of people. "We have the internet and companies such as Ancestry.com, which make it easier than ever to access historical documents," Lesley notes. "You can see a parish register from the 1800s while sitting in your pajamas."



Linen Hall Library, Belfast

And from a humble mouse and screen to traveling across oceans; the most rewarding journeys end with a poignant visit to the place where it all began.

## Getting started

Of course, everyone has to start somewhere, and even with the dramatic new amounts of online resources, it can sometimes be a challenge. "It's all about narrowing the search," says Megan. "The key is identifying a town of origin, then you've got a shot at learning more, but it can take some digging."

Ireland's paper trail, while fascinating, can at times result in unexpected twists and turns, as Megan explains. "The destruction of critical records back in the 1920s, the fact that civil registration didn't kick in until 1864, and the extreme patchiness of early church records – particularly Catholic records – all make Irish genealogy more challenging than many other types."

But these challenges ultimately turn to positives. Overcoming these hurdles, uncovering the past and visiting the birthplace of your ancestors brings a satisfaction that takes many by surprise. It is an experience that rewrites your own personal history.

## Tracing Ulster-Scots roots

Researching an Ulster-Scots background faces similar challenges and rewards, says Boyd Gray, an amateur family historian who works for the West Ulster Genealogy Society, although church records can be useful. "Most of the Presbyterian churches kept records from around 1830," Boyd says. "The Church of Ireland started decades before that and often included Catholic and Presbyterian baptismal records. This is because it was the only church by law allowed to record baptisms, marriages or burials."

## Changing lives

"Learning about your family can really change your view of history," says Megan. "I think the most common response is respect and admiration for what our ancestors endured, and a sense of hope and strength that comes from knowing



Murrisk Famine Memorial, County Mayo

that their blood flows in your veins. If they could survive war, famine or uprooting, you can weather your current problems. They were resilient and so are you."

Irish-American Gerry Britt found the experience one of the most rewarding of his life: "It really changed me," he explains. "The genealogy was important, but I had always thought of it as an end. My tree was really only a map that led me to the people, the land and the culture that had shaped my family for hundreds of years."

"When I finally got to Ireland, the sense of comfort was overwhelming, but the sense of community was even stronger. My grandfather left Drombane, County Tipperary, over 100 years ago. But when villagers introduced me to another local they always said, 'This is Gerry Britt, home from America.' I can't explain it any better than that."



## Did you know?

An incredible 22 US presidents have Irish roots, from George Washington (County Cork) to Ronald Reagan (County Tipperary) and the Ulster-Scots Agency notes that 17 of America's 44 presidents have Ulster-Scots ancestry. That's quite a history.

## The essentials

### Ireland Family History on Facebook

This page was created to help people on their Irish genealogy adventure. It posts interesting stories, alerts you to new resources available, and is a good place to share experiences. [facebook.com/IrelandFamilyHistory](https://facebook.com/IrelandFamilyHistory)

### Ireland Reaching Out

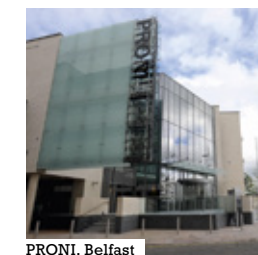
Ireland Reaching Out (also known as Ireland XO) is a "reverse genealogy project," which aims to connect the Irish diaspora of 70 million. Rather than letting ancestor hunters come here, Ireland XO is reaching out through genealogists across the island who can put you in touch with people who are tracing your family tree. [irelandxo.com](http://irelandxo.com)

### National Library and the Irish Times

There are few finer resources than Dublin's National Library or the Irish Times Ancestry project. The National Library (with its beautiful reading room) outlines the basics. Meanwhile, the Irish Times last name search is a gem of a resource. [nli.ie](http://nli.ie) and [irishtimes.com](http://irishtimes.com)

### Census records

Ireland's 1901 and 1911 census records are easily searchable online and should be a touchstone in any ancestral search. [census.nationalarchives.ie](http://census.nationalarchives.ie)



PRONI, Belfast

### Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)

This is the official depository for all public records from Northern Ireland, so people now and in the future can enjoy reading about past generations. Its huge range of material comprises records of historical, social and cultural importance, all of which are available to the general public for free. The General Register Office for Northern Ireland registers all births, deaths, marriages and adoptions in Northern Ireland. [proni.gov.uk](http://proni.gov.uk) and [nidirect.gov.uk](http://nidirect.gov.uk)

### Ulster Historical Foundation

This non-profit family history research foundation has been helping people trace their Scots-Irish and Irish roots for more than 50 years. There are over 200 family history records here, as well as a free Ulster-Scots app. [ancestryireland.com](http://ancestryireland.com)

### Griffith's Valuations

It's doubtful that Sir Richard Griffith, the Irish baron in whose name Griffith's Valuation was carried out, could have guessed how

essential this record would be to ancestral researchers some 160 years later. Should your query lie between 1860 and 1900, this is your ticket. [askaboutireland.ie](http://askaboutireland.ie)

### Military archives

The Military Archives and the newly launched records website hosts an astoundingly rich and diverse body of information. [militaryarchives.ie](http://militaryarchives.ie)

### Dunbrody Famine Ship and Irish Emigrant Experience

Today, 40 million people in America claim Irish heritage. Many of those families made the Atlantic crossing in what were lamentably known as "coffin ships." The Dunbrody was one such ship, and her replica in County Wexford is a poignant reminder of those journeys and the lives that were lost. Passenger lists for New York are available for 1846-1890, while the Famine years (1846-1851) are covered for the cities of Boston, Baltimore, New Orleans and Philadelphia. [dunbrody.com](http://dunbrody.com)

Finally, many counties in Ireland boast their own county genealogy center and the level of local knowledge found can be highly useful in getting over any hurdles. The National Archives has a list of each of the individual county centers. If you're in Dublin, visit the genealogy center at Glasnevin Cemetery. [nationalarchives.ie](http://nationalarchives.ie)



## Explore Ulster the Cradle of American Presidents

No fewer than 17 US presidents have been elected with Ulster-Scots/Scotch-Irish roots, reflecting the huge impact of the Scotch-Irish on American society.

Visit Ulster and see the heartlands of the Ulster-Scots/Scotch-Irish people, and explore the places that have such resonance in the story of America. Wander through the picturesque village of Ramelton, Co. Donegal, which was home to the family of President James Buchanan, who famously said, "My Ulster blood is a priceless heritage."

Explore the ancestral home of President Chester A. Arthur at Cullybackey, Co. Antrim, which will reopen in 2014 following extensive refurbishment; and follow in the footsteps of one of the greatest Presidents, Ulysses S. Grant, who visited his own ancestral home in Co. Tyrone in 1878.

To find out more visit [www.ulsterscotsagency.com](http://www.ulsterscotsagency.com)

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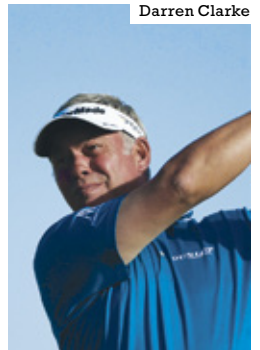
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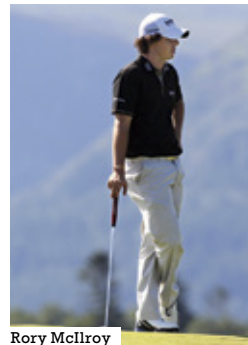


ROYAL COUNTY DOWN  
County Down

Over the course of his many visits, Tiger Woods has played the famous Royal County Down course at the foothills of the Mourne Mountains



ROYAL PORTRUSH  
County Antrim



Rory McIlroy

# PLAYING THE GREATS

For a small island, Ireland packs a mighty punch when it comes to golf, with some of the finest links courses on the planet. **Brian Keogh** looks at the natural powerhouses shaped by nature and adored by the professionals

### Top shots

Rory perfected his swing on some of Ireland's top golf courses, including his home club of Holywood, County Down, and the mighty links courses at Portrush, Rosses Point and The European.

Ireland is the world's smallest golfing superpower. The island has claimed seven of golf's Major titles over the last few years, and boasts some of the greatest courses – and golfers – in the world. This isn't some idle claim either; there are little more than 150 links courses on the planet, and Ireland has over a third of them, making a trip to the island a must for any golfer who's looking for a combination of primeval terrain, world-class golf and, even better, fun.

Great courses produce great players and none more so than Royal Portrush on the rugged north coast of County Antrim, just a stone's throw from the iconic Giant's Causeway. It was here that 2011 US PGA champion Keegan Bradley let himself get swept away in the emotion and power of it all. Originally from Vermont, but with ancestors from County Cork, Keegan made the trip "home" for the Irish Open at Royal Portrush in 2012.

"Hundreds of people have told me 'welcome home,' which gives me chills almost every time they say it," said Keegan. The experience clearly had a big impact on him, and as well as enjoying the friendly welcome, Keegan made sure he got in a trip to the Giant's Causeway and the Old Bushmills Distillery on his visit. "Everybody has just been so great. The area is unbelievable and the people are extraordinary."

No wonder 2010 US Open champion Graeme McDowell, and 2011 British Open winner Darren Clarke are proud to call the coastal town of Portrush their home. "People should come and play in Ireland because we have a lot of the best courses in the world, not just up here near Portrush, but all over Ireland," says Clarke, originally from Dungannon in County Tyrone. "The Irish are a friendly and welcoming people. You'd go a long way around the world to find people better than the Irish."

It's a fact that's not lost on some of the game's legends, many of whom have been coming to Ireland for years – both for the quality of the courses and the unrivalled atmosphere they find here. Tiger Woods has frequently touched down at the island's best links courses to practice for the British Open (and get in a little fishing in his spare time.)

Over his many visits, Woods has played the famous Royal County Down, voted Ireland's top course in the 2013 Golf Digest Ireland Top 100. Created by the legendary architect Old Tom Morris at the foothills of the Mourne Mountains, neither Jack Nicklaus nor Tom Watson managed to conquer its majestic, savage beauty. Royal County Down is a unique test in the game with its myriad blind shots, subtle run-offs and fringe-topped bunkers in a picture-postcard setting.

Heading south from Royal County Down, you come to the hidden gem of the County Louth

Golf Club, or "Baltray" as it's known, arguably the friendliest club in Ireland. If you're in any doubt, ask the visitors who once teed off there and ended up finishing their round on neighboring Seapoint Golf Links. They had inadvertently crossed the boundary wall at the 14th tee, and continued their game on the fine course next door. The group didn't realize the mistake until heading to the car park to search, in vain, for their hire car. But they were soon fed, watered and eventually taken back to Baltray by the good-humored Seapoint folks, where they continued on their way.

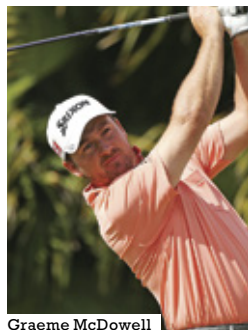
Of course, if they had kept going south along the east coast, they would have soon reached County Dublin and some of its great links courses including The Island at Donabate, world-famous Portmarnock and its next-door neighbor Portmarnock Links. Further down the coast at Brittas Bay in County Wicklow, The European Club awaits in all its >

### Natural beauty

Situated on the stunning north Antrim Causeway Coast, the Royal Portrush Golf Club is the only club on the island of Ireland to have hosted The Open Championship. The club welcomes visitors all year round to play the Dunluce Links and Valley Links courses.



## IRELAND GOLF



Graeme McDowell



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LAHINCH GOLF CLUB  
County Clare

Ranked among the greatest courses in the world, Lahinch enchants and torments golfers in equal measure. This place has it all: a stunning location overlooking Liscannor Bay, a unique links challenge and goats that act as weather forecasters – if they're sheltering by the clubhouse, you know you're in for a rather wet round!



ROYAL PORTRUSH  
County Antrim

At this mighty County Antrim club, you can easily visualize a young Graeme McDowell perfecting the arrow-straight hitting and short-game efficiency that won him the 2013 US Open. It's home to two of the most challenging courses in the world, too: the Dunluce Links, and the Valley Links. Which one do you fancy testing your skills against?



COUNTY SLIGO  
GOLF CLUB

Rory McIlroy may have grown up playing at the Holywood Golf Club in County Down, but it was here in Rosses Point, County Sligo, where he burst onto the scene by becoming the youngest West of Ireland champion at the age of 15. If you're after a challenge, why not treat yourself to a game on the course that made him famous?

*You'll make friends as easily as a double bogey in Ireland, where you should expect the unexpected as readily as a bad bounce*

splendor. Framed by sand dunes on the edge of the Irish Sea, The European is where three-time major winner Pádraig Harrington honed his game for those incredible back-to-back wins in the British Open. Perfectly suited to the more cerebral golfer, there are a few quirky little additions here for the more superstitious among us, such as the famous "Cursing Stone" not far from the 10th tee. According to local legend, you can curse a person or thing if you rotate the seven small stones that sit on the top of the rock in an anti-clockwise direction.

Head southwest along the coast and you can stop to play at Rosslare in County Wexford, where generations of visitors have witnessed the sea in all its turbulent majesty, or head on to Kerry in the far southwest and lose yourself in the dunes of Waterville, Tralee, Dooks or Ballybunion.

Don't be surprised when you see a statue of the late US Open winner Payne Stewart at Waterville on the Ring of Kerry. Stewart stayed here with Tiger Woods and Mark O'Meara on a memorable golfing trip in the late 90s, and found it to be the perfect place for that great Irish golfing tradition: the 19th hole knees-up. "We get into the pub and get round a piano," Stewart said of his post-round routine. "I bring out my harmonica and the next thing you know it's about 4am."

You'll make friends as easily as a double bogey in Ireland, where you should expect the unexpected as readily as a bad bounce. "That's links golf," says Harrington with a laugh. "You hit it and it's still a mystery until you actually find your golf ball. It's the same thing when you travel around the country – it looks small on a map but get out there and explore; you're always discovering new places to go, new people to meet."

Drive north through Limerick into County Clare and you have the new and the old side by side with Greg Norman's modern Doonbeg links only around >

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**BALLYLIFFIN**  
County Donegal



**STRANDHILL**  
County Sligo



Pádraig Harrington

*Given the golf, the scenery and the people, it's no wonder that many find it a wrench to head back home*

20 miles from storied Lahinch, home of the late, great amateur golfer John Burke. Winner of no fewer than 26 amateur championships, nine of them at national level, he was a true character with a typical Irish sense of humor.

Given the golf, the scenery and the people, it's no wonder that many find it a wrench to head back home. Two-time Masters Champion Bernhard Langer had just that experience when he stopped off to practice in County Sligo on the wild west coast; he ended up staying for a week at Enniscrone. He could easily have spent his time at County Sligo Golf Club's famous Rosses Point links, home of the West of Ireland Championship, which Rory McIlroy won back-to-back as a teenager in 2005 and 2006. Or he could have stopped along the way there to see the wild dunes at Carne Links in County Mayo or the lilting charms

of Connemara Golf Club in the wilds of beautiful County Galway.

If you think that's all Ireland has to offer, keep heading north along the Atlantic coast for the pristine beaches of County Donegal and the ultimate links experience at the likes of Ballyliffin, Rosapenna, Portsalon, Narin and Portnoo, Dunfanaghy or little Cruit Island, the nine-hole course you reach by boat.

Most visitors travel from one great place to the next by car, but not American author Tom Coyne, who one day realized that Ireland was ringed with golf holes and set off to play every single seaside course he encountered – on foot. Coyne, whose hilarious and uplifting book *A Course Called Ireland* was an international bestseller, explains the lure of Irish golf for many visitors.

"Ireland, a place the size of Indiana, has 40% of the world's supply of links courses," he says. "That's really one of the notions that kicked my whole adventure off in the first place."

So what's stopping you? Your own adventure is just waiting...

**Need to know**  
the essential information

*The inside track on how to make your golfing vacation as smooth and enjoyable as possible*



**Plan ahead**

Going where the road takes you is part of the beauty of a trip to Ireland. Still, a bit of planning is always a good idea. Check out courses in the county-by-county list provided by the Golfing Union of Ireland [gui.ie](http://gui.ie). Ask about special offers for visitors and groups from the club or your tour operator.

If you haven't brought your own clubs, you can rent them at many clubs or hire before you fly and pick them up at the airport through European Ryder Cup captain Paul McGinley's convenient [clubstohire.com](http://clubstohire.com) service.

**Be prepared**

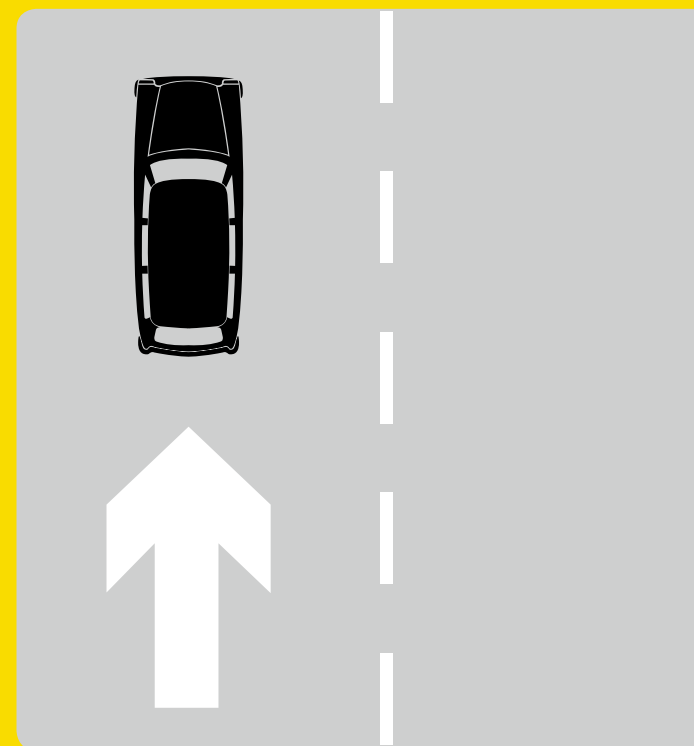
The Irish weather might be unpredictable but that doesn't mean you can't play all year round, especially on a links. April to October is the best time and with those long summer evenings, you can play until 10pm and still make it to the 19th hole.

**Dress to impress**

Most golf clubs on the island of Ireland are relaxed and informal, but there is usually a basic dress code. Jeans, shorts and sneakers are generally not acceptable, while some clubs might insist on a jacket and tie for the dining room. The safest bet is smart-casual. Always bring waterproof gear and sunscreen just in case. Many clubs will only allow soft spikes, so do check in advance.

For the lowdown on golf in the Home of Champions, visit: [ireland.com/golfnow](http://ireland.com/golfnow)

# ATTENTION / ACHTUNG



## Drive on left Conduire à gauche Links fahren

YouTube f t rsa.ie



RSA

Udarás Um Shábháilteacht Ar Bhoithre  
Road Safety Authority

**The Cloughmore Stone**  
Legend has it that the Cloughmore Stone, a 40-tonne granite boulder standing on a mountain ridge 1,000ft above Rostrevor, must have arrived there through the work of a giant. It's said that it was probably thrown at Fionn mac Cumhaill (Finn McCool), hero of the Ulster sagas, during an argument with another giant.



# LAND OF LEGENDS

*Ireland's mythical tales, with their compelling characters and ancient landscapes, have endured for centuries, as **Mal Rogers** discovers*

**Nobody knows quite** how she managed it, but Aoife, with a flourish of magic, turned her stepchildren into swans. Growing tired of her husband Lir's children, she concocted a malign spell to ensure that they would swim about lonely Lough Derravaragh in County Westmeath for some 300 years. Westmeath's own wicked stepmother was in no mood for compromises.

The legend of the Children of Lir is just one of countless Irish tales, the product of centuries of strange goings-on in this misty, dramatic island. Villains, heroes, the odd mournful banshee (a female spirit who heralds death), and alchemists conjuring up potions on ancient stones are the cast.

The islands around Ireland, such as Tory, Aran,

Achill and Rathlin, claim their own magical creatures, too. Take Selkies, for example. These mythical beings live most of their time as seals, but can take human form when they reach land. But don't expect to be making friends with them any time soon. Once a selkie has talked with a human, there'll be no contact for a further seven years. Sad, but true.

When it comes to Irish myths, melancholy and magic, just like danger and delight, are essential elements. North Antrim is dominated by two of Ireland's most famous icons – the Giant's Causeway and the Old Bushmills Distillery. One has given rise to eerie legends, tales of giants, fantastic feats, imaginary happenings and discussions about the Wee Folk. And funnily enough, the Giant's Causeway has done much the same thing.

Several theories exist to explain this astonishing rock formation on Antrim's spectacular Causeway Coast. Is it the work of giants or geology? Some 60 million years ago molten lava erupted then cooled, >



The Cloughmore Stone, Rostrevor, County Down

The Burren, County Clare



*This is a place of bewitching rocks and crags shaped by 350 million years of weather, with more than 90 megalithic tombs and numerous ring forts*

Mountain sheep, County Kerry



Ben Bulbin, County Sligo



The Giant's Causeway, County Antrim



*Those who tend towards a supernatural dimension focus on a giant, Fionn mac Cumhaill (Finn McCool), who built the causeway to walk to Scotland in order to do battle with another giant, Benandonner*

shrinking into these weird shapes, say the scientists. But those who tend towards a supernatural dimension focus on a giant, Fionn mac Cumhaill (Finn McCool), who built the causeway to walk to Scotland in order to do battle with another giant, Benandonner. However, it was Fionn's wife Oonagh who cleverly managed to scare off the Scot. Tricking the giant, Mrs mac Cumhaill showed him the door, and watched as he tore up the causeway behind him. The basalt rock columns are all that remain...

Landscape and weather fire the imagination, and accordingly Ireland's terrain has produced a huge cannon of folklore in which surreal rock shapes, such as the Proleek Dolmen in County Louth were created by giants; the country's numerous ring forts were entrances to the realm of the fairies; and mountains such as Ben Bulbin in County Sligo played home to a mythic band of warriors called the Fianna. And these are just the places you can see.

Irish mythology is full of "otherworldly" locations, beyond the confines of a map and past the furthest edges of the west coast. One such place is Tír na nÓg – the "land of the young" where there is no disease and death. The great warrior Oisín followed the beautiful Niamh to this mythical land, galloping across the waves on a magical horse. But on a nostalgic visit to his homeland, he fell from his horse near the village of Elphin in County Roscommon and the magic spell that had kept him young was broken.

Elphin has another claim to fame: St Patrick visited here in the 5th century and consecrated a church, while nearby at Rathcroghan is a massive archaeological site at the very heart of Irish mythology – an area with over 5,000 years of legends. Warrior Queen Medbh (Maeve) from the epic tale Táin Bó Cúailnge (The Cattle Raid of Cooley) had her palace here, while Oweynagat (Cave of the Cats) has been in use since the Bronze Age, and is supposedly an entrance to the otherworld. If you do enter, just make sure you come back out again!



Grianán of Aileach, County Donegal

Of course, while Ireland is famous for its many tales and legends, it has also influenced writers from across the world. It's thought that J.R.R. Tolkien was inspired by the bewitching landscape of The Burren in County Clare to create Middle Earth in The Lord of the Rings.

The Burren's spectral limestone pavements loom out of the turf in harsh, haunting fashion. This is a place of bewitching rocks and crags shaped by 350 million years of weather, with more than 90 megalithic tombs and numerous ring forts. And as the setting sun frames the famous Poul nabrone Dolmen, it's easy to believe that this is a truly magical place.

On the far side of the country, the scene is set for another myth. Surrounded on three sides by sea, with the Cooley Mountains rising steeply behind the medieval village of Carlingford in County >

### Folklore favorites

#### HILL OF TARA County Meath

Although standing only 300ft high, almost a quarter of Ireland can be seen from the Hill of Tara, which according to tradition was the seat of the High Kings of Ireland. Located near the River Boyne, the hill has archaeological, religious and spiritual significance. At the solstices, crowds still gather here as they have done for millennia.

#### BOA ISLAND County Fermanagh

Boa Island on Lough Erne is named after Badhbh (pronounced "Bye-ve"), the Celtic goddess of war. Here you'll find two extraordinary stone statues: Boa Man – also known as the Lusty Man – and the Janus Stone. Both are around 1,500 years old and are rich in legend, but no one knows for certain their origin.

#### GRIANÁN OF AILEACH County Donegal

The incredible stone fort Grianán of Aileach sits on a hilltop in Inishowen offering panoramic views over the peninsula. Its origins are shrouded in mystery – but it was said to have been built by the Tuatha Dé Danann, a mythical race who invaded Ireland before the Celts.

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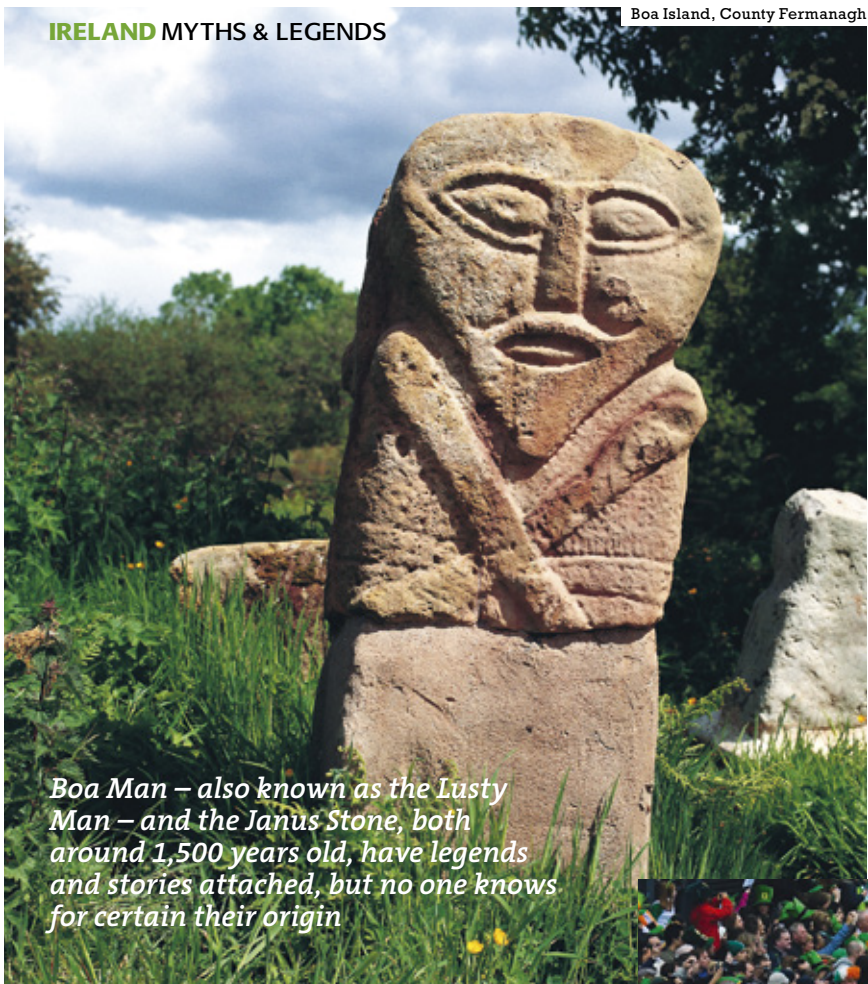
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*Boa Man – also known as the Lusty Man – and the Janus Stone, both around 1,500 years old, have legends and stories attached, but no one knows for certain their origin*

cauldron from which Bram Stoker's Dracula sprang. The Dublin man's book was essentially an Irish tale played out in Whitby, London and Transylvania — probably the first time these three areas had ever appeared together in a work of fiction. And maybe the last, too.

Stoker was immersed in the folklore and mythology of Ireland. His mother (from Sligo in the northwest of Ireland) would regale the young Bram with stories about the 1832 cholera epidemic in the west of Ireland, rumored to have originated in an unknown place in central Europe. Those infected were often buried alive. She also told her somewhat impressionable son grisly accounts of the Famine, when starving people would drink blood from the veins of cattle.

These stories were an echo of earlier Irish folklore with its recurring theme of "the undead" — particularly associated with the Celtic festival of Samhain, now known as Halloween.

Of course, you don't need to have an interest in the supernatural to enjoy Ireland. It doesn't matter if you don't believe in giants, fairies, water spirits or even mermaids. You'll still have a wonderful time in these glorious surroundings.

And the beings from the otherworld won't mind a bit. Take it from us, they're used to it.



St Patrick's Day, Dublin

### Myths and traditions that endure

*In this land of legend and myth, it's not surprising that the shamrock of St Patrick lays claim to its own story*

According to legend, Patrick used the three sepal leaf to explain the concept of the Trinity to the pagan Irish. Today, Ireland's patron saint is celebrated on March 17 with festivals, parades and events all over the island.

Many other legends persist in Ireland. The Claddagh ring, associated with Galway since at least the 16th century,

can represent faith, trust, loyalty or betrothal depending on its design. Wear it with the heart turned out, and people know you're looking for love; if you have the heart turned in, you're spoken for! The rings are still popular today, and can be bought in jewelry stores, such as Thomas Dillon's in Galway city — the original maker of the ring.

In counties Louth and Kildare, St Brigid's crosses are still a feature of the Celtic first day of spring, February 1. Made out of rushes, they are placed in homes, bringing blessings and good luck throughout the year. The practice is said to have its origins in the 5th century, and relates to the legend of Brigid's conversion of a dying pagan. She fashioned a makeshift cross by plaiting rushes together. St Brigid's crosses are still made in this way today.

One of Ireland's biggest festivals is the ancient pagan celebration of Halloween, or Samhain as it was known — the date when the souls of the dead returned to their homes.

Thousands of years ago, great fires were built, but it's all about costumes and trick-or-treating now. Derry~Londonderry city is one of the best places to enjoy Halloween with the Banks of the Foyle Halloween Carnival. The five-day festival features culture, art and a parade.

While the exact origins of Halloween are shrouded in mystery, there's still one thing we can be certain of — in Ireland, they've been celebrating it for some 5,000 years. Now, that's what you call an enduring legend.



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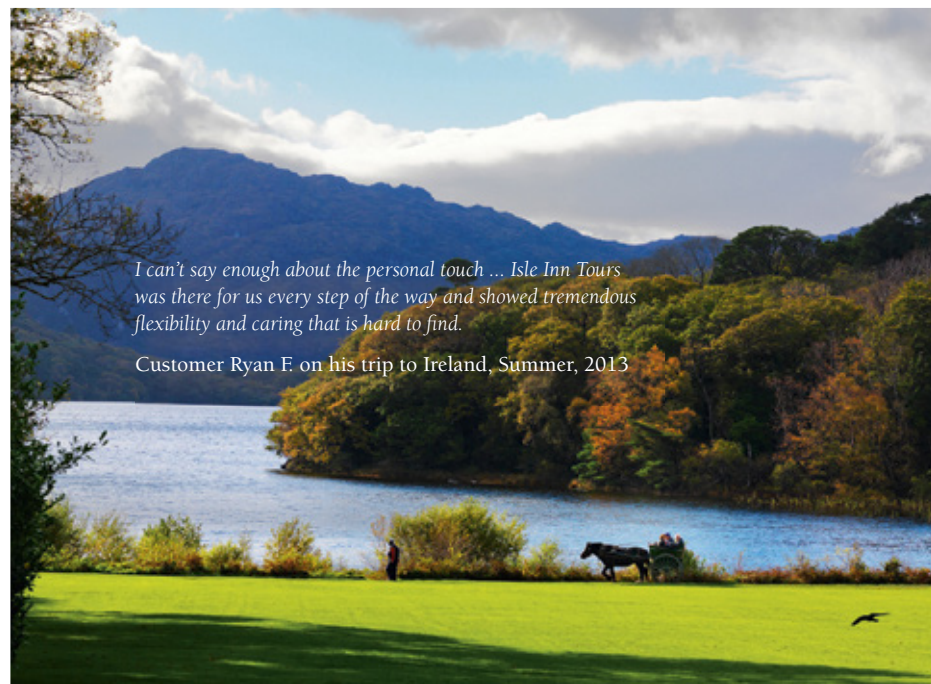
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Customer Ryan F. on his trip to Ireland, Summer, 2013



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**IRELAND KEY TRAVEL FACTS**

**PUBLIC HOLIDAYS 2014**

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

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

**SMOKING RESTRICTIONS**

Smoking is banned in all public places in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

**CUSTOMS**

Customs operate green and red channels at most ports and airports. If you need to declare goods over the duty and tax-free allowances for non-EU visitors you must use the red channel. Pass through the green channel if you have nothing to declare. The United States Customs and Border Protection (USCBP) facility at Terminal 2 in Dublin Airport is a purpose-built facility that allows US-bound passengers to undertake all immigration, customs and agriculture inspections at Dublin prior to departure.

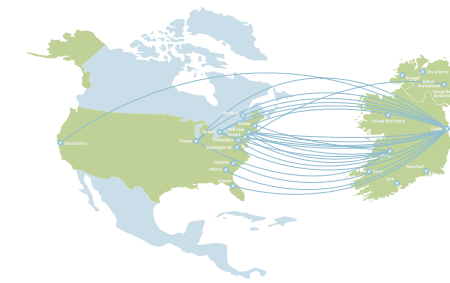
**WEIGHTS AND MEASURES**

The metric system is used in the Republic (not strictly enforced at times); imperial in Northern Ireland.

**VAT (SALES TAX) AND REFUNDS**

In the Republic of Ireland, tourism services such as restaurant meals and accommodation benefit from a lower VAT (sales tax) rate of 9% throughout 2014. Visitors to Ireland from non-EU countries can claim back sales taxes on purchases made in Ireland; shopping in Ireland is subject to a sales tax of 23%. Always look for the "Tax-Free Shopping" sign in the windows of participating stores. To avail of your tax refund, complete a valid tax refund document, which you can get from participating stores. Present this and goods to customs on departure from the EU and you can receive your refund on the spot at some airports; otherwise, you can mail your tax refund document to the store and a refund will be issued. Selected shopkeepers will offer you the Horizon Tax-Free Shopping card, a new paperless method of getting tax refunds brought to you by FEXCO Tax-Free Shopping. With each purchase, the card is swiped and tax-free eligible items are logged. At the end of your trip, hand in the card to the FEXCO Tax-Free Shopping desk at Dublin or Shannon Airport. You can apply for a card online at [shoptaxfree.com](http://shoptaxfree.com)

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For details of airline services to Shannon, Dublin and Belfast please see **page 62**

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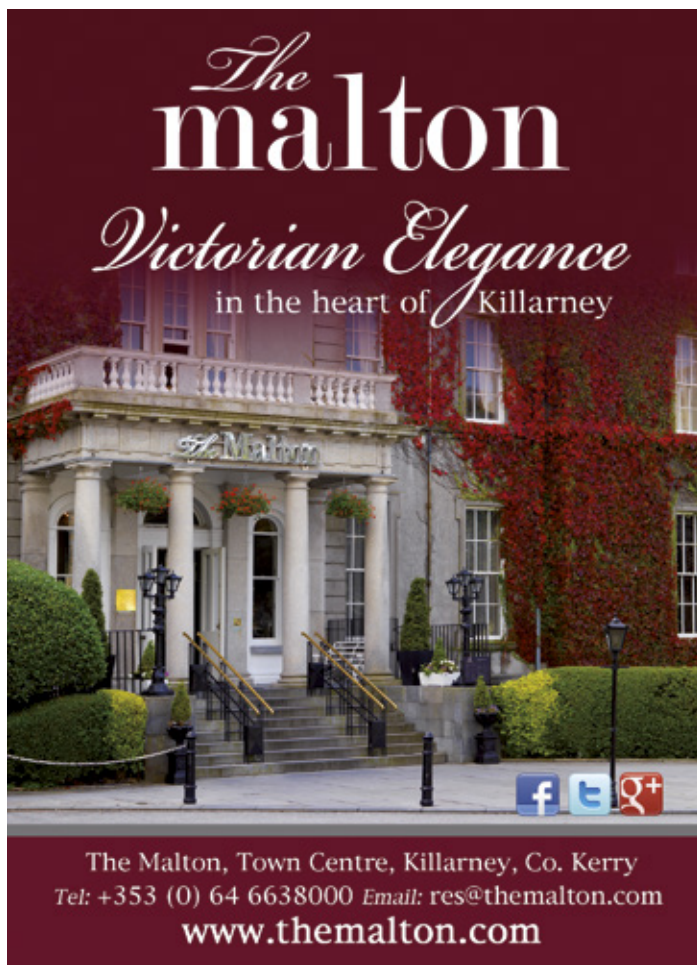
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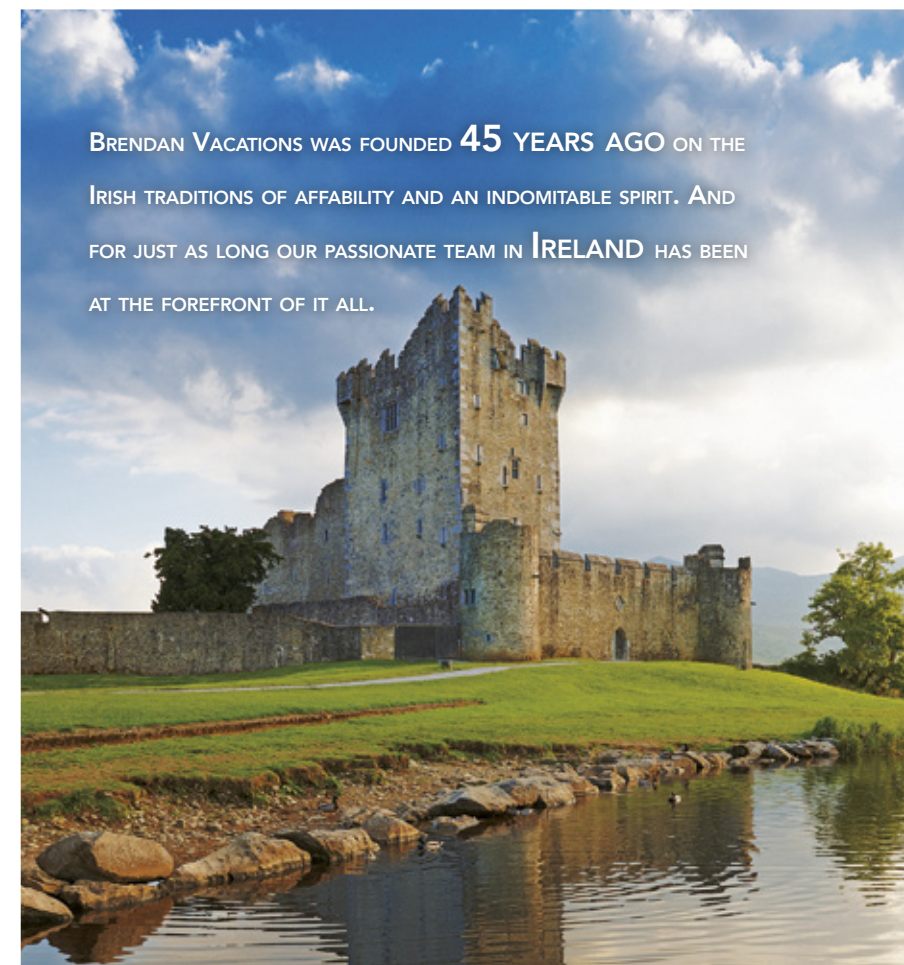
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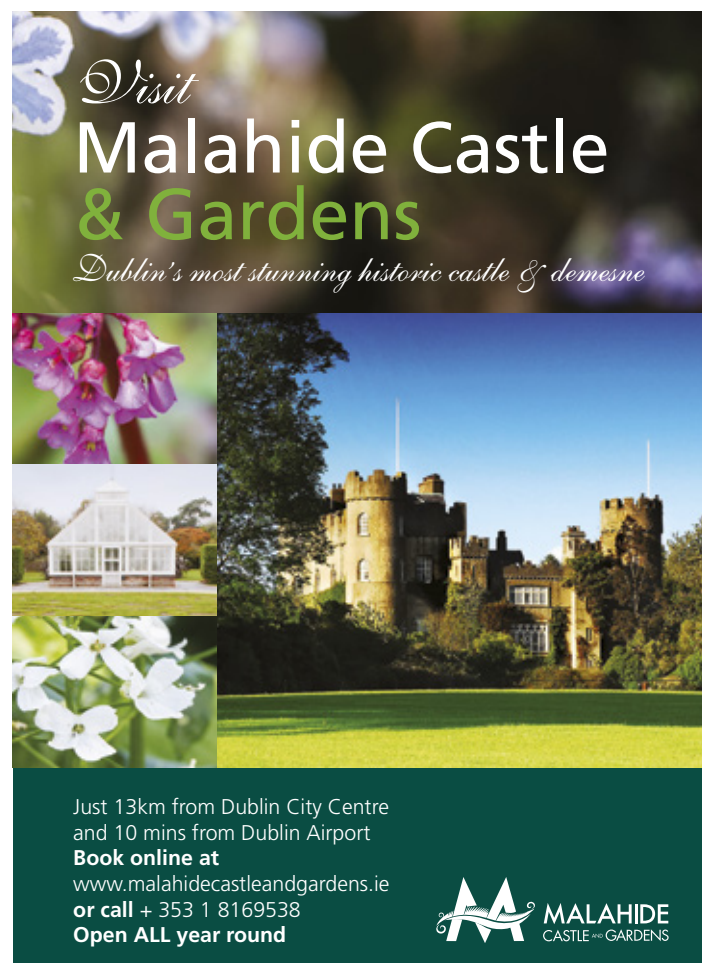
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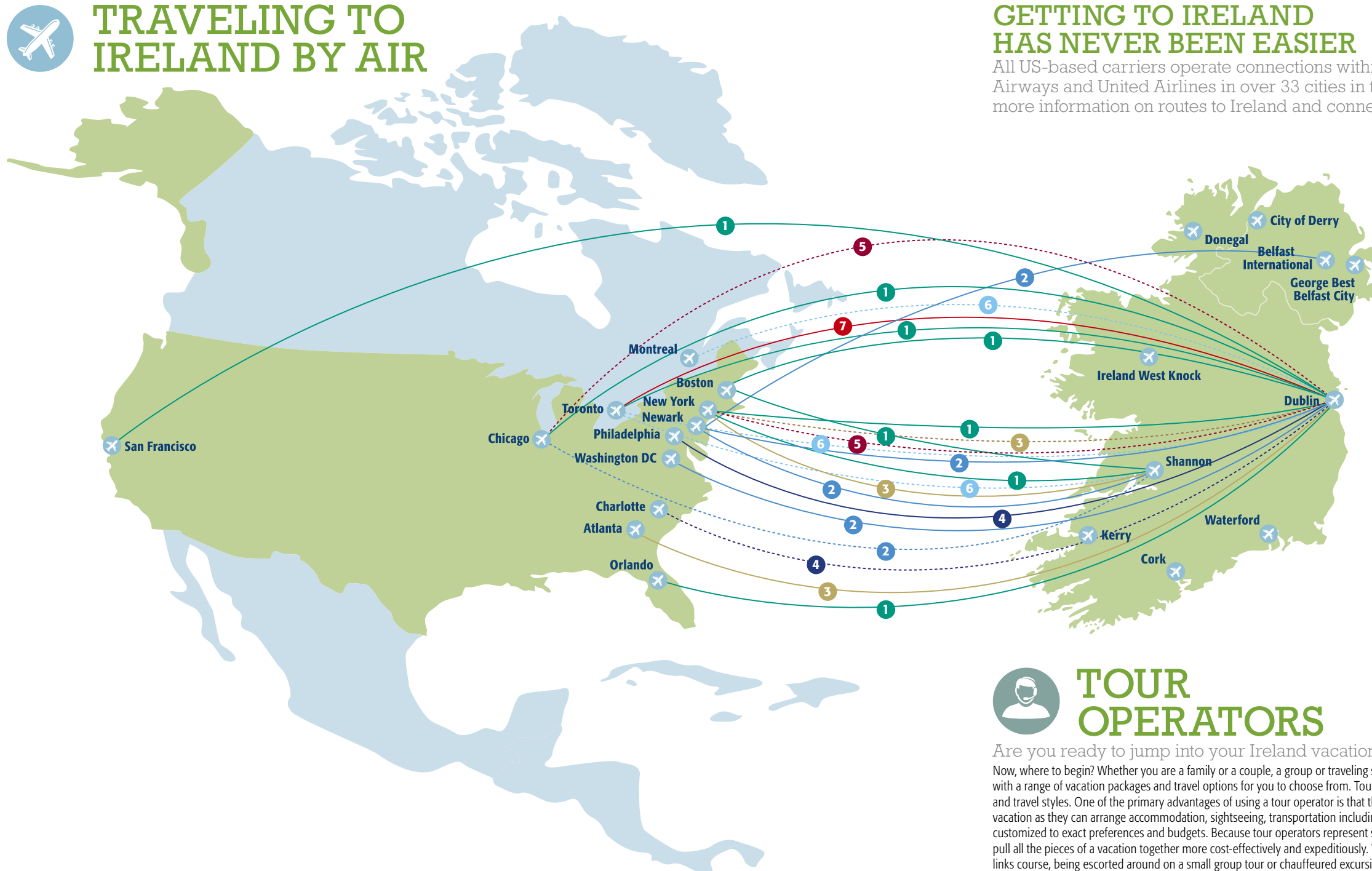
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1 Aer Lingus	aerlingus.com	JFK - DUB JFK - SNN BOS - DUB BOS - SNN ORD - DUB MCO - DUB SFO - DUB (from Apr 2014) YYZ - DUB (from Apr 2014)
2 UNITED	united.com	EWR - DUB EWR - SNN EWR - BFS IAD - DUB ORD - SNN (seasonal)
3 DELTA	delta.com	JFK - DUB JFK - SNN (seasonal) ATL - DUB
4 U.S. AIRWAYS	usairways.com	PHL - DUB CLT - DUB (seasonal)
5 American Airlines	aa.com	ORD - DUB (seasonal) JFK - DUB (seasonal)
6 Air Transat	airtransat.com	YYZ - DUB (seasonal) YYZ - SNN (seasonal) YUL - DUB (seasonal)
7 AIR CANADA rouge	aircanada.com	YYZ - DUB (from May 2014)

Note: Dotted line indicates seasonal service. Information correct at time of printing. Map not to scale.

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Please visit [ireland.com/offers](http://ireland.com/offers) for a complete listing of tour operators that Tourism Ireland partners with in the United States. Be sure to check out the Vacation Offers page where you will find some great value deals.



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## TRAVELING TO IRELAND FROM GREAT BRITAIN

Travel to Ireland from Great Britain is convenient with an increasing number of air and ferry routes to the island now available. The island of Ireland has five main ferry ports – Belfast, Dublin, Dun Laoghaire, Larne and Rosslare. If traveling from Great Britain to Ireland, you can bring your car or go as a foot passenger. Visit [ireland.com](http://ireland.com) for further information.

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The following internal flights are available within Ireland:

DEPART	ARRIVE	AIRLINE	TELEPHONE	WEBSITE
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	Kerry	Aer Lingus Regional	+353 818 365 044	aerlingus.com

All information correct at time of going to press but may be subject to future operator changes. Airlines may also operate/change code sharing and franchise operator agreements. Please see websites for details.

## AIRPORT CONTACT DETAILS

AIRPORT	WEBSITE
Belfast International	belfastairport.com
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