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Ireland is our Business!



THE GREAT GAME
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Ireland Welcome

The perfect escape? The city break you've been dreaming of? The cliff-path walk you'll remember forever? Well, Ireland has you covered. This magical island is just waiting to thrill you with its stunning windswept scenery along the Wild Atlantic Way, to capture you with its history from ancient sites such as Newgrange to the Walled City of Derry~Londonderry, and to entice you with its traditional music. The time is now.

Jump into Ireland

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Tourism Ireland
Marketing the island of Ireland overseas



Picture This

It looks like it's straight out of a fairy story, with its hexagonal stepping stones tumbling down to the crashing ocean. So it's no surprise that the Giant's Causeway has created a few tales of its own. Geology will have it that an ancient volcanic eruption was the cause of these 40,000 interlocking basalt columns, but actually it's all down to warring giants, or so the story goes! Whatever you believe, one thing's for sure – visiting this UNESCO World Heritage Site is an unforgettable experience. Hop over the stones, roar at the raging ocean, and explore the award-winning visitor centre. This is a place to create your own legends.

Giant's Causeway, County Antrim



Feet in Calgary Heart still in Dublin

Our Insider perspective is one way we make dreams come true. It totally opens up your understanding of a destination.

And the way we take away the usual travel hassles, like skipping lines with VIP entry, our guests say it helps them see and enjoy more of their vacation.

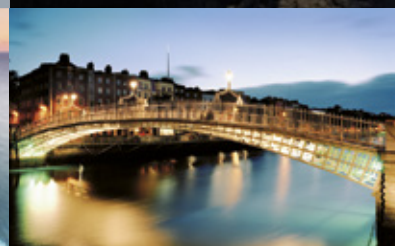
Cutting corners on a vacation costs you memories. And what's the value in that?

"There are so many special memories filled with wonderful sights and experiences which we shall never forget."

Christine, Trafalgar Guest



Giant's Causeway, Co. Antrim



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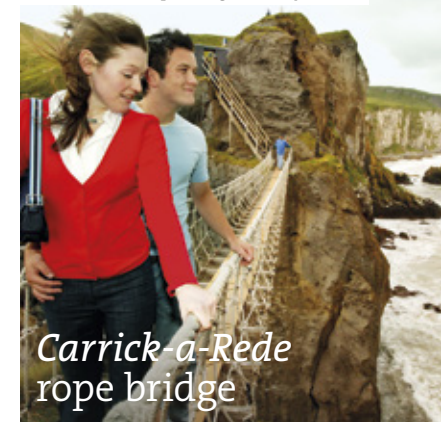
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Terms & Conditions: *Early Payment Discount is valid on new bookings only and may not be valid on all itineraries/departure dates. Save an extra \$150 per couple (\$75 per person) on 2015 Europe & Britain summer itineraries to Ireland for trips 10 days or longer. \$200 deposit is due within 3 days of booking. Not combinable with other limited time offers, last minute deals, custom groups and group allocations. Not valid on the Hidden Journeys brochure itineraries.

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Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge, County Antrim



Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge

Cliff-edges, waves crashing on the rocks below, a tiny rope bridge. Get ready for one of the most exciting crossings in the world. The Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge in County Antrim sways almost 30m over a 20m wide chasm. Walking it is unforgettable. Just don't look down!



IRELAND ESCAPE

Fanad Head Lighthouse, County Donegal

The All-Island Lighthouse Trail

Many of the most iconic images of Ireland feature a lonely lighthouse perched on the edge of a cliff. Now a new All-Island Lighthouse Tourism Trail connects 20 of these structures, which have safeguarded Ireland's scenic coastline for centuries. Learn about their history, walk the peaceful trails that surround them, or stay the night and fall asleep to the sound of the waves – now that's a night to remember. cil.ie

DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT

The island of Ireland has a unique appeal, with incredible escapes and epic adventures just waiting for you. Here are some to get you started

Kilkenny Castle, Kilkenny



Medieval Mile Kilkenny city

With its ancient castle, winding alleys and impressive abbey, Kilkenny has always been a medieval beauty, but now there's a new way to unlock its past: a stroll down the Medieval Mile. Stretching from Kilkenny Castle to St Canice's Cathedral, this walking route highlights the best of Kilkenny's heritage. From Rothe House, a 17th century merchant's townhouse and gardens, to Kyteler's Inn, a pub that dates back to 1263, it's the most enjoyable way to walk back in time.

Wild Atlantic Way

A rugged coastline shaped by time and pounding waves, the Wild Atlantic Way is Ireland's epic 2,500km coastal touring route. Stretching along the west coast from County Donegal to County Cork, this is a taste of the real Ireland.



Dingle Peninsula, County Kerry

Titanic Belfast



Tea at Titanic Belfast

It's one of the world's biggest Titanic visitor experiences, right in the heart of the city that built the Ship of Dreams. It's moving and monumental, with interactive exhibits, holograms and memorabilia, and now there's a special way to enjoy Titanic Belfast. Every Sunday, afternoon tea is served in the luxurious surroundings of the Titanic Suite, where the centrepiece is a replica of the Grand Staircase. Tea and cake in exceptional surroundings – this is one to be savoured! Book at titanicbelfast.com





WELCOME TO WATERFORD

We've been expecting you

Stroll through the picturesque streets of the Viking Triangle in Ireland's oldest city, 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.

Experience over 1100 years of history in 1,000 paces at Waterford Treasures.

Begin your Waterford adventure at www.DiscoverWaterfordCity.ie



Distances to Waterford:
 Dublin 1 hr 45 mins
 Cork 1 hr 30 mins
 Shannon 2 hrs 20 mins
 Belfast 3 hrs 30 mins



Glamping at Ballyvolane House, County Cork



Helen's Tower, County Down, Irish Landmark Trust



The Merchant's House, Derry~Londonderry



Ballinkeele House, County Wexford



Adare Manor, County Limerick



Clare Island Lighthouse, County Mayo

IRELAND ACCOMMODATION

STAY SOMEWHERE DIFFERENT

From cosy B&Bs to some of the grandest buildings on the island, Ireland offers a wealth of wonderful places to stay, with charm, comfort and a warm Irish welcome

We like to do things a little differently in Ireland, and the Irish Landmark Trust and the National Trust are perfect hunting grounds for some of the most intriguing and unique properties on the island. From tower houses to schoolhouses and from gate lodges to grand city apartments, a stay in one of these historic buildings will add style to your self-catering holiday.

Blazing fires, grand drawing rooms and manicured gardens – surround yourself with old-fashioned opulence in an Irish castle, where you can do everything from take tea in the library to learn the art of falconry. Enjoy indulgence at Adare Manor in County Limerick; Ballygally Castle in County Antrim; and Castle Leslie in County Monaghan.

There's no better way to experience Ireland's famous hospitality than with a bed & breakfast. Offering family-style

accommodation and tasty Irish breakfasts, B&Bs are perfect for connecting with local people. Whether you choose the boutique cosiness of Gallán Mór on the Sheep's Head Peninsula in County Cork; or a historic city spot such as the Merchant's House in Derry~Londonderry, a warm welcome is guaranteed.

With beautiful grounds, well-appointed bedrooms and personal attention, historic country houses make delightful places to stay. Try the Georgian style of Deane's Hill in County Armagh; the pretty Ballinkeele House in County Wexford, surrounded by beautiful parkland; or the Victorian Italianate style of the glorious Clonalis House, County Roscommon.

Experience the beauty of the outdoors with a touch of glamour on a glamping holiday. Glamping is the island's "new big thing", with romantic yurt hideaways,

pretty log cabins and teepees offering a touch of fun in some of the island's most scenic locations. Try Ballyvolane House in Fermoy, County Cork; Rock Farm in Slane, County Meath; or go for a camping pod at Castle Ward beside scenic Strangford Lough in County Down.

With epic locations that boast crashing waves, cliff edges and panoramic views, lighthouses offer a breathtaking alternative to a hotel. Enjoy the "great escape" of Clare Island Lighthouse at the entrance to beautiful Clew Bay in County Mayo; see the scenic east coast and sleep with ghosts at the Wicklow Head Lighthouse; or experience the history and atmosphere of Blackhead Lightkeepers' Houses in County Antrim.

For more information on accommodation, visit: ireland.com



DISCOVER ALL ABOUT... LITERATURE



Cloughmore Stone, Mourne Mountains, County Down



Dublin Literary Pub Crawl



Davy Byrne's pub, Dublin



Listowel Writers' Week, County Kerry

PHOTO: ANN MCNAMEE

The award winners

Ireland's writers are not just beloved at home – they are celebrated abroad, with accolades and literary prizes coming thick and fast. There have been four Irish Nobel Laureates of Literature: Seamus Heaney, Samuel Beckett, W.B. Yeats and George Bernard Shaw. Paul Muldoon, born in County Armagh, won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 2003, while the Man Booker Prize for Fiction has been won by Roddy Doyle, John Banville and Anne Enright.



MAC, Belfast



Happy Days International Beckett Festival, Enniskillen



James Joyce



PHOTO: DARAGH MCDONAGH

Gate Theatre, Dublin

Ireland: land of literature. For centuries, this small island on the edge of Europe has inspired a host of poets, playwrights and dreamers to compose some of the best writing in the world. Come and explore a world of inspiration

What's it all about?

Ireland punches well above its weight when it comes to literature. The island resounds with a rich literary tradition that dates back to early tales of mythical heroes, such as Cú Chulainn, and continues right up to prize-winning modern authors Colum McCann, Colm Tóibín and Edna O'Brien. Literature is most definitely in our blood – Early Irish literature is thought to be the oldest vernacular literature in western Europe, and you can still see examples of Ogham inscriptions on stones in the counties of Kerry, Cork and Waterford. Wherever you go on the island, be it an Atlantic outpost or a thriving modern city, you can connect with plays, poetry and prose, as well as experiencing the landscape, culture and history that inspired the greats.

Where do I start?

Dublin is famous for its vibrant street life and quirky characters, and it has been home to some exceptional writers over the years. In this UNESCO City of Literature you can almost hear the words of Oscar Wilde, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett echo through the streets. Dublin has produced three of Ireland's four Nobel Prize winners for literature, and continues to be a hotbed of creativity. Pull up a bar stool in one of the city's famous "literary" pubs such as Davy Byrne's – immortalised in James Joyce's *Ulysses* – or join the Dublin Literary Pub Crawl. Explore the Dublin Writers Museum at Parnell Square, and visit the award-winning W.B. Yeats exhibition at the National Library, described by the *New York Times* as "dazzling". The 150-year anniversary of Yeats's birth is also set to be honoured in Sligo in 2015, with a year-long celebration of the poet's life and works.

Seeking out C.S. Lewis

Belfast's literary heritage reverberates through its historic streets – this grand Victorian city was the birthplace of *The Chronicles of Narnia* author C.S. Lewis. The C.S. Lewis Tour takes in some of the

key locations in the author's life, as well as exploring some of the influences on his writing. The landscapes that cradle the city are also a source of inspiration – Cave Hill is believed to have triggered the creation of the sleeping giant in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Swift was born in Dublin, but was a clergyman in the parish of Kilroot, County Antrim.

If you head out of Belfast into County Down, you'll come across the impressive Mourne Mountains, which are thought to have inspired Lewis to create the fantastical world of *Narnia*. In a letter to his brother, Lewis wrote: "That part of Rostrevor which overlooks Carlingford Lough is my idea of *Narnia*." Visit in winter, and you'll see why.

Travel around the island of Ireland and you'll uncover endless places associated with playwrights, thinkers and poets, from small islands to craggy mountains. Who knows what this land might inspire in you?

What about festivals?

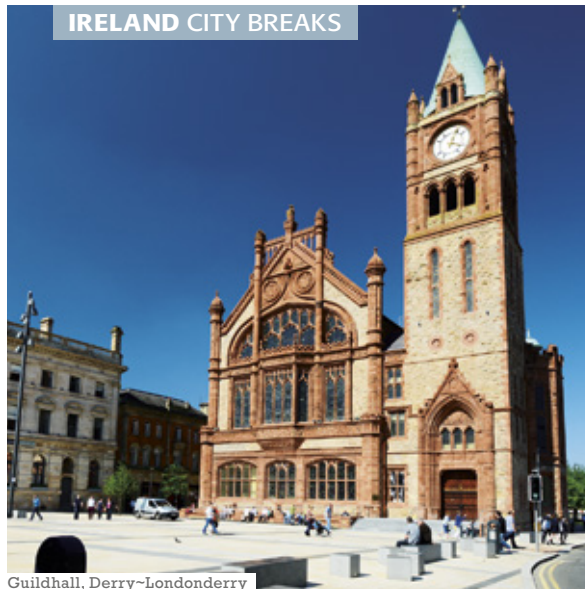
If there's one thing Ireland does well it's a festival, especially a literary one! Listowel Writers' Week Literary Festival (May/June) is now in its 44th year, and is one of the most acclaimed literary events on the island, with readings, lectures, workshops and exhibitions taking over this lively County Kerry town.

Dublin makes the most of its literary culture with the Dublin Writers Festival (April) and the Dublin Book Festival (November), while the Belfast Book Festival (June) is fast becoming one of the city's most exciting events.

Head to Bangor, County Down, and you'll find the Aspects Irish Literature Festival (September); while in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, where Samuel Beckett spent his late teens at school, the Happy Days International Beckett Festival kicks off in August. If you like to take things at a different pace the Cape Clear Storytelling Festival, on a stunning island off the coast of County Cork, should fit the bill, with story swaps and heritage walks. Tall tales and good company – what's not to like?



Dublin boasts an impressive theatre scene with historic venues and world-class productions. Try the **Gate**, the **Abbey** and the **Gaiety**, as well as smaller spots such as the **Project Arts Centre**, **Smock Alley** and the **New Theatre**. In September, the city embraces festival season, with the **Dublin Theatre Festival** and the **Dublin Fringe Festival** bringing innovative and acclaimed productions to a variety of venues. The **Belfast Festival at Queen's** in October/November features a host of outstanding theatrical productions, while venues such as the **MAC**, the **Lyric** and the **Grand Opera House** stage everything from art-house plays to big-scale musicals.



Guildhall, Derry-Londonderry



Kinsale, County Cork

CITY BREAKS

Unique attractions and a great atmosphere – no wonder Ireland’s cities are so popular. Take time out and enjoy the very best that’s on offer in Dublin, Belfast and Cork, as well as the eight other fabulous cities around the island. With a spirit that respects the past and is excited for the future, a city break in Ireland holds far more than the expected.

By Pól Ó Conghaile



At the Galway Market



Black Cab Tours, Belfast



Art on the Green, St Stephen's Green, Dublin



Ha'penny Bridge

EXPLORING GEORGIAN DUBLIN

Think of Dublin, and hardy red brick buildings often spring to mind. This capital city may owe its origins to the Vikings, but Georgian squares and townhouses are very much the postcard image of the city today. They flanked the finishing line for the 2014 Giro d'Italia's Big Start, formed the backdrop to the video for U2's Sweetest Thing, and continue to captivate people from all over the world.

Loosely speaking, Georgian Dublin describes the city during the reign of four different Georges, kings of Great Britain and Ireland between 1714 to 1830. The medieval city got a makeover, resulting in an architectural golden age. Early developments such as Henrietta Street led to elegant terraces, leafy squares and ambitious buildings including Leinster House, King's Inns and the Hugh Lane Gallery. Today, Fitzwilliam Square, Merrion Square, St Stephen's Green and North Great George's Street are some of Dublin's most beautiful examples.

But it's not all stately buildings and squares. The Georgian district has a fun side, too. The Friday lunchtime food market on Percy Place sees tasty treats served up alongside the canal. You can eat and drink in grand Georgian buildings, including Restaurant FortyOne and the Cliff Townhouse, or enjoy lunch and a craft beer in an old Georgian kitchen at Hatch & Sons. And for the perfect day out, rent a Dublin Bike and take to the cycle path that flanks the Grand Canal.

To learn more, visit Number 29 Fitzwilliam Street Lower, a museum highlighting life in Georgian Dublin. Or download one of Visit Dublin's free Georgian iWalk podcasts and go exploring.

Just think of it as a little bit of time travel in a busy modern age.



Long Room, Trinity College Dublin

Dublin five to try

Experience the best the city has to offer

Phoenix Park

This beautiful park is one of the largest city parks in Europe. It's home to Dublin Zoo, the President of Ireland's residence, and a herd of fallow deer.

Trinity College and the Book of Kells

The Old Library is a star attraction in Dublin, whilst the exquisite illustrated Book of Kells is over 1,000 years old.

Guinness Storehouse

Learn how to pour the perfect pint before enjoying 360-degree views of Dublin at the home of the black stuff. Sláinte!

Temple Bar

Funky clothes stores, jewellery markets, cocktail clubs, galleries and book stores stand alongside pubs and souvenirs in Dublin's most famous cultural hub.

National Gallery of Ireland

A collection of Italian baroque and Dutch Masters alongside distinguished Irish artists such as Jack B. Yeats make this one of the best free things to do in the city.

Out of town

Glendalough: St Kevin's 6th century monastic site is the crown jewel of the Wicklow Mountains National Park, with hiking trails to match. National Stud and Japanese Gardens: Veteran racehorses and newborn foals, St Fiachra's Garden, and the Irish Horse Museum combine in the perfect Kildare day trip. Howth: A working harbour, waterside restaurants, cliff walks and hidden beaches make this northside peninsula one of the city's most enjoyable escapes.



Little Museum of Dublin

Dublin's hidden corners

Little Museum of Dublin: The devil's in the detail at this small and eccentric museum, which brings its exhibits to life by revealing the incredible tales behind them. Iveagh Gardens: Generations of Dubliners take pride in pointing out the city's best-kept secret: a gorgeous Victorian park off Clonmel Street. Dublin Science Gallery: A superb space tackling scientific issues through wacky exhibitions such as Fat: It's Delicious!

Where Life Takes You...



Lough Eske Castle, a five-star castle hotel located on a secluded lakeside estate near the fabled Bluestack mountains, just outside Donegal Town in the Northwest of Ireland, has a rich history dating back to the 1400s. The Castle is an historic building set in a storybook location delivering superior hospitality and comfort.

Lough Eske Castle is the only five star hotel in Donegal. Winner of the World's Best Luxury Country Hotel for the past five consecutive years, Condé Nast Readers' Award 2013, Trip Advisor's Choice Award 2013 and Condé Nast Gold List for 2014. This lovingly restored castle hotel in Ireland blends its historic past with a dash of contemporary elegance.

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Titanic Belfast

TRAILING TITANIC BELFAST

Belfast has rebooted. In recent years, the city has taken a huge step forward thanks to a buzzing new wave of restaurants, shops and tours. Now is the perfect time to visit, whether your interest is in history or the here-and-now.

Titanic Belfast lies at the heart of the Titanic Quarter. R.M.S. Titanic was designed and built on Queen's Island over a century ago ("she was fine when she left here," as the locals like to quip) and today's immersive heritage attraction tells the ill-fated liner's story with high-tech highlights including a replica shipyard ride and ocean exploration centre.

But Titanic Belfast isn't the only new addition to the city skyline. Think of developments such as Victoria Square shopping centre, the Odyssey Arena or the towering "Spire of Hope" piercing the sky on top of St Anne's Cathedral. Visitors can quaff cocktails at hip bars, wander through galleries or let the kids run wild at W5, an interactive discovery centre.

Amidst all the change, the old fabric remains, so make sure to check out the originals: the Botanic Gardens with their Victorian Palm House, the bustling St George's Market, the Edwardian City Hall and the dry dock where Titanic was fitted out. Or you can choose from several guided tours of Titanic sights, including one by Segway scooter, and one hosted by Susie Millar, the great-granddaughter of an engineer lost in the disaster.

Recently, "Titanic's little sister", the S.S. Nomadic, came home to Hamilton Dock. Today, you can walk onto the actual ship that transferred first and second-class passengers from Cherbourg dock to the Titanic. It's a living connection to the historic ship, and a highlight on any trip to this fascinating city.



Belfast City Hall

Belfast five to try

Don't miss the best of the Belfast buzz

Belfast Castle Estate

Set on the lower slopes of the scenic Cave Hill Country Park, the estate here includes an adventure playground, visitor centre and eco-trails.

Belfast Bike Scheme

A handy bike scheme offers the best way to get around on two wheels in this small and compact city.

St George's Market

Built between 1890 and 1896, this historic market space kicks into action every Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Ulster Folk and Transport Museum

This outdoor museum tells the story of life in 20th century Ulster, with a cool collection of vintage cars, buses and trains.

Black Cab Tours

One of the city's top attractions sees taxi drivers bringing visitors on a whistlestop tour of Belfast's political murals, "Peace Line" and other iconic sights.

Out of town

Giant's Causeway: Don't miss this unique basalt rock formation and UNESCO World Heritage Site in County Antrim. Its fascinating visitor centre makes an ideal day trip from Belfast. **Mourne Mountains:** County Down's iconic mountains didn't just inspire C.S. Lewis's Narnia; they inspire walkers and adventure sports enthusiasts too. **Ards Peninsula:** The beautiful peninsula separating Strangford Lough in County Down from the Irish Sea is a scenic gem.



Oh Yeah Music Centre, Belfast

Three Music Favourites

Oh Yeah Music Centre: This former whiskey warehouse has transformed into a cool venue, rehearsal space, café and permanent music exhibition. **Belfast Music Tour:** Van Morrison, Snow Patrol and Therapy? are just some of the local legends whose life and tunes are evoked on this rock 'n' roll tour. **The Limelight:** A legend in the Belfast music scene, this venue has hosted everyone from Arctic Monkeys to Manic Street Preachers and Oasis.

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SHAMROCK VACATIONS

Kiss us, we fly to Ireland.
Flights to Dublin starting May 1, 2015



Welcome to a city where history is everywhere: from towering cathedrals and conquering Vikings to Georgian elegance and cobblestone quarters. Not all of Dublin's charm lies in the past, though. Dublin is also home to a contemporary arts and culture scene, and Dublin's restaurants prepare dishes made with only the finest and freshest local produce. Of course, no trip would be complete without a rip-roaring Irish music session in a bustling city pub.

Starting May 1, 2015*, WestJet offers service from St. John's, Newfoundland to Dublin. Convenient connections are also available from other Canadian cities.

Book today at westjet.com.



*Schedule subject to change without notice.



Cork cityscape

UNCOVERING CREATIVE CORK

Cork is known as Ireland's culinary capital, but it also has a dynamic creative side. Visit its galleries, catch a show or feel the irresistible atmosphere of a summer festival, and you'll soon develop a whole new appetite for the city!

Cork packs a punch "by having one of everything a civilised person could want," according to the Irish Times, a venerable national newspaper. Its list? "One university, one opera house, one jazz festival, one film festival, one excellent summer arts festival, one school of music, one city-centre food market, and the sea on its doorstep." The result is a place that is thriving in all quarters.

Cork has always had an affinity with the arts, but its galleries have really come of age in recent years, buoyed by the success of University College Cork's Lewis Glucksman Gallery, among others. Bathed in natural light, this beautiful structure has been listed among Mark Irving's 1,001 Buildings You Must See Before You Die.

Cork has developed an impressive international reputation for its festivals too. From Cork Pride and the Cork Film Festival to the globally renowned Guinness Jazz Festival, there's something for everyone. And if you visit the city in September, you're in for a treat – Culture Night is a night-time voyage of discovery, entertainment and adventure, where cultural institutions throw open their doors till late for various free events and the city's streets hum with atmosphere.

Most of all, the creativity comes through in everyday life. Think of the musical pubs and vibrant literary traditions, or the clever transformation of an 18th century church into one of the city's most interesting arts venues, Triskel.

Good ideas are second nature here.



St Anne's Church, Cork

Cork five to try

Cork's top sights will make you want to stay a while

Shandon Bells

St Anne's Church offers a visitor experience unlike any other: the chance to ring its 18th century bells.

Cork City Gaol

Sightseeing and spectres combine in this impressively maintained Victorian prison. Thursday evening tours bring added atmosphere to this spine-tingling spot.

Crawford Art Gallery

Cork's art gallery houses a wonderful collection that includes Mainie Jellett, Paul Henry and Harry Clarke. Oh, and there's a tasty café, too!

Huguenot Quarter

Book stores, bars, cafés and boutiques are crowded into this tightknit quarter around French Church Street and Carey's Lane.

Sin É

This lively Coburg Street pub has been hosting traditional music sessions since the 1970s, and you'll find lots of musicians among the regulars.

Out of town

Cobh: This historic town in Cork Harbour was Titanic's last port of call. Harbour views and a cracking heritage centre make a great afternoon out. **Kinsale:** A must for foodies – this lively harbour town is THE place to come for the freshest seafood, prepared with a dash of real Cork style. **Bantry:** This coastal spot is a gateway to West Cork – an old fishing port, thriving market town and heritage gem; as suited to a quick cuppa as it is to a longer stay.



English Market, Cork

Three Foodie Favourites

Fabulous Food Trails Cork: See, and taste, the very best that gourmet Cork has to offer on the Fabulous Food Trails walking tour. **English Market:** Cork's culinary centrepiece has been dishing up delicious food since 1788 – even Queen Elizabeth II has been a visitor. **Cork Butter Museum:** A keg of 1,000-year-old butter, medieval cattle raids and the story of the world's largest butter market – this quirky museum is just full of surprises.

Cities to explore

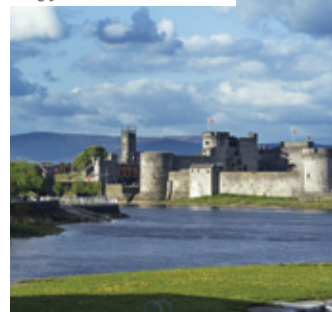
A quick city trip or a longer urban getaway? You'll find that each city on the island of Ireland boasts unique opportunities



GALWAY

Galway is never far from a festival: arts, film, horse racing and oysters are all celebrated in quick succession during summer. This gives the feeling of a rolling street party. A super little museum, thriving food scene (from fine dining restaurants to hearty seafood pubs and lively food markets), and the little seaside suburb of Salthill seal the deal. And with Connemara National Park only a short trip west, you couldn't locate yourself anywhere better!

King John's Castle, Limerick



LIMERICK

Overlooking the sweeping River Shannon, Limerick is a city of surprises. Faded Georgian grandeur combines with set-pieces such as the People's Park and King John's Castle. There's a burgeoning festival scene (Limerick was National City of Culture in 2014) and fab galleries such as the Hunt Museum and the Limerick City Gallery of Art. Limerick is also home to Munster rugby and the Thomond Park Museum and Stadium Tour is a treat for fans!

WATERFORD

One of Ireland's oldest cities, in 2014 Waterford celebrated the 1,100th anniversary of its founding by the Vikings. Explore their legacy within the Viking Triangle, a historic quarter hosting the Waterford Treasures Museum and Reginald's Tower. Elsewhere, the House of Waterford Crystal gives a glimpse into the crystal's incredible production, while top festivals include the Spraoi street party in August, with its carnival atmosphere, and Winterval in December.

Medieval Museum, Waterford



KILKENNY

This city's medieval character remains thrillingly intact, with Tudor inns, old merchant townhouses and ancient little lanes all dotting the Medieval Mile, which stretches all the way from Kilkenny Castle to St Canice's Cathedral. A visit is always infused with energy, thanks to an eclectic array of bars, restaurants, stores and festivals. Check out Trail Kilkenny for its craft, food, walking and cycling trails, and the National Craft Gallery in the former castle stables.



Kilkenny

St Patrick's Cathedral (RC), Armagh



ARMAGH

Armagh exudes heritage. The Georgian Mall (formerly a racecourse) is lined with elegant houses, and it's the only city in the world with two cathedrals dedicated to the same saint. St Patrick is said to have founded his first church on the hilltop site of the Church of Ireland Cathedral (Armagh is the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland). The County Museum and Navan Fort turn back the clock even further, boasting prehistoric artefacts and an ancient pagan ceremonial site. The city even has its own planetarium, so you'll always be reaching for the stars.

Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum



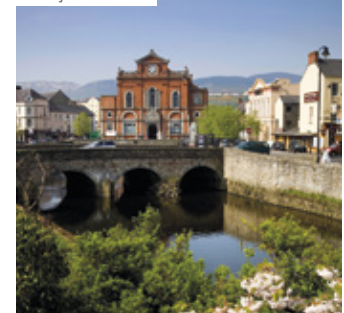
LISBURN

The capital of Lagan Valley is just a baby in terms of its city status, which was awarded in 2002 as part of Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee celebrations. In terms of heritage, however, it goes way back, as you'll discover when you explore everything from the grand 18th century streetscapes to the Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum. Lisburn also boasts a thriving arts scene, a dynamic young population, and lots of shopping options – from small city boutiques and the pedestrianised Bow Street to larger retail developments such as Sprucefield Park.

NEWRY

If you like to shop, you'll love Newry. This is one of Ireland's best retail destinations, with a host of on-street shopping alongside The Quays and Buttercrane Centres. But it's not all about the credit card. There's a lot of "past" on offer, too. In the 19th century, Newry was a bustling trading port, a place of merchants, markets and noisy city quays. The town's heritage trail, City Hall, cathedral and the Newry & Mourne Museum in Bagenal's Castle all tell their stories, offering a rich diversion before you relax in the many buzzing bars, clubs and restaurants.

Newry Town Hall



DERRY~LONDONDERRY

The island's only surviving walled city, Derry~Londonderry is also home to the island's youngest population. The pull of history and the push of youth gives this city an infectious vibe, which is visible in its thriving arts and music scene (the Undertones, Phil Coulter and Nadine Coyle all hail from here). It pushed the cultural envelope with a wildly successful stint as UK City of Culture in 2013. A visit to the Peace Bridge and the Bogside murals are essentials, if only to see how much this place has changed recently.



City walls, Derry~Londonderry

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Irish Design 2015

Get set to connect with Irish design. A new generation of exciting craftspeople and designers is shaking up the scene on the island of Ireland, mixing traditional techniques with a contemporary edge. 2015 is the year of Irish design, which will showcase the very best from design, craft, fashion and architecture. So what's on offer? Well, how about a packed programme of exhibitions, lectures and other designer events across the island? Not to mention the chance to end the year with a perfectly crafted bang at the Dublin Design Festival in November. Also big for 2015 is the Économusée movement, where you can watch artisans at work and learn the history of crafts as diverse as pottery, hurl-making (the stick used in the sports of hurling and camogie), and salmon smoking. Game of Thrones fans may be particularly interested in Steensons Jewellery Économusée in the lovely Antrim village of Glenarm, where some of the jewellery featured in the hit HBO series was made.



Enignum Shelf XIII by Joseph Walsh Studio

EXCITING THINGS TO DO IN 2015

Ireland is full of surprises, and in 2015 the island is brimming over with a vast array of things to do and see. Time to start planning your trip



Cruising on the River Shannon

Cruising Ireland's waterways

Look at a map of Ireland and you'll see just why the island has such a reputation as a playground for boating enthusiasts. There are hundreds of inland lakes here, as well as a network of rivers and canals, all blissfully free of commercial traffic and easy to navigate, even as a novice. All you have to worry about is gliding through the countryside, stopping off for a round of golf here, a cosy pub lunch there, and maybe a trip to some must-sees such as the ancient monastic site of Clonmacnoise in County Offaly, or the adrenaline-fuelled Lough Key Forest and Activity Park in County Roscommon. Ireland has seven main inland waterways to choose from. For a truly epic journey, try the 400km of navigable waters between Belleek, at the northern tip of Lough Erne, County Fermanagh, and Killaloe in County Clare, which takes in both the River Shannon and peaceful Lough Erne.



Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, Derry~Londonderry



Spraoi Festival, Waterford

Cultural highlights of the sunny southeast

Famed for its beaches, Viking heritage and grand historic houses, the "sunny southeast" is fast becoming known for its thrilling festivals, too. Start off your festival extravaganza in Kilkenny, where you can laugh your socks off at the Sky Cat Laughs Comedy Festival (28 May-1 June). Then head to Carlow town, where the Carlow Arts Festival (29 May-7 June) offers street carnivals, theatre and music, all against the scenic backdrop of the magnificent Blackstairs Mountains. Each year, the Clonmel Junction Festival (3-12 July) sets the County Tipperary town of Clonmel humming with live music, dance and comedy. Fuelled by creative energy, Waterford city's Spraoi in early August makes great use of its medieval backdrop with free street theatre, music and, of course, the famous Spraoi parade. Also in August is one of Ireland's oldest festivals, the Kilkenny Arts Festival, where creativity takes over this medieval city (one of the friendliest in Europe, according to readers of Condé Nast Traveller). Finally, go highbrow with the acclaimed Wexford Festival Opera in October – a real highlight of Ireland's cultural calendar.

A taste of Fermanagh

The beautiful pastures of Ireland's "Lakeland" district have given rise to pure flavours that define this county. There's dry-aged Kettle beef, grass-fed Lough Erne lamb, sublime ice cream from Tickety-Moo, and Pat O'Doherty's incredible Black Bacon from pigs reared on their very own island. Like the sound of that? Enjoy the tasty treats at the Watermill Lodge in Lisnaskea, and Leslie's Home Bakery in Enniskillen. Delicious doesn't do this county justice!



Lough Erne Resort, County Fermanagh

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2015

Sometimes called the "Olympics of Irish music", the Fleadh (as it's affectionately known) is Ireland's biggest traditional music festival. In August, Fleadh fever moves into Sligo town and you can look forward to a rip-roaring week of song and dance, with lively street performances and seisiúns (live music sessions) everywhere. The Fleadh is more than just a party, though. What you'll hear is the sound of Ireland honouring its musical culture, and the talent on display will set your pulse racing. Time-honoured traditions such as liltling (think of an Irish version of scat singing) and sean nós ("old style" singing) are performed by young and old alike. Away from the music, there are walking and historical tours, films, seminars and markets. Round off your day by nabbing a seat at a rousing sing-song in a traditional pub. Because when it comes down to it, it's all about the music.



St John's Point Lighthouse, Killough, County Down

Mourne Coastal Route

The journey from Belfast to Newry along the spectacular County Down coastline is one of Ireland's hidden gems. This is the Mourne Coastal Route, a beguiling mix of craggy mountains, swirling sea, fantastic legends and ancient heritage. On this 148km route, you'll pass through two different Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: the Mournes, and Strangford and the Lecale coast, ending up on the doorstep of a third, the Ring of Gullion. Explore the stunning Ards Peninsula, take the Portaferry ferry across Strangford Lough, follow in the footsteps of a saint on St Patrick's Trail, or delve into the heart of the Mourne mountains with a series of scenic loops that bring you to spots such as the Silent Valley, the Mourne Wall and Bloody Bridge. Finish your journey with a meal of fabulous local produce such as Carlingford Lough mussels or Graham's ice cream. The perfect end to a perfect trip.



Fresh steamed clams, Fishy Fishy Café, Kinsale, County Cork

FRESH FROM THE SEA

With pure waters, passionate producers and vibrant coastal communities, is it any wonder Ireland has become famous for seafood? TV chef, author and journalist Rachel Allen uncovers great dishes and fabulous pubs around the island



Rachel Allen

Ireland has a special relationship with the sea. And it's not surprising really, when you consider that the island is surrounded by miles and miles of bountiful and pristine waters. Countless songs and poems have been written about our seafood, not least the tragic tale of poor Molly Malone who wheeled her wheelbarrow through the streets of Dublin crying "cockles and mussels, alive, alive-oh!" If you like seafood, then you are, without a doubt, in the right place!

Seafood for the road

When I am travelling around the island, my route is often determined by my tummy. My love of good food will regularly see me veering off the beaten path to try something that's being produced, harvested or grown in a particular area. If you're planning a trip around Ireland, then I suggest you let your appetite lead the way. And the first place to start? It's got to be a market, of course.

Farmers' markets have increased



Carlingford Oyster Festival, County Louth



Deanes Love Fish, Belfast



English Market, Cork

Irish soul food

When the fish is this fresh it is often best served simply, which is where the humble yet sublime fish and chips comes in. Served in a light batter with chunky chips and sprinkled with salt and vinegar, it's the perfect dinner. Try it at great "chippies" including Salt and Batter Takeaway in Rathmullan, County Donegal; Morton's in Ballycastle, County Antrim; and Leo Burdock's in Dublin city.



The tradition of smoking fish is something Ireland has become famous for worldwide, and you can experience it to the full with wonderful smokehouses dotted around the coast

enormously over the last few years, and now many small towns and villages have one. Here, amid the bustling farmhouse cheese stalls, the rich treacly breads and the handcrafted chocolates, there is usually a taste of the ocean to be found.

At the Temple Bar Food Market in Dublin, fresh oysters are served up with glasses of crisp white wine at little wooden tables; while the fish stalls at the Limerick Milk Market, St George's Market in Belfast and the English Market in Cork city showcase Ireland's exceptional seafood in all its glory.

What to eat

Having an abundance of seafood on our doorstep also means we are creative when it comes to preparing and cooking it. And we're nothing if not diverse in our tastes. Just look at the northern European delicacy of pickled herring, which gets a fabulous treatment in Ireland courtesy of Silver Darlings seafood company. Want to try? Seek them out at Mahon Point



Seafood casserole, Mourne Seafood Bar, Belfast

Farmers' Market in Cork city, the lively Milk Market in Limerick city, and Dublin's fabulous food emporium on Exchequer Street, Fallon & Byrne.

If it's a smokey flavour you're after, then you're spoilt for choice. On the farm at Ballymaloe in County Cork where I live, Bill Casey produces a consistently delicious smoked salmon, using only organic Irish salmon, which you can buy from the Farm Shop at Ballymaloe Cookery School. This tradition of smoking fish is something Ireland has become famous for worldwide, and you can experience it to the full with wonderful smokehouses dotted around the coast.

In County Cork, take a trip to see the traditional timber Belvelly Smokehouse, which is run by Frank Hederman – a second generation smoker. Hederman smokes mussels, salmon, mackerel, eel and haddock; not to mention cheese, oats, garlic and butter!

Other smokehouses that you should add to your culinary trail include >



Fresh lobster, sea bream and salted squid, Lough Erne Resort



Moran's Oyster Cottage, County Galway

In Belfast, Ox serves up seriously innovative, very pretty food, and it's absolutely delicious, too. I still have dreams about the sea trout with crab, olives and samphire

the Burren Smokehouse in County Clare, Ummera Smokehouse and Woodcock Smokery in West Cork, and the Connemara Smokehouse in County Galway.

Seaweed has been appearing on the menus of some of the island's most innovative restaurants of late, and the unpolluted waters mean there are lots of varieties to choose from, and every single one of them is edible! Look out for those by Sea of Vitality and AlgAran at health food shops and on supermarket shelves – they make great snacks!

A seafood platter

It'll probably come as no surprise when I tell you that there are a myriad of wonderful restaurants where you can sample excellent seafood, including my home at Ballymaloe House. The menus are completely dictated by what is growing on the farm and what has come in from Ballycotton Bay that day, so expect an amazing array of seafood: hot buttered lobster; pan-fried scallops or boiled shrimps with homemade mayonnaise; sole à la meunière; pan-fried mackerel with herb butter; and baked baby plaice.

Head west from here to a much loved seafood restaurant, Fishy Fishy in Kinsale, County Cork. It's located in the heart of this busy seaside town, and is a great place for a long, leisurely lunch.

Another part of the island that's

Fishy festivals

You'll find festivals dedicated to the scallop, the oyster or the mussel all over the island of Ireland. Some of the best-known are the Galway International Seafood and Oyster Festival in Galway city (Sept); the Hillsborough Oyster Festival in County Down (Sept); and the Kilmore Quay Seafood Festival in County Wexford (July). Fun, entertaining and delicious!



Fresh from the sea, Roundstone, County Galway

enjoying an exciting time gastronomically is the west of Ireland. "Aniar" is the Irish word for westerly – it also happens to be the name of one of Ireland's hottest restaurants, fresh from a Michelin star win for the second year running. Aniar is situated in the centre of Galway city and its menu changes daily, but you might find anything from divine salmon confit to turbot with turnip tops.

While in Galway, try to fit in a visit to Jessica Murphy's Kai Café and Restaurant, too. Her scallop ceviche with tiger's milk is to die for. As you leave the city behind and head for the coast, you'll find yourself on the Wild Atlantic Way, which runs along the shore from Cork up to Donegal. Kealy's Seafood Bar on the harbour in Greencastle, County Donegal is a local gem. It's a relaxed place where simplicity is valued: try Tricia Kealy's delicious Greencastle chowder and you'll understand the principle of taste above all else.

In Belfast, three wonderful spots spring to mind. One of the best is Ox: seriously innovative, very pretty food, and absolutely delicious, too. I still have dreams about the sea trout with crab, olives and samphire. Mourne Seafood Bar, located in a lovely wood-panelled Victorian house, is a fishmonger-meets-restaurant, where you can try your oysters five different ways. Deanes Love Fish, also in Belfast, serves an exceptional pickled crab salad with fennel and citrus fruit. >

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Frank Hederman, Belvelly Smokehouse, Cobh, County Cork



Tastes of the island

It's not just seafood that Ireland is famous for. From traditional tastes to new artisan foods, the flavours of the island will inspire and entice

Food on the island of Ireland revolves around simple, pure flavours and honest dishes that have been passed down through the generations. The island is renowned for its dairy produce, and you'll find new producers such as **Abernethy Butter Company** in County Down elevating butter to something truly delicious. Irish farmhouse cheeses are world famous, with an array of producers creating incredible flavours. Keep an eye out for **Milleens**, **Coolea**, **Cashel Blue** and **St Tola**. The green pastures that have fostered such quality dairy produce also result in some of the best beef and lamb in the world. **Kettyle beef** from County Fermanagh is a real treat, while **Connemara lamb** has European Protected Geographical Indication. And as for traditional dishes, you're spoiled for choice. Try some **Irish stew** (made with lamb and vegetables); savour a **soda farl** (a flattened dough bread) as part of your **Ulster fry** cooked breakfast; enjoy fresh brown **soda bread** with a bowl of seafood chowder; and check out the **Waterford blaa** (a lovely fresh white roll unique to the city). Delicious.

Five seafood pubs

O'Neill's The Point Seafood Bar, Caherciveen, County Kerry: Dine on fresh, locally smoked salmon. **Tedford's**, Belfast: Curry roast monkfish with coconut rice is a firm favourite here. **Cronin's**, Crosshaven, County Cork: Fresh fish and a fine rum selection. **Moran's Oyster Cottage**, The Weir, County Galway: Tuck into wild native clams in white wine. **The West Bar**, Westport, County Mayo: World Seafood Chowder winner, USA, June 2014!



Super-fresh scallops at Tedford's, Belfast

Countless songs and poems have been written about our seafood bounty, not least the tragic tale of poor Molly Malone who wheeled her wheelbarrow through the narrow streets of Dublin

On to Warrenpoint, County Down, and located along the glistening Carlingford Lough you'll find Bennetts. This is a stalwart of the fine-dining scene, and its catch is always fresh and local from Kilkeel Harbour. Move inland to the lush lakelands of Fermanagh, and you'll see why this region is creating such a buzz in foodie circles. At the Lough Erne Resort, Head Chef Noel McMeel has become a byword for culinary perfection. Try the baked Blackrock stone bass if you're in any doubt of the man's talents.

When in Dublin, I love eating at Caviston's in Glashule, in the south of the county. I can also pick up the catch of the day from its adjoining fish shop and deli – just jump on the DART (train) to get here. On a recent visit to Super Miss Sue in Dublin's city centre, I understood exactly why this is one of the city's most talked about new foodie openings. The pan-fried mackerel with horseradish and pickled seaweed here was delicious. Dublin's top Michelin-star fine dining experience has to be Chapter One. On my most recent visit, the halibut with Dublin Bay prawns and courgette cream was perfection itself.

Around the coast again and into Wexford's Rosslare Harbour, home of the Lobster Pot. Expect super-fresh seafood and chowder to rival any on the planet. So there you have it: a whistlestop tour of some of the island's finest seafood haunts.



Aniar, Galway



Kylemore Abbey, County Galway

FAIRYTALE ROMANCE

Whether you're looking for whimsical tales, dreaming of fantastical castles, or just want to visit some of the most romantic settings imaginable, the island of Ireland has something to suit every taste, writes Barbara Collins



Hillsborough Castle, County Down

HILLSBOROUGH CASTLE County Down

The official residence of the Queen and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is possibly the smallest royal castle – but sometimes the best things come in small packages. Now part of the Historic Royal Palaces portfolio, this captivating Georgian mansion was built by Wills Hill, the first Marquess of Downshire in the 1770s, and is set in the cut stone village of Hillsborough, County Down. Open for the first time to the public (previously you could only visit with a tour), Hillsborough is one of the most elegant and interesting structures on the island of Ireland. Despite the fact that the castle is still a “working” building, the romance comes with a touch of royalty and you can explore the State Drawing Room, the Red Dining Room and Candlestick Hall. Tickets for the Royal Garden Party every summer are extremely sought after, which is no wonder since the castle is surrounded by 96 acres of ornamental grounds. For true romantics, the castle is certain to delight. If those trees in the grounds could talk, they would perhaps whisper about the romance of Edward VIII and Wallis Simpson. Rumour has it the couple stayed in the castle, and sneaked down to the local pub. Sounds like a good idea!



Hillsborough Castle, County Down

KYLEMORE ABBEY County Galway

Connemara is a place of pure romance. Located at the very edge of Europe, this wild, rugged land boasts some of the most dramatic scenery on the island of Ireland. It's easy to fall in love with the landscapes here, which is just what happened to Mitchell and Margaret Henry. In the 1860s, the couple were honeymooning at what was then Kylemore Lodge. They were so captivated by the beauty of the area, they decided they would make it their home. Practicalities brought them back to their native city of Manchester, but when Mitchell inherited his father's estate, he decided to build a fairytale castle in Connemara for his beloved wife. Over the following decades, the couple and their children lived happily at Kylemore, with Mitchell working on the glorious Victorian walled garden there. Tragically, Margaret died suddenly in 1874 on holiday in Egypt, leaving her husband and their nine children heartbroken. Distraught but resolute, Mitchell responded by building his wife one of the most elegant final resting places money can buy. Backed by craggy hills, surrounded by mature trees and overlooking the glassy lake, the stunning Gothic church at Kylemore still stands today as a testament to Mitchell's enduring love. The romance lives on in County Galway.



Victorian Walled Garden, Kylemore Abbey



BLARNEY CASTLE
County Cork

One of Ireland's most famous castles, Blarney was built nearly 600 years ago by the great chieftain Cormac "The Strong" MacCarthy, and while much of the structure is in ruins, you can still explore the dungeon and the battlements. Blarney fires the imagination and still manages to capture the spirit of the time – standing in the roofless family room, you can't help conjuring up images of medieval nobles and servants. Lots of honeymooners come here to kiss, but it's a historic stone they come for, not their beloved's lips. The Stone of Eloquence, or the Blarney Stone, is said to give you what the Irish call "the gift of the gab" – otherwise known as "good speaking skills". You have to hang upside down to kiss the stone, but that's all part of the fun. And once you've gained a new fluency of speech, head out to explore the incredible grounds. Set amongst the huge landscaped gardens is Rock Close – a romantic little spot that really enchants visitors. The Fern Garden, with its mini waterfalls, is also a delightful place for a walk, while the owners positively encourage you to take a picnic and spend a few stolen hours in the woods.



Glenveagh Castle, County Donegal

GLENVEAGH CASTLE
County Donegal

Glenveagh is the epitome of a storybook castle, with its crenellated towers and heavy-set battlements. John George Adair, who built it, wanted a structure that would stand out amongst the jaw-dropping scenery that surrounded it. In fact, his ambitions were so grand that he hoped it would surpass the beauty of Queen Victoria's castle at Balmoral in Scotland. Did he achieve his dream? You might even say he surpassed himself. Here, amidst some of the island's most dramatic scenery stands a majestic stronghold adorned with ramparts, turrets and round towers. It's so impressive that it has even been dubbed "Donegal's Camelot". Swathed in colour, the lakes, glens and woods are teeming with wildlife including red deer and golden eagles, and the castle sits within 16,000 hectares of national park. At one point, Glenveagh was owned by American socialite and philanthropist Henry McIlhenny. Stars such as Marilyn Monroe, Clark Gable, Charlie Chaplin and Greta Garbo would escape to this exceptional corner of the world to enjoy a lavish whirl of dinner parties, picnics and afternoon teas. These days, the stars may have left, but the castle still has a gloriously cinematic appeal.



The gardens at Blarney Castle



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POWERSCOURT HOUSE AND GARDENS
County Wicklow

Romance seems to run in the very water at Powerscourt. This gracious County Wicklow estate, set in the shadow of the Sugarloaf Mountain, is achingly beautiful – whether you're gazing at the lily pads drifting on the ornamental lake, strolling through the Japanese gardens or wandering along the avenue of beech trees. With scenery like this, it's no wonder that Powerscourt is a favourite place for couples to tie the knot. But for those who aren't getting married, it still offers a gorgeous sylvan escape just a short distance from Dublin. The estate itself dates back to the 1300s, but the current Palladian house was completed in 1741. Commissioned by the 1st Viscount Powerscourt, the mansion was described by a historian at the time as possessing "the massive dignity of a great Italian Renaissance villa". The gardens, with their cascading green terraces, magnificent statues and manicured lawns have been voted number three in the world's Top 10 Gardens by National Geographic. After a romantic walk, there are few better places to relax than on the outdoor terrace overlooking the fountain where you can enjoy afternoon tea. And if you feel like wandering farther afield, you'll find Powerscourt Waterfall, Ireland's highest, about 5km away. The perfect spot for summer picnics? We think so!



Powerscourt Gardens, County Wicklow



Florence Court, County Fermanagh

FLORENCE COURT
County Fermanagh

Naming your grand Palladian mansion after the woman you love – now that's a romantic gesture. At the foothills of Cuilcagh Mountain stands Florence Court, once the home of the Earls of Enniskillen. The Florence in question was the wife of John Cole, the man who built this impressive home around 1718. Florence was an aristocrat from Devon, England, with a fondness for the finer things in life, and her doting husband made sure the house more than matched her expectations. Famed for its exquisite interiors, fine Irish furniture and Rococo plasterwork, Florence Court is also renowned for its setting amongst abundant woodland. The impressive Florence Court yew tree also draws visitors to this part of County Fermanagh, as it's believed to be the source of most modern Irish yews. It's a real pleasure to amble through the extensive grounds here, with their pretty walled garden, ice house and summer house. Away from all the hustle and bustle of modern life, you can almost imagine John and Florence strolling together through what they described as their "majestic wilderness".

Castles and houses
Unforgettable experiences

Ireland's houses, castles and gardens are imbued with a real sense of "living history" and many of them offer something extra special, from summer festivals to archery. These are not just places to admire, they are places to enjoy and experience



Birr Castle
County Offaly
Vintage shows, arts festivals, outdoor theatre and country fairs: Birr Castle itself isn't open to the public, but visitors are welcomed to the demesne each summer for a packed programme of events. August is definitely the month to go!

Castle Ward
County Down

The hit HBO series Game of Thrones is partly shot in Northern Ireland. And at Castle Ward on Strangford Lough, you can feel like a true Westerosi when you pick up your bow for archery practice in one of the show's filming locations.



Dromoland Castle
County Clare
Learn the ancient art of falconry on one of the most beautiful castle estates on the island. Experiencing one of these magnificent birds landing on your glove is a real rush, and there are few better surrounds in which to do it.

Dunguaire Castle
County Galway

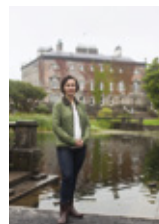
Get in touch with your inner aristocrat and experience a medieval banquet at Dunguaire Castle in the pretty town of Kinvara, County Galway. Join other diners at long oak tables and enjoy a traditional feast in a genuine 16th century castle.



Glenarm Castle
County Antrim
This 17th century castle is the family home of Viscount and Viscountess Dunluce and their family. It's also a gardener's paradise. The walled garden is one of the oldest on the island and is famed for its unusual flowers and specimen plants.

Westport House
County Mayo

A perfect spot for family fun, the grounds of Westport House are something very special. There are beautiful gardens here, a Pirate Adventure Park, and an adventure centre – you can even glide across the lake on your very own swan boat!



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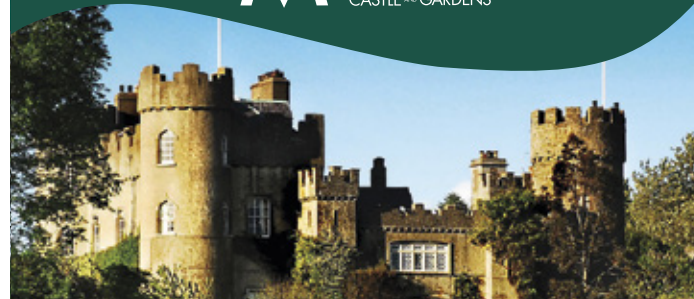
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Clogher Head, County Kerry

ON TOUR

From charming coastal villages to spectacular natural wonders, taking to the road on the island of Ireland reveals surprises at every turn

THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

By Pól Ó Conghaile

My car is covered in salt spray. I'm smiling. An hour ago, I parked up near Mizen Head Signal Station – a lighthouse and heritage attraction clinging to the tip of Ireland's most southwesterly peninsula. I took a bridge across a surf-thrashed chasm dotted with seals. I was pummelled by wind. I gulped down lungfuls of fresh air, and felt the salty sea spray on my face. I guess the Wild Atlantic Way isn't named for its gentle nature.

At 2,500km this is the world's longest defined coastal touring route; it can be driven in sections or in its entirety. Starting at Kinsale in County Cork and weaving right up to the Inishowen Peninsula in County Donegal, the route passes through small villages, by vast



Roundstone, County Galway

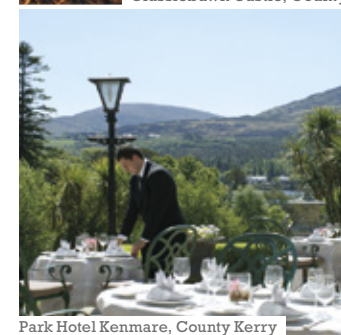
beaches, and alongside golf courses shaped by nature. From scenic set-pieces such as the Cliffs of Moher in County Clare to hidden gems such as Valentia Island in County Kerry, it follows every twist and turn of the western seaboard.

But it's not just about spectacular scenery. Driving the route, I've eaten amazing food in Grogan's Castle, County Clare, and tucked into fish fresh off the boats at Castletownbere, County Cork. I've met big-wave surfers, traditional musicians, foragers, fishermen and a Sligo historian who remembers his baby cot being made from driftwood. I've visited Foynes in County Limerick, where the first ever Irish coffee was made and wondered at the mystery of the Gallarus Oratory on the Dingle Peninsula in County Kerry.

This is a route you can drive in a couple of weeks, or dip into for a day. In County Clare, I swapped four wheels for two on a cycling tour of Loop Head Peninsula.



Classiebawn Castle, County Sligo



Park Hotel Kenmare, County Kerry

Along the way

Visit **Skellig Michael** in County Kerry is home to an Early Christian monastery and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Cyclists will love the **Great Western Greenway**, a 42km off-road cycling trail from Westport to Achill Island in County Mayo. And don't miss Ireland's only cable car, which connects **Dursey Island** to the Beara Peninsula in County Cork.

Eat At **Vasco Restaurant** in Fanore, County Clare, you can enjoy the freshest fish and foraged foods. **Packie's** in Kenmare is one of Ireland's best bistros, and **Eithna's by the Sea** brings new meaning to the phrase "sea to fork" in Mullaghmore, County Sligo. You won't go hungry on this trip!

Sleep Accommodation along the Wild Atlantic Way ranges from the unusual such as **Loop Head Lighthouse** in County Clare, to five-star hotels such as **Park Hotel Kenmare** in County Kerry, or elegant, period guesthouses such as the **Quay House** in the lively town of Clifden, County Galway.



Causeway Coastal Route

THE CAUSEWAY COASTAL ROUTE

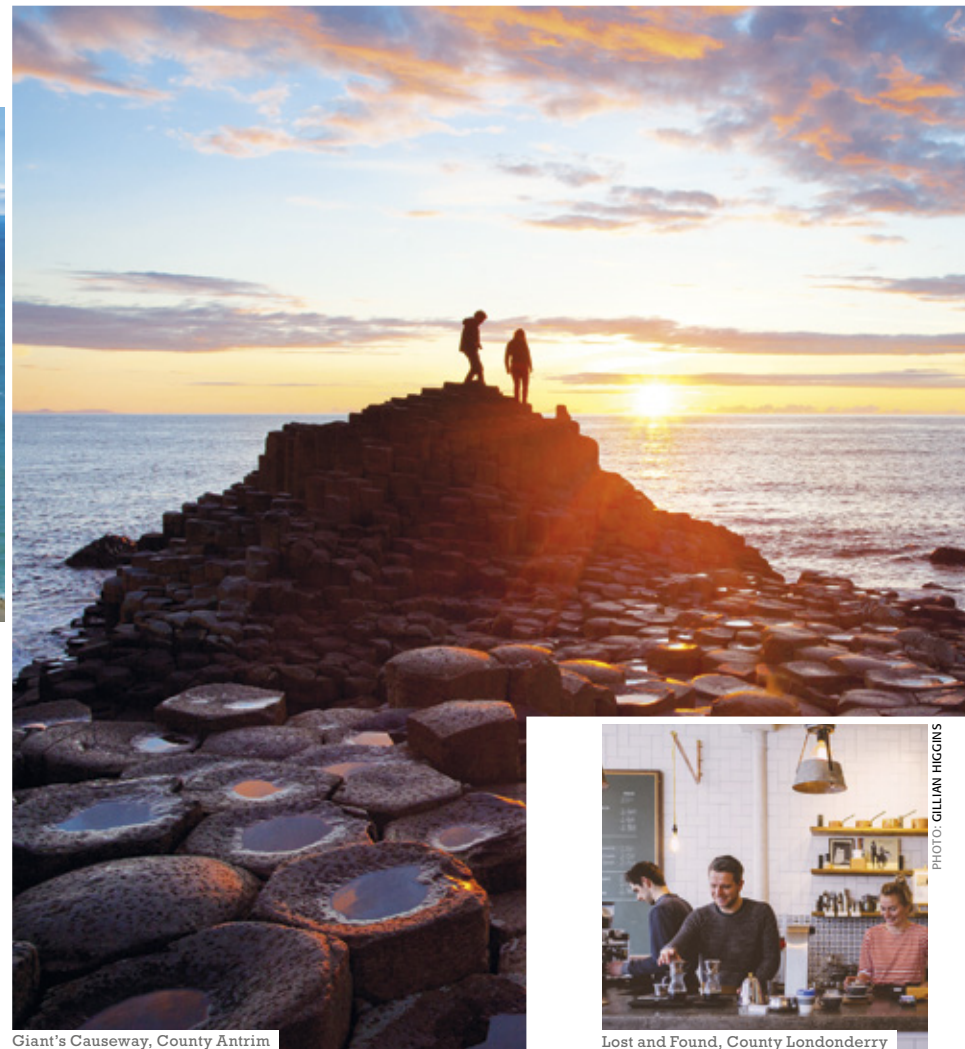
By Alan Morrow

It's official: the Causeway Coastal Route is one of the world's top road trips. Driving this route, I came across an ever-changing tapestry of sweeping strands, picture-perfect harbours and lovely villages. I scaled vertiginous roads, saw views that remind me why I so love Ireland, and ate fresh seafood plucked from the deep-blue Irish Sea.

The 193km of the Causeway Coastal Route starts sedately enough, following the motorway from Belfast along the broad northern shore of Belfast Lough. Soon the hulk of Carrickfergus Castle looms into view, before the road follows through to the busy port of Larne. Beyond this point, the route starts in earnest, narrowing as it hugs this Jurassic coastline, packed with fossils and flanked by steep cliffs. There's no doubt about it – the Causeway Coastal Route is a massive engineering achievement. Along the way you can stop and view a plaque commemorating the engineers who built it in the 1830s.

It may have plenty of big sights, but the journey here is just as packed with hidden gems. Just between Waterfoot and Red Bay Pier are sea-eroded caves, one of which once served as a school. A mile or so beyond the village of Cushendall, I take the road less travelled, negotiating the scenic route to Ballycastle along a tight country track. It takes me through quaint Cushendun village, past rocky Torr Head, Murlough Bay and magnificent Fair Head.

Clinging precariously to the steep slopes, this section of the route is a great test of driving skills, and the awesome views over the swirling waters of the North Channel across to the purple hue of Scotland are unforgettable.



Giant's Causeway, County Antrim



Distance 193km
Time 1-3 days

After a night at the Bushmills Inn, close to the Old Bushmills Distillery, I head off to the Giant's Causeway and experience my first visit to the Causeway Visitor Centre. I'm impressed; it's a fitting tribute to this awesome natural phenomenon.

On the final leg of my journey towards Derry~Londonderry city the road widens. I'm treated to views of Mussenden Temple, hugging a cliff edge 37m above Downhill Strand. And as the Maiden City heaves into view, my epic tour ends.



Lost and Found, County Londonderry

Along the way

Visit

Enjoy stunning views from the cliffs above **Kinbane Castle** and take care – the path down is steep and narrow. **St Gobban's**, allegedly Ireland's tiniest church, is set in the village of Portbraddan. Or head to **Ballintoy Harbour**, where HBO's *Game of Thrones* has been filmed – definitely one for fans!

Eat

For great food in the heart of the nine Glens of Antrim, try **Harry's**, in Cushendall. Sample Irish ingredients with a continental twist at **The French Rooms** in Bushmills. You may have a short wait for a table, but the **Ramore Wine Bar** in Portrush is a great find, or stop at **Lost and Found** in Coleraine for really great coffee and locally sourced ingredients.

Sleep

Enjoy all the charm of a real Irish castle with a resident ghost at **Ballygally Castle**. Book into the **Fullerton Arms**, a family-run guest house, bar and restaurant in Ballintoy, near the Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge. And for stunning views, there's the **Bayview Hotel** in Portballintrae.



Hill of Slane, County Meath

THE BOYNE VALLEY

By Emer Taaffe

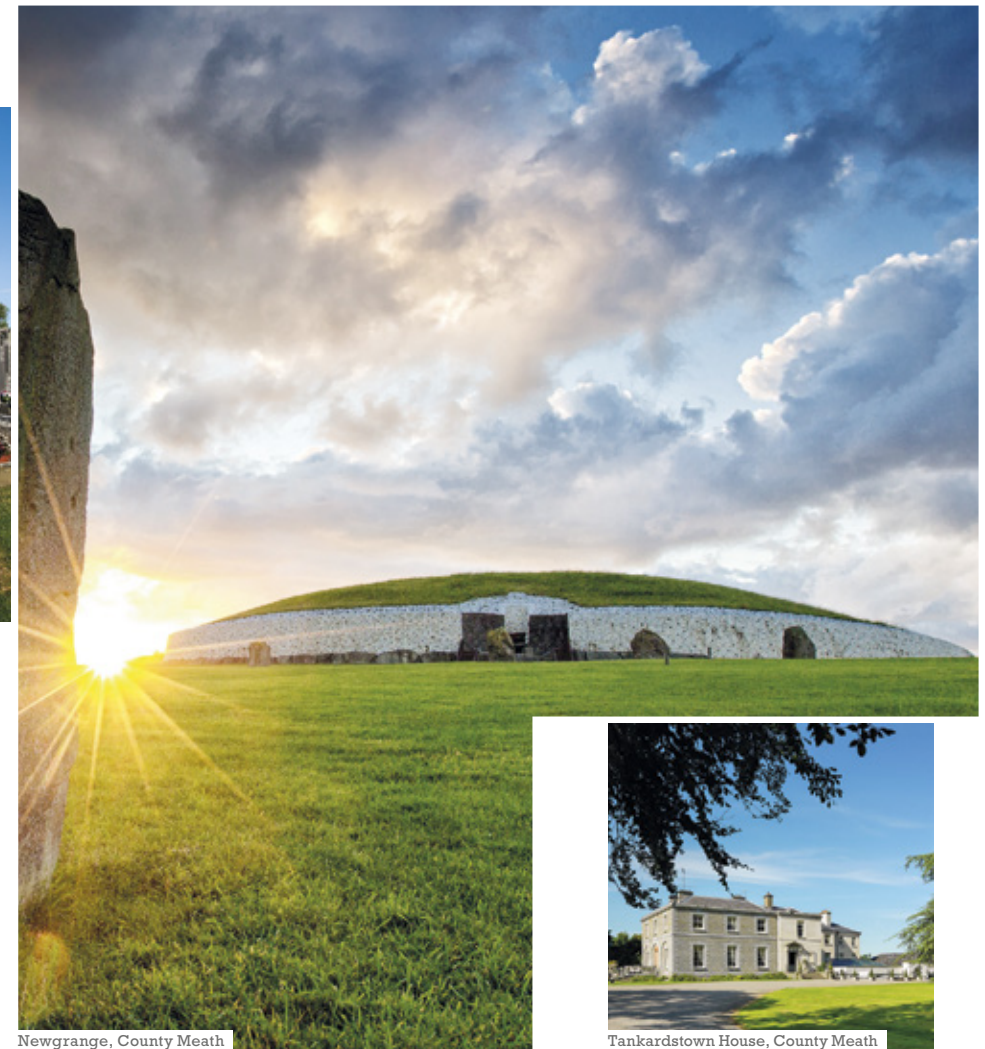
The light creeps slowly along the floor of the stone passageway. I'm in Newgrange, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This passage tomb is older than the pyramids, and I'm getting a glimpse of just what happens here on the winter solstice when the rising sun illuminates the burial chamber. It's eerie and extraordinary, and it leaves you feeling that you can just reach out and touch history.

But then, this is the Boyne Valley, and you *can* actually reach out and touch history here. At 225km, it's an easy drive (and a nice one to cycle) but with 29 historic sites along the way, it's a journey rich with heritage. Just look around you and you'll see the legacy of every big player in Ireland's history, from ancient pagans to High Kings, Early Christian monks to Vikings, Normans to Anglo-Irish aristocrats.

So far I've climbed past bemused sheep to reach the top of the Hill of Ward, near Athboy, site of an Iron Age fort, and the place where the wild, pagan festival of Samhain or Halloween was celebrated. To this day, pagans congregate on Tlachtga (to give the hill its Irish name) to welcome the Celtic new year. According to the locals, it's quite a spectacle.

I've touched the massive stone crosses at Monasterboice, Mellifont Abbey and Kells, and wondered just how the monks who lived in these Early Christian settlements managed to clamour into the round towers carrying all their valuables when the doorways are well over 3m off the ground. One can only assume that pursuit by a marauding Viking adds a spring to one's step.

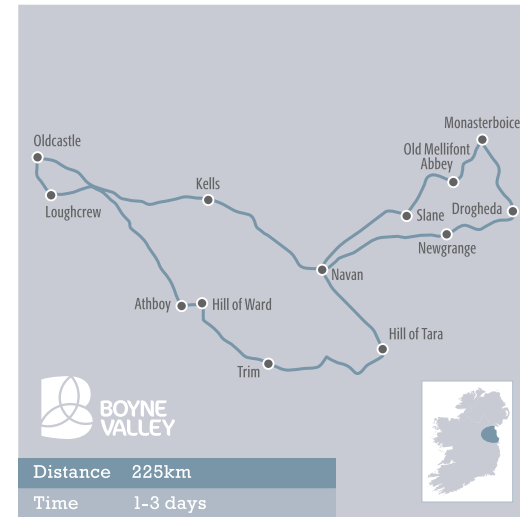
I've wandered through stately homes and heard tales of their scandalous



Newgrange, County Meath



Tankardstown House, County Meath



Distance 225km
Time 1-3 days

Along the way

Visit

Trim Castle is a 12th century Anglo-Norman stronghold and star of Mel Gibson's *Braveheart*. The Battle of the Boyne Visitor Centre in the elegant Georgian **Oldbridge House** near Slane is fascinating, or visit **Loughcrew** near Oldcastle, a megalithic cemetery containing around 30 passage tombs.

Eat

Tankardstown House near Navan offers everything from afternoon tea to a seven-course tasting menu. **The Forge** in Carnaross serves the best local produce in a converted 18th century forge (naturally); and in **George's Patisserie** in Slane you'll find some of the best pastries and cakes you'll ever taste.

Sleep

Enjoy quirky luxury in **Bellinter House**, a boutique hotel on the banks of the River Boyne. The quiet elegance of **Rosnaree House** overlooking Newgrange makes for a restful place to stay, or go for cosy quaintness in **Clonleason Gate Lodge**, near Kells, a pretty Georgian cottage nestled in the lush countryside.

histories. The road from Dublin to Slane was said to be one of the straightest in Ireland to ensure King George IV could visit his mistress, Elizabeth, Marchioness Conynham of Slane Castle, without having to slow down for the inconvenient bends.

I finish my day much as I started it – gazing at the sun. It's setting this time, and from my vantage point on top of the Hill of Tara, I can see for miles. As inspirational panoramas go, I couldn't ask for better.

THE GREAT GAME

Ireland, Home of Champions, a place where land, sea and sky come together in perfect harmony. Brian Keogh explores some of the courses that have made this island one of the top places in the world to play golf

THE DESIGNER CHOICE

Trump International Golf Links Ireland

Doonbeg, County Clare

It's a credit to Greg Norman that he could earn such praise for a links course built just minutes away from the legendary Lahinch Golf Club – the links created by the famous Augusta National designer, Dr Alister MacKenzie. "It took someone as courageous as Greg to design Doonbeg," Pádraig Harrington said of the incredible course. "He has designed a phenomenal golf course. It's unlikely you'll get to see the likes of it anywhere else in the world. It's a fun golf course to play... how golf was designed to be played 150 years ago." No wonder businessman Donald Trump swooped in to buy it in 2014, renaming it Trump International Golf Links Ireland. Good news for golfers who fell in love with its dramatic setting.

Other Designer Choices:

Mount Juliet, County Kilkenny: Jack Nicklaus's signature parkland course constantly ranks as a must-play. **Tralee Golf Club**, County Kerry: Arnold Palmer's first European design in a beautiful corner of Ireland. **Lough Erne Golf Club**, County Fermanagh: Sir Nick Faldo's course is host to The Irish Open 2017.



Royal County Down, County Down

THE IRISH OPEN 2015

Royal County Down Golf Club
County Down

Old Tom Morris laid out Royal County Down where "the Mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea". The course has been refined since, but it's still so stunning that Golf Digest rates it as the best on the planet outside the US, and number four on their Top 100 Courses of the World. Rory McIlroy, winner of both The Open and the USPGA Open in 2014, can't wait to return for the Irish Open (28-31 May). "Royal County Down is one of my favourites," McIlroy said. "The more you play it, the more you recognise it for the class place it is." One of golf's finest chroniclers, Peter Dobereiner, once wrote: "The essence of golf is to say that it enhances the feeling that it's good to be alive. That's the first priority and absolute justification. The links of Royal County Down are exhilarating even without a club in your hand."

Other Championship Courses:

Portmarnock, County Dublin: Home to the Irish Open and the Walker Cup, amongst others. **Killarney Golf Club**, County Kerry: The incredible setting for two Irish Opens. **Warrenpoint Golf Club**, County Down: Where Christy O'Connor Snr won the Irish Professional Championship in 1960 and 1966.



Trump International Golf Links Ireland, Doonbeg, County Clare

THE HISTORICAL GEM

Killeen Castle Golf Club
County Meath

For over 800 years, Killeen Castle has stood as a silent sentinel at the heart of Royal Meath, just a short distance from the Hill of Tara, ancient home of the High Kings of Ireland. Now it is the centrepiece of one of Ireland's great golf destinations, designed by 18-time major winner Jack Nicklaus, with a little help from the fairies. Only in Ireland would the "Golden Bear" be forced to redesign a golf hole for mystical reasons. When planning the 12th, Nicklaus wanted to tuck the green further in to the left, but that would have meant cutting down a hawthorn tree, considered by the Irish to be a fairy tree. The great man was taken aback when workmen told him it was bad luck to remove the tree, so he reworked his plans and the result is beautiful: a big drive leading to a small green protected on the right by the Rock River. This is where the magic happens.

Other Historical Gems:

Ballybunion, County Kerry: In view of a 15th century castle, it's a links on a jewel of a bay. **Carton House**, County Kildare: Where the World Amateur Championships will be held in 2018. **Royal Belfast**, County Antrim: Celebrated its first 18-hole competition all the way back in 1881.



Killeen Castle, County Meath



Royal Portrush, County Antrim

Need to know the essential information

There are fewer than 200 true links courses on the planet. Ireland has 50 of them.

Nothing is more beautiful than a sunny day in Ireland, but it's best to be prepared – pack a windcheater and waterproofs.

Golf Digest magazine ranks six of Ireland's courses in its Top 100 in the World: Royal County Down (4th), Royal Portrush (16th), Ballyunion Old Course (27th), Lahinch (64th), Portmarnock (83rd) and Waterville (93rd).

The advantage of living on a small island at the edge of Europe? The summer days are long. At the height of the season, it's light by 6.30am and doesn't get dark until after 10pm.

Playing that dream course is just a matter of paying your green fee, but don't forget to book ahead, especially for the top courses.

You won't need your tuxedo in Ireland but there's a strict dress code at most clubs – on and off the course. Smart casual works well.

Don't be afraid to mix. Invite a member or two to join your group and have a fun fourball. Loser buys the drinks at the 19th hole.

Invest in a caddie. If you're going to be on some of the famous championship courses, a good caddie will save you plenty of shots and make that dream round even more enjoyable.

For more information, visit ireland.com/golf

THE WILD ONE Rosapenna Golf Resort

County Donegal

Located in the village of Downings in the wilds of County Donegal, this excellent resort is bounded by the Atlantic on one side, with rolling hills on the other. Golf has been played at Rosapenna for more than 120 years and while the forces of nature have shaped the land, golfing giants have left their mark here, too. Old Tom Morris, the pioneering professional golfer and course designer, first set eyes on Sheephaven Bay in 1891 when invited by Lord Leitrim to design the links course there. Today, Rosapenna is the oldest golf resort in Ireland, boasting two superb links courses. Whether you play the Old Tom Morris Links or the Sandy Hills Links – both ranked among Ireland's Top 50 courses by Golf Digest Ireland – you'll need to navigate your way through sand dunes cloaked in marram grass. The golf is riveting, but the landscape is a glorious backdrop, with sandy strips of beach, and green- and purple-hued mountains, caressed by those eternal Atlantic winds. Wild and wonderful.

More to explore:

Lahinch Golf Club, County Clare: Designed by MacKenzie, Phil Mickelson is a member here.

The European, County Wicklow: A beauty ranked in the Top 100 Courses of the World.

Portstewart Golf Club, County Londonderry: On the Causeway Coastal Route, it includes the aptly named Thistly Hollow!

THE STAR ATTRACTION Royal Portrush Golf Club County Antrim

Just a few minutes' drive from the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Giant's Causeway, the Dunluce Links at Royal Portrush is a giant of Ireland's golf in every sense: towering dunes, sweeping valleys and rough so thick that only the greats of the game can conquer it. With the R&A inviting Royal Portrush to return to The Open Championship rota (earliest available slot is 2019), Royal Portrush's status as one of the great golf courses of the world is cemented. "If you play really good golf, you get rewarded around Royal Portrush," says Rory McIlroy. "It's very fair. But if you hit shots that you shouldn't, you're going to get punished."

More to explore:

County Louth Golf Club, County Louth: Rising star Shane Lowry won the Irish Open as an amateur here in 2009. **County Sligo Golf Club, County Sligo:** A firm favourite of two-times Masters winner Bernhard Langer. **Hollywood Golf Club, County Down:** Rory McIlroy was its youngest member at the tender age of 16.



Rosapenna, County Donegal

THE BEAUTY The Old Head of Kinsale Golf Links County Cork

From the scampering hares and swooping sea birds to a pod of humpback whales frolicking in the Celtic Sea, the Old Head of Kinsale has it all. No wonder it's regarded by many of the game's greats as one of the most spectacular golfing locations on earth. Situated on an isthmus that protrudes into the sea, the view from the 15th tee simply blew Tiger Woods away. "Wow," he said as the early morning fog cleared to reveal the challenge. "Well worth the wait. This has to be one of the most spectacular sights I have ever seen in golf." Former Masters and The Open winner Mark O'Meara was with Woods that day: "Anyone who has a love of golf and scenic beauty should make a point of playing here, it's as simple as that."

Other Beauties:

Carne Golf Links, County Mayo: A glorious 18-hole course along the Wild Atlantic Way.

The Island Golf Club, County Dublin: Just 15 minutes from Dublin Airport, this natural wonderland is a real gem.

Ardglass Golf Club, County Down: The Mourne's backdrop give this a wow factor.



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Traditional music session in Galway

A PASSION FOR MUSIC

Martin Hayes has turned fiddle playing into a true art form. Tony Clayton-Lea meets the County Clare maestro who has brought his inventive brand of traditional Irish music to the world stage

PHOTO: DEREK SPEIRS



Martin Hayes

You don't have to be an expert in Irish traditional music to hear the truly unique sound that Martin Hayes creates. When he starts to play, the effect on the audience is palpable – such is the power of his style and technique.

This traditional music virtuoso has been the All Ireland Fiddle Champion six times (before the age of 19), has recorded numerous albums, and is a member of acclaimed contemporary Irish trad music group, The Gloaming. As fiddle players go, Hayes is a master craftsman.

Hayes grew up in County Clare, a county that is synonymous with traditional music. Lisdoonvarna made rock stars out of its trad musicians, Kilfenora is renowned for its céilí band (the simply titled Kilfenora Céilí Band), and the corner of the county near Kinvara has more musicians per square foot than

anywhere else in the island. You need to be pretty remarkable to stand out against this crowded backdrop, but according to Hayes, music is simply a way of life here.

“Being a musician wasn't considered to be in any way extraordinary,” Hayes says. “It was very much a normal thing. I developed an interest by proximity and exposure.” When you grow up in east Clare, the son of a famous musician (Hayes's father was a member of the Tulla Céilí Band) that may be true. But it doesn't take away from what an extraordinary experience it is to visit this wildly beautiful region where you can almost hear music on the wind.

Every picturesque town you pass through, every tiny pub you enter echoes with the relaxed, lyrical strains of east Clare's particular brand of traditional music. This isn't the place to come to if

you're in a hurry, and the music takes its cue from the pace of life. As Hayes puts it, “we take things a little slower here, our music, too”.

Drop into a music pub such as Shortts and Pepper's of Feakle (Hayes's home town), or Minogue's in Tulla, and you'll see a side of Ireland that feels truly special. Here, the connection to the music is deep, and it unites the rural community with an atmosphere that makes these pubs legendary.

The abundance of festivals in Clare is also testament to the social and cultural importance of music in the county. One of the highlights comes in August with the Feakle International Traditional Music Festival. Hayes usually comes home every year bringing a crowd of great players with him. The masterclasses are raved about across counties, but technique has

Contemporary sounds

U2, Sinéad O'Connor, Van Morrison, Enya... Ireland has a pretty good reputation when it comes to contemporary music. And with the likes of Snow Patrol and Imelda May making waves across the world, that looks set to continue. Of course, if there's one Irish name on the lips of international record companies and music promoters, it's that of County Wicklow musician, Andrew Hozier-Byrne. Known to all as Hozier, the singer-songwriter is set to take the world by storm. You can enjoy all sorts of music at great venues around the island including the Empire Music Hall in Belfast, a Victorian-era church; the Rococo plushness of the Olympia in Dublin; and the Cork Opera House.



Snow Patrol, Ward Park, County Down

Set dancing, County Limerick



County Clare isn't the place to come if you're in a hurry; the music takes its cue from the pace of life. As Hayes puts it: “we take things a little slower here, our music, too”

never been the main focus for Hayes – his aim is to create “good sounds” and get the melodies flowing as serenely and beautifully as possible. “I learnt that expressing a feeling in music and not playing wild or crazy all of the time was a more desirable path to take,” he says.

This emotional connection with the music is what gives it its intense character. Whether it's the poetic quality of County Clare's lilting style, the bouncy and intricate fiddle playing so familiar in Sligo – 2015 host town of the All Ireland

Fleadh Cheoil in August – or the up-tempo beats of County Donegal, there's nothing quite like seeing it performed live, and the lack of strict rules makes it that much more spontaneous. From Matt Malloy's in Westport, County Mayo, McGrory's and Teac Jack in Donegal, to Cleary's and Ciaran's Bar in County Clare, what these venues have in common is community, inclusiveness and atmosphere.

Moving beyond the fiddle, the bodhrán, the jigs and the reels, sean-nós reveals a more reflective side to Irish traditional music. This haunting style of unaccompanied Irish-language singing is rooted in the Gaeltacht regions, and developed as a way to tell the stories of everyday life. According to author Tomás Ó Maoldomhnaigh, “Songs were made to accompany the work inside and outside the home, to express the many >



Temple Bar TradFest, Dublin

At times something quite special can emerge from the session. "People can unite around this simple idea of the melody," Hayes explains, "and there are moments when everyone locks in together"

emotions, love and sadness of daily existence... and to often mark the loss of family and friends whether by death or by emigration."

You might also get to see a sean-nós dance at a traditional music festival or competition. This free-form style of dance breaks from the structure of Irish step-dancing and is compelling to watch.

Don't worry if your visit doesn't coincide with a festival; there is a much easier way to enjoy Irish music – a session. Taking place in pubs all around the island, the session (or seisiún to give it its Irish term) is a relaxed gathering of musicians – a shared experience rather than a performance; spontaneous rather than strictly organised.

"There's no limit to the amount of people that can sit in," explains Hayes. "The music is circular, there isn't a lead instrument; generally speaking, it's non-hierarchical – although some people might dominate the session. And because there isn't a divide between the professional and non-professional, there's an innate sense of egalitarianism to it."

At times something special and, as Hayes reflects, quite unexplainable can emerge from the session. "People can unite around this very simple, central idea of the melody, and there are moments in a session when everybody locks in together."

Because of this fusion of music and mindset, the combined energy of all the musicians can become a powerful entity. "This doesn't happen all the time," admits Hayes. "As they say, sometimes people don't always skate in the same direction. But those moments when it does coalesce? They are quite magical."



Belfast Ulster-Scots Festival



Lambeg drum

Ulster-Scots music

With a history that goes back 400 years, Ulster-Scots music continues to flourish. Influenced by a folk repertoire that developed up until the end of the 18th century, the likes of jigs (of Irish origin), reels (from Scotland), and hornpipes (which originated from England) combined with a traditional dance repertoire that was linked with marching tunes played by military bands.

Many decades later, such tunes are still to be heard all over Northern Ireland, along with the vibrant sounds of pipes, fiddles, flutes, accordions and the mighty Lambeg drum. Valerie Quinn is Musical Director of the Ulster-Scots eXperience, a band of musicians who perform music from the Ulster-Scots tradition. They are part of a wider revival of Ulster-Scots culture that developed during the 1990s but for Valerie, this music is not a new thing. In fact, she has been involved in Ulster-Scots music from when she was a

toddler, soaking up Scottish traditional and ceildh music that her mother played in their house. "My father's family was very musical," she explains, "and my parents were keen to get me professionally trained, so from the age of five I was classically trained on the piano; at 15 I was presented with an accordion."

It was during her teens that Valerie began to notice the differences between Scottish and Irish traditional music. "The latter is quite smooth," she explains, "whereas the former has what I'd call a snap or a kick, which was something I personally preferred. What I discovered, however, was that there were very similar tunes shared, with no definition of what was Irish and what was Scottish."

Migration between countries would be a reason for that, of course. "And then you'd have music from America coming back to Ireland. With the travelling of that music back and forth, and with Ireland and Scotland being so close geographically, the lines have become blurred as to what is Irish and what is Scottish. To my mind, Ulster-Scots folk music isn't really a separate genre."

Valerie says that what highlights the unique spirit of the music isn't necessarily the repertoire but how it's played and phrased in a musical context. "Irish music is played with very little accents, whereas Ulster-Scots and Scottish music has more." And so the music and the traditions continue? Absolutely, according to Valerie, the future is looking bright.

"My eight-year-old son is now in the marching band that my father, grandfather and great-grandfather were in," she says proudly, "so all of those tunes are second nature to him."

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Devenish Island

County Fermanagh

Lower Lough Erne's Devenish Island comes complete with round tower, high cross and monastic ruins. These are all 12th century, but would have been regarded as new-fangled architecture by the founder, St Molaise, back in the 6th century. Nearby White Island has a similarly ancient church with a Romanesque doorway – so beautiful it could support an entire postcard industry.

THE VIKINGS

Just what exactly did the Vikings get up to on the island of Ireland? Mal Rogers explores the history, myths and legends of the fearsome Norse invaders, from raiding monasteries to establishing cities

It was once the very centre of Europe with its great teaching monastery and missionary abbey. Today, Armagh bustles with all the energy of a modern city. This ancient place, still serene and beautiful, remembers its glory days – back when St Patrick established his mission here in the 5th century. Books, schools and libraries flourished, a formidable literary elite emerged, and the island of saints and scholars was born.

This turned out to be very good news for the rest of the world. Rome lay sacked; London was a muddy backwater;

Goths, Visigoths, Vandals and assorted barbarians were trashing Europe. But back in Ireland, life for monks before the Vikings saw the holy men busy saving Christian civilisation, working to protect precious manuscripts: poetry, history, social law, and literature of all sorts.

Abbeys and monasteries, such as Glendalough in the Wicklow Mountains, and Clonmacnoise, built on a bend in the mighty River Shannon, sent out missionaries to reintroduce the Gospel and educate Europe. These sites are ruins today, but with the help of their innovative interpretive centres, you can imagine pious monks hard at work creating beautifully illustrated manuscripts, golden croziers and some of the most enduring artworks the world has seen – objects that would be deemed very attractive to future invaders.

Celtic Christianity may have thrived here but its peaceful endeavours would soon be interrupted. The reason? Some very unwelcome guests were about to descend on the island of Ireland.

The Vikings made their first appearance in Ireland when they landed on picturesque Rathlin Island off the County Antrim coast in 795AD. Shortly after, they attacked the monastery on the

Scottish island of Iona. Terrified monks escaped from there to Ireland, taking with them the priceless illuminated manuscript known today as the Book of Kells – named after the Meath town where the Iona monks fled. This incredible must-see is now on view in Trinity College Dublin, where visitors can gaze at its intricately decorated pages.

From Rathlin, these Scandinavian scoundrels, dressed in animal skins and horned helmets, headed down the coast and attacked the locals in a display of shocking debauchery.

Or so we are led to believe, because throughout the centuries, the Vikings have been demonised and romanticised in equal measure. But what do we actually know about them?

History is usually written by the victors, but in the case of the Vikings, this is not so. The men from the north were pagan illiterates, so their story has largely been told by those they conquered – Christian literates – with a predictable degree of bias.

Firstly, they probably didn't wear those horned helmets, which are a pretty modern invention. Secondly, a lot of them were just as interested in trading as terrorising, and although the Irish kings



Clonmacnoise, County Offaly

They soon discovered monasteries were the richest source of booty and took aim for the source; perhaps accounting for two features of the Irish landscape: round towers and high crosses

posts, doubling as safe places for monks to store their valuables. Hefty high crosses can be explained, too: they simply couldn't be stolen as easily as works of art.

This is why you can still see many fine examples around the country: the West Cross at Monasterboice, County Louth, for example, is the tallest high cross in Ireland, at 7m.

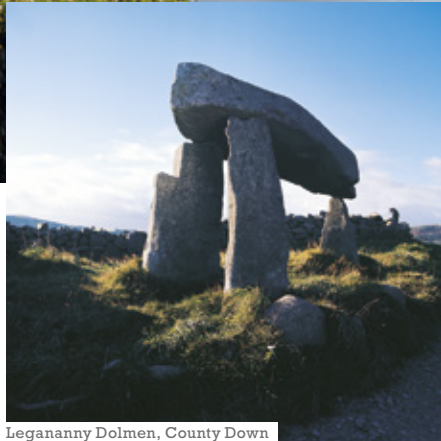
From the 830s, much larger bands of Vikings came calling. They were mostly looking for stock and provisions but gradually the attractions of actually living in Ireland dawned. The Vikings wintered for the first time on Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland, and established bases in County Louth, near the village of Annagassan, and in the city of Dublin – the watery artery of the River Liffey providing a sheltered route for the Vikings who rowed in here all those years ago. >



Viking Splash Tour, Dublin



Skellig Michael, County Kerry



Legananny Dolmen, County Down

Pop into Dublinia and imagine yourself as a Viking warrior setting forth into a new world.

The Norse seafarers – sometimes accompanied by women from back home – had grown tired of harassing the natives, and began to settle down. But despite founding great cities such as Limerick, Cork, Waterford and Dublin, the Vikings left behind little material evidence of their sojourn in Ireland. Except for one thing: place-names.

A scattering of towns and islands have Norse origins, including the Skelligs, County Kerry; Howth and Dalkey, County Dublin; Leixlip, County Kildare; Wicklow; and the Saltee Islands, County Wexford. For that matter, “ford”, as in Wexford, Carlingford and Strangford – is derived from the Norse “fjord”.

In areas such as the Waterford Viking Triangle, the streets follow a 1,000-year-old Norse street plan. A tour takes in over 1,000 years of history in 1,000 paces, and includes Waterford’s Medieval Museum, Greyfriar’s House, 12th century Reginald’s Tower and Bishop’s Palace.

Viking personal names didn’t become quite as popular, although this may be understandable with names such as Magnus Barelegs, Sitric Silkbeard and Sigtrygg the Squint-Eyed. Some family names did survive, including MacAuliffe, “Son of Olaf”, and Doyle, an Anglicisation of Ó Dubhghaill, “son of the evil foreigner”.

Despite this new family-orientated

emphasis, it wasn’t all domestic bliss. The Vikings were inevitably drawn into Ireland’s internal wars – getting along with your neighbours was still something of an exotic concept. Time, ultimately, was up for the invaders. Their shifting alliances with Irish tribal factions eventually led them into the Battle of Clontarf in 1014 (an event important enough to be remembered in Icelandic poetry) and hastened the end for the Northern adventurers.

In a few short decades, Viking rule was over and Ireland settled down to a tranquil future – just as other Norsemen were moving into France to become the Normans. And they had some very definite plans for Ireland...



Dun Aengus, Inishmore, County Galway

Back in time

Ireland’s culture may be old, but its presence is still felt with an incredible collection of passage tombs, round towers and prehistoric forts that are standing tall today

Mountsandel

County Londonderry

The oldest archaeological site in Ireland is near the town of Coleraine, and dates back an incredible 9,000 years. It’s the earliest known human settlement on the island. In the woods here, remains of flint tools were found, and today you join a forest walk down from the fort with views of the woods and the peaceful River Bann below.

Clonmacnoise

County Offaly

At the crossroads of ancient Ireland some 1,500 years ago, St Ciarán founded the monastery of Clonmacnoise. Several high crosses remain. Try to visit in the evening with the sun sinking beyond the broad sweep of the River Shannon. Enough to make even an ardent atheist momentarily reconsider.

Dun Aengus

Inishmore, County Galway

The fort of Dun Aengus, perched on a crag above the Atlantic Ocean as it crashes into Inishmore’s coastline, is often used as a film location. In fact, the island may well be typecast for the rest of its career as a spectacularly striking, prehistoric fortress clinging perilously to the Old World.

Skellig Michael

County Kerry

Nobody knows for certain what drew Early Christian monks to build stone beehive huts on an island at the edge of the known world. Maybe they were just zealous guys. See what you think yourself: a 1,000-year-old set of stone steps takes you up to the monastic settlement at the top.

Legananny Dolmen

County Down

The Legananny Dolmen in County Down is a 4,500-year-old megalithic portal tomb that looks like a Stone Age bus shelter – but is more likely the burial site of an important chieftain. This elegant tripod of stones also has links with the pagan goddess Áine, who is said to haunt the area. Nonsense? Probably.

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Condé Nast Traveller, Top 100 Hotels & Resorts in the World 2014: #1 Ireland.
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Blasket Islands, County Kerry



IN SEARCH OF HISTORY

Tracing your ancestry can be one of the most rewarding journeys you ever take. Consultant genealogist John Grenham gives expert advice on how to do it, both before you travel to the island of Ireland, and when you get here



Linen Hall Library, Belfast

If you're thinking about embarking on a journey back to your past, the news is good: genealogy in Ireland is quite straightforward. And with more and more records now easily searchable online, there's no excuse for not starting.

The only cast-iron rule is that you begin from what you know and use it to find out what you don't know. So if your surname is Kelly, do not presume that you must be connected to the Gaelic aristocrats, the O'Kellys of Uí Máine, and then try to stretch their pedigree forward to fit your family. Start from Grandpa Pat Kelly and work backwards. "Interview the elder members of your family," advises historian Turtle Bunbury. "Gather whatever information you can, irrespective of quality. A detail that may seem trivial at the start could prove the key to a whole episode."

It is true that the Public Record Office

Dunbrody Famine Ship, New Ross, County Wexford



in Dublin was destroyed during the Irish Civil War in 1922, and all the documents it held were burned, but with a little effort (and some rose-tinted spectacles), the glass can be half-full: the range of records you have to think about is all the simpler.

Only four sets of records are absolutely essential for everyone doing Irish research: census returns; state registration of births, marriages and deaths; church registers; and property tax listings.

Censuses

The earliest surviving full censuses for the entire island of Ireland are for 1901 and 1911, and they are freely searchable online at genealogy.nationalarchives.ie. For the descendants of the millions who fled Ireland during the Great Famine of 1845-1852 or immediately afterwards, these censuses might seem too late. But everyone who emigrated left behind a network of extended family, and that network almost certainly survived in some form up to the start of the 20th century. So start with the online censuses; at the very least, they will give you a sense of the scale of the research. And they are simple and addictive to use: every item on every household census return is searchable.

Vital records

State registration of all Irish births, deaths and marriages began in 1864, under the charge of the General Register Office. In theory at least, every event after that year is recorded. Again, 1864 can seem very late, but these records are indexed for the whole island and can be extremely informative. If you have to start with a grandnephew of your direct line and work back, so be it.

The only place to search all pre-1922 records is in the GRO Research Room in Werburgh Street in Dublin.



PRONI, Belfast

Online research is still a little fragmented, but there are some very useful sites. For Northern Ireland, all registered events going back to 1864 are fully searchable for a small fee at geni.nidirect.gov.uk. The GRO indexes (but not the registers) for the entire island up to 1922 and the Republic of Ireland up to 1958 are transcribed and free to search on familysearch.org. This website also has transcripts of the birth registers up to 1881. Rootsireland.ie has excellent pay-per-view transcripts of the registers up to 1900, but only for some counties.

Church registers

The three major Christian denominations in Ireland are Roman Catholicism, Church of Ireland and Presbyterianism.

The Church of Ireland (in North America the Episcopalian Church) was the "established" or state church in Ireland until 1870. This meant that its pre-1870 records were regarded as state or public records, so most Church of Ireland registers dating from before 1870 were in the Public Record Office in 1922 and were destroyed. However, not everything was



Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin

lost and many transcripts of those that were destroyed have since emerged. The best collections are in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland in Belfast (for the historic nine counties of Ulster) – proni.gov.uk, and the Representative Church Body Library (for the Republic of Ireland) – ireland.anglican.org

Presbyterians have only ever made up a sizeable portion of the population in the northeast Ulster corner of the island, but before partition in 1922 there were many congregations scattered throughout Ireland. When both of the states created in that year took on clearer religious identities, many of these southern congregations withered away. In general, their records ended up in PRONI in Belfast.

A large majority of the population (more than 80%) belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, and Roman Catholic records are the single most important

The only cast-iron rule with Irish genealogy is that you begin with what you know, and use it to find out what you don't. Start from Grandpa Pat Kelly, and work backwards

source of family information before the start of civil registration in 1864. The National Library of Ireland on Kildare Street, Dublin, has microfilm copies of almost all surviving Catholic registers before 1880 and these are freely searchable by anyone on a walk-in basis.

A good selection of online copies of Church records is available, though scattered over different websites including rootsireland.ie; irishgenealogy.ie and ancestry.com >

Further resources

Ireland Family History on Facebook

This page holds expert sessions and enables you to connect with a community of people embarking on the journey. [Facebook.com/IrelandFamilyHistory](https://www.facebook.com/IrelandFamilyHistory)

Ireland Reaching Out

This volunteer-led research project will connect you with distant relatives at the parish level. irelandxo.com

National Library and National Archives

Both have excellent free, walk-in advisory services, while you can search census records of 1901 and 1911 online at the National Archives website. nli.ie and census.nationalarchives.ie

The Irish Times

The last name search on this website is a gem of a resource. irishtimes.com/ancestor

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) and General Register Office for Northern Ireland (GRO NI)

All public records from Northern Ireland are stored at PRONI. There's a huge range of material including records of historical, social and cultural importance that can be accessed for free. GRO NI, meanwhile, registers all births, deaths, marriages and adoptions in Northern Ireland. proni.gov.uk and gen.nidirect.gov.uk

Ulster Historical Foundation

This 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 records, as well as a free Ulster-Scots app. ancestryireland.com

Military archives

A diverse body of information for the Republic of Ireland is held on this site. militaryarchives.ie

County Genealogy Centres

Many counties in Ireland boast their own county genealogy centre and the level of local knowledge there can be useful. There's a list of the individual centres on rootsireland.ie



IRELAND GENEALOGY

Ulster American Folk Park, County Tyrone

Property taxes

The only all-inclusive record of who was living where in 19th century Ireland is Griffith's Valuation, a county-by-county listing taken between 1847 and 1864 in order to impose a property tax. From the humblest mud-walled cabin to the grandest of Georgian mansions, every single property on the island is listed, along with the name of its occupier.

An earlier tax survey, which was much less comprehensive, is found in the National Archives of Ireland's Tithe Books. Tithes were payable by all rural dwellers, regardless of religion, to the local Church of Ireland clergy. This was not a recipe for inter-faith harmony, but the assessments drawn up between 1824 and 1838 are very often the only surviving records from the period.

Griffith's and the Tithe Books are both free to search online, Griffith's at askaboutireland.ie and the Tithes at genealogy.nationalarchives.ie

From the humblest mud cabin to the grandest Georgian mansion, every single property on the island is listed in Griffith's Valuation (1847-1864) along with the name of its occupier

Along the way

As a general rule, the limit for research is the start date of the relevant parish registers. This varies, with records beginning in the late 1700s in Dublin and some of the more prosperous parts of the east of Ireland, but not until the 1840s or 1850s in many places in the west.

The glory of family history is that families don't obey the laws of history or statistics, so there's always an element of surprise – you can't say what you might find until you start looking. Good luck!

Did you know?
 In 1841, the population of Ireland was 8.25 million. By 1861, it was less than 6 million. Over those 20 years, more than a million died and more than a million fled the island.
 The 2011 National Household Survey counted over 4.5 million Canadians with Irish descent.
 Famous Canadians with Irish ancestry include novelist and short story writer W.P. Kinsella, and actors Michael J. Fox and Michael Cera.



Cobh, County Cork



National Library, Dublin

Ancestry experiences
Where to visit

National Library (Kildare Street, Dublin 2; nli.ie) and **National Archives** (Bishop Street, Dublin 8; nationalarchives.ie) in Dublin are the two major record repositories. Both provide walk-in genealogical advisory services. While at the National Library, make sure to visit the very beautiful Reading Room, with its impressive grand domed ceiling.

For a sense of how the Great Famine impacted on Irish communities, the **Irish National Famine Museum** (Strokestown, County Roscommon; strokestownpark.ie) is unmatched.

The Country Life National Museum of Ireland (Turlough, County Mayo; museum.ie) vividly represents and celebrates traditional rural life in Ireland.

Cobh, County Cork (formerly Queenstown), was the main point of embarkation for Irish emigrants to North America in the late 19th century. **The Cobh Heritage Centre** (cobhheritage.com) tells their story with a unique multimedia experience in the town's restored Victorian railway station.

It can be hard for us today to grasp just what our emigrant ancestors had to endure. **Dunbrody Famine Ship** (New Ross, County Wexford; dunbrody.com) hosts a uniquely hands-on interpretation of the Famine emigrant experience.

The Ulster American Folk Park (Omagh, County Tyrone; nmni.com) follows the Irish emigrant story from the cottages of Ulster to the log cabins of the American Frontier. It's a fascinating journey.

The Jeanie Johnston (jeaniejohnston.com) was a three-mast sailing ship that made 16 transatlantic voyages carrying emigrants between 1847 and 1854. A fully working replica is docked at Dublin's Custom House Quay and is one of the city's most popular attractions.

Glasnevin Cemetery (Finglas Road, Dublin 11; glasnevintrust.ie) holds burial records for 1.5 million people. Its award-winning museum tells their story and holds a Genealogy Research Centre.

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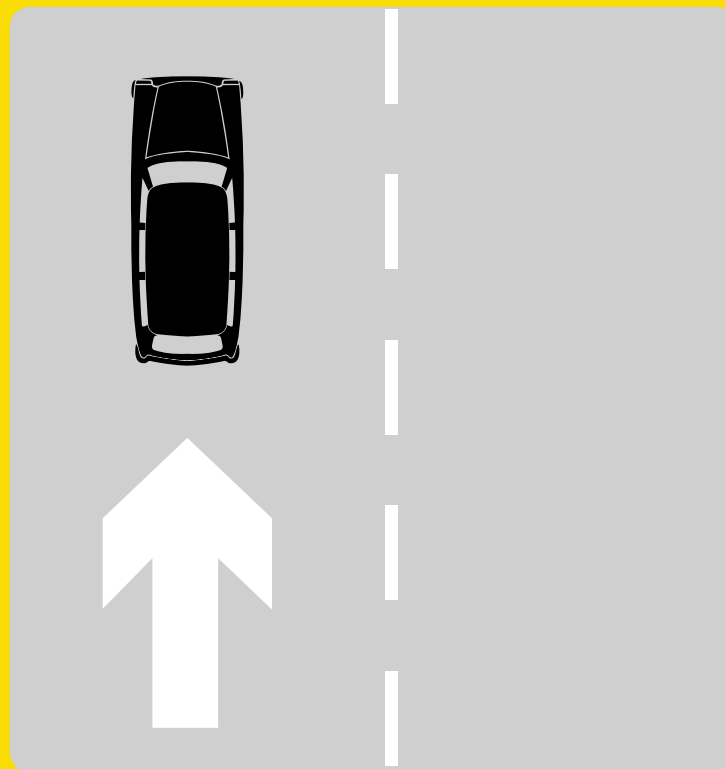
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IRELAND GENERAL INFORMATION

CLIMATE

Ireland has a mild, temperate climate with summer temperatures generally ranging from 60°F/15°C to 70°F/20°C. Temperatures in spring and autumn are generally 50°F/10°C, and in winter between 40°F/5°C and 46°F/8°C. Snow is rare but rain showers can occur at any time of the year. For up-to-the-minute weather reports visit met.ie

EMBASSIES & HIGH COMMISSION

Canadian Embassy in Dublin
canadainternational.gc.ca/ireland-irlande
British High Commission
gov.uk/government/world/canada
Irish Embassy in Canada
embassyofireland.ca

PASSPORT/VISA REQUIREMENTS

A valid Canadian passport is required to visit the island of Ireland and no visa is required. However, if you are travelling on a passport issued by another country (although a resident in Canada), please check visa requirements with the embassy.

ACTIVITIES

WALKING

Along spectacular coastline, over dramatic mountain scenery or by tranquil lakes, walking in Ireland is a joy. Look out for a whole network of Waymarked Ways, walking holidays and special festivals throughout the year. For more information visit ireland.com/walking

CYCLING

A hugely popular sport in Ireland (which has produced several of the world's leading cyclists), cycling is a marvellous way to tour the country. A number of companies provide guided and self-guided cycling tours,

and you can hire bicycles throughout Ireland. For more information on cycling around Ireland please visit ireland.com/cycling

GAELIC FOOTBALL/HURLING

The unique Gaelic sports of football and hurling are as exciting as any sport in the world to watch and can be seen at stadiums throughout Ireland as well as at Croke Park in Dublin, home of the **Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA)**; gaa.ie

RUGBY

All 4 provinces in Ireland have strong rugby teams and the national team, composed of players from each of the provinces, is one of the best in the world. For further information contact the **Irish Rugby Football Union**; irishrugby.ie

SOCCER

Soccer is widely played and followed throughout the island of Ireland.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Football Association of Ireland; fai.ie

NORTHERN IRELAND

Irish Football Association; irishfa.com

For more detailed information on activities in Ireland, visit ireland.com/activities

WHERE TO STAY

Hospitality comes naturally in Ireland, and the island boasts a wonderful range of places to stay – from the friendliest bed & breakfasts in the world to 5-star hotels. For fantastic accommodation offers and inclusive packages visit ireland.com/hotoffers

Choose from hotels or guesthouses, elegant country homes, luxury castles, village pubs, Georgian manors, budget hotels and Victorian houses. You'll find

welcoming bed & breakfasts throughout Ireland, even in the most remote areas, with friendly personal service and delicious full Irish or Ulster fry breakfasts. To feel part of the countryside, nothing compares to a farmhouse holiday, but book early as they are very popular – it's a great way to get to know local people.

Ireland's large network of hostels gives budget travellers great independence. Facilities vary so check in advance.

HOTELS & GUESTHOUSES

Irelandhotels.com
irelandhotels.com
Northern Ireland Hotels Federation
nihf.co.uk
Ireland's Blue Book
irelands-blue-book.ie
Good Food Ireland
goodfoodireland.ie
Manor House Hotels
and **Irish Country Hotels**
manorhousehotels.com
irishcountryhotels.com

BED & BREAKFASTS

B&B Ireland
bandbireland.com

COUNTRY HOUSES

The Hidden Ireland Guide
hiddenireland.com

HOSTELS

An Óige – Irish Youth Hostel Association
anoige.ie
Independent Holiday Hostels
hostels-ireland.com
Hostelling International Northern Ireland
hini.org.uk
Independent Hostels of Ireland
independenthostels.com

TRAVELLING TO IRELAND BY AIR

GETTING TO IRELAND HAS NEVER BEEN EASIER

You can fly direct from Canada to Ireland at any time of the year. A number of airlines service Canada to Ireland from major departure cities across the country including Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Ottawa, Halifax, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg and St John's. Arrival destinations on the island of Ireland are Dublin, Belfast, Cork and Shannon.



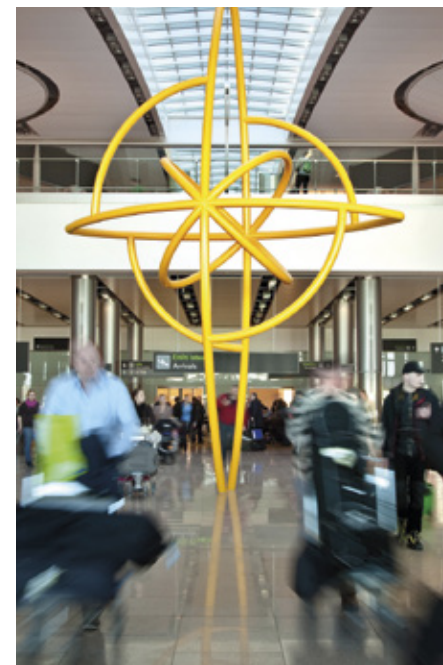
See airline websites or visit ireland.com for further information.

AIR SERVICES FROM CANADA

AIRLINE	TELEPHONE	WEBSITE
Aer Lingus	800 474 7424	aerlingus.com
Air Canada	888 247 2262	aircanada.com
Air Transat	866 847 1112	airtransat.ca
American Airlines	800 433 7300	aa.com
British Airways	800 247 9297	ba.com
Delta Air Lines	800 221 1212	delta.com
United Airlines	800 864 8331	united.com
US Airways	800 622 1015	usairways.com
Virgin Atlantic	800 862 8621	virgin-atlantic.com
WestJet	1 877 952 4696	westjet.com

CARRIER	CONTACT	ROUTE
1 Aer Lingus	aerlingus.com	TORONTO - DUBLIN (year round)
2 AIR CANADA rouge	aircanada.com	TORONTO - DUBLIN (year round)
3 Air transat	airtransat.ca	TORONTO - DUBLIN (May-Oct) TORONTO - SHANNON (May-Oct) MONTREAL - DUBLIN (May-Oct)
4 WESTJET	westjet.com	TORONTO - DUBLIN (via St John's, May-Oct) ST JOHN'S - DUBLIN (May-Oct)

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



TRAVELLING FROM DUBLIN AND BELFAST AIRPORTS INTO CITY CENTRES

DUBLIN

BUS: Direct buses to the city centre, and bus and train stations are available from Dublin Bus Airlink; €6* single and €10* return. Children travel half price.

TAXI: Taxis cost between €15-25* depending on where you are travelling within the city.

BELFAST

BELFAST INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

BUS: The 24-hour Airport Express 300 to and from Belfast city costs £7.50* single and £10.50* return.

TAXI: Fares to the city are about £30*.

GEORGE BEST BELFAST CITY AIRPORT

BUS: Airport Express 600 into the city centre runs on the hour (every 20 minutes during peak times); £2.40* single and £3.60* return.

TAXI: Fares to the city centre are about £10*.

TRAIN: Trains run from Sydenham station near the airport to Belfast and beyond.

*Prices are subject to change.



CANADIAN TOUR OPERATORS

COMPANY	WEBSITE
ESCORTED TOURS & INDEPENDENT VACATIONS	
Air Canada Vacations	aircanadavacations.com
ATOURZ/Airliners	atourz.ca
CIE Tours	cietours.com
CIT Tours	cittours.ca
Collette Vacations	collettevacations.com
Contiki Holidays	contiki.com
Cosmos	cosmosvacations.ca
Craig Travel	craigtravel.com
Denure Tours	denuretours.com
DH Tour	dhgrouptours.com
Ellison Travel and Tours	ettravel.com
Globus	globusjourneys.ca
Horizon & Co	horizon-co.com
Insight Vacations	insightvacations.com
Irish Travel Bureau	irishtravel.ca
Merit Travel Group	merit.ca
Monograms	monogramstravel.ca
NAVTOURS	navtours.com
Romantic Planet	romanticplanet.ca
Rostad Tours	rostad.com
Royal Irish Tours	royalirishtours.com
Tauck	tauck.com
Tours Chanteclerc	tourschanteclerc.com
Trafalgar Tours	trafalgartours.com
Transat Holidays	transatholidays.com
Travel Only	travelonly.ca
Senior Tours	seniortours.ca
Vacances Ideals	vacancesideal.com

COMPANY	WEBSITE
GOLF	
Golf-Away Tours	golfawaytours.com
Golf the World Vacations	golftheworldvacations.com
Gryphon Golf Tours	gryphongolf.com
Merit Golf Vacations	meritgolfvacations.com
Strider Golf Adventures	strider.ca
ACTIVE VACATIONS	
Active Journeys	activejourneys.com
The Adventure Travel Company	theadventuretravelcompany.com
Butterfield & Robinson	butterfield.com
Comfortable Hiking Holidays	letshike.com
Freewheeling Adventures	freewheeling.ca
G Adventures	gadventures.com
Great Explorations	great-explorations.com
Hidden Trails	hiddentrails.com
Randonée Tours	randoneetours.com
The Vacation Station	thevacationstation.com
World Expeditions	worldexpeditions.com
YOUTH & EDUCATIONAL TOURS	
Celtic Learning	celticlearning.com
Connaissance Travel and Tours	connaissancetravel.com
EF Educational Tours	eftours.ca
Explorica	explorica.ca
Georgia Hardy Tours	ghardytraveltours.com
Languages Abroad	languagesabroad.com
Travelcuts	travelcuts.com

A packaged vacation offers a variety of choices including a range of fully escorted coach tours, self-drive vacations, golf, cycling, walking, horse riding and fishing. Packages, including pre-paid vouchers, can be booked before departure from a Canadian tour operator. For details of packages, please visit ireland.com/hotoffers or call your travel agent. All information correct at time of going to press.



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TRAVELLING AROUND IRELAND



PUBLIC TRANSPORT BY RAIL

The rail network serves many large towns and cities across the island, including the ferry ports of Larne, Belfast, Dublin, Dun Laoghaire, Cork and Rosslare.

The Enterprise is a fast, high-quality rail network linking Dublin and Belfast. The journey takes around 2 hours and is probably the most comfortable way to travel between the 2 cities. Catch the Enterprise from Connolly Station in Dublin and Central Station in Belfast.

Britrail Pass Plus Ireland (must be purchased before leaving Canada) combines either 8 or 10 days of unlimited rail travel in Britain and Ireland with a round trip crossing of the Irish Sea by Stena Line. Eurail/Rail Europe also offer unlimited rail travel packages in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (must be purchased before leaving Canada).

BY BUS

Bus services link to the rail system as well as providing access to ferry ports and airports. Recent investment in road and rail provides more comfort for travellers, offers greater frequency of service and improves travel times. New services include the western rail link between Galway and Limerick. Rail and bus fares offer good value for the traveller with various discount tickets available offering unlimited travel on bus and rail services.

URBAN TRANSPORT

The Dublin Bus 3-day Freedom Pass offers visitors unlimited travel on tour buses, airport links and regular

bus services. Please check for offers when booking.

The Leap Visitor card offers 72 hours unlimited travel on Airlink, Dublin Bus, Luas, DART and Commuter Rail services. It is available for purchase at Dublin Airport only, and costs €19.50 for 72 hours.

The Belfast Visitor Pass includes unlimited travel on all scheduled Metro buses, NI Railways and Ulsterbus services operating within the Translink Belfast Visitor Pass Zone, as well as discounts on attractions and tours, and special offers for shopping and eating out. visit-belfast.com

DUBLIN LUAS

The Dublin Luas tram system connects outlying suburbs to Dublin city centre with a high-capacity, high-frequency and high-speed service. When in the Republic of Ireland call Luas on 1800 300 604 or visit luas.ie

If you do not have a validated bus ticket, you will need to keep in mind that Dublin Bus services require exact change to be given; notes will not be accepted. Bus/rail/Luas travel tickets are available from most newsagents in Dublin city centre and the surrounding suburbs.

DART

The Dublin area is served by the DART – Dublin Area Rapid Transit – from Howth to Malahide in north County Dublin via Dun Laoghaire to Greystones in County Wicklow. irishrail.ie

CYCLING

The Dublin Bike Sharing Scheme is another good option for travelling around the city. dublinbikes.ie

Cork, Galway, Limerick and Belfast (from February 2015) also have bike schemes. ireland.com

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Irish Rail – Iarnród Éireann

Tel: +353 1 836 6222

irishrail.ie

Irish Bus – Bus Éireann

Tel: +353 1 836 6111

buseireann.ie

Dublin Bus – Bus Átha Cliath

Tel: +353 1 873 4222

dublinbus.ie

NORTHERN IRELAND

Translink (Northern Ireland Railways, Ulsterbus, Metro – Belfast's bus service)

Tel: +44 28 9066 6630

translink.co.uk

Check for discounted fares when travelling by public transport. For instance, iLink provides unlimited travel for 1 day, 1 week or 1 month (Northern Ireland only).

DRIVING IN IRELAND

Canadian visitors to Ireland must bring a valid Canadian driver's licence with them. Driving in Ireland is on the left of the road and seatbelts must be worn at all times in the front and back of the vehicle. Drivers should note that they are obliged by law to carry their driver's licence at all times when driving in the Republic of Ireland.

Motorcyclists and their passengers must wear helmets. There are very strict laws on drinking alcohol and driving, and the best advice is simply "don't drink and drive".

The measurement of speed limits on roads in the Republic of Ireland is kilometres per hour (km/h). The measurement of speed limits on roads in Northern Ireland is miles per hour (mph). Motorists are urged to remember the change of driving laws when crossing the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

In Northern Ireland, the speed limit is 30mph in built-up areas, 60mph on the open road and 70mph on motorways unless otherwise shown. In the Republic of Ireland, the speed limit is 120km/h on motorways, 100km/h on national roads and 80km/h on non-national roads.

CAR RENTAL

Most of the major car rental companies have desks at airports, ferry terminals and cities across Ireland. Some companies do not rent cars to drivers under 21 years or over 70 years, but please check with your car rental company before making a reservation. All drivers must hold valid licences. It is advisable to book in advance, especially if you are travelling during the high season, as it is generally cheaper. The majority of rental cars are standard shift but automatic cars are available, if booked in advance, for an additional charge. Child seats should also be booked in advance.

To avoid misunderstandings, it is recommended that you always check the detailed terms and conditions of your rental booking in advance. Even if you book through a third party (broker, agent, tour operator) you will be required to sign a rental agreement with the car rental company, so spend some time in advance selecting the various insurances, waivers and other options appropriate to your needs and understand the costs involved.

For insurance reasons you should advise the car rental company if you intend to travel between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The trade organisation for the car rental industry in the Republic of Ireland is the Car Rental Council.

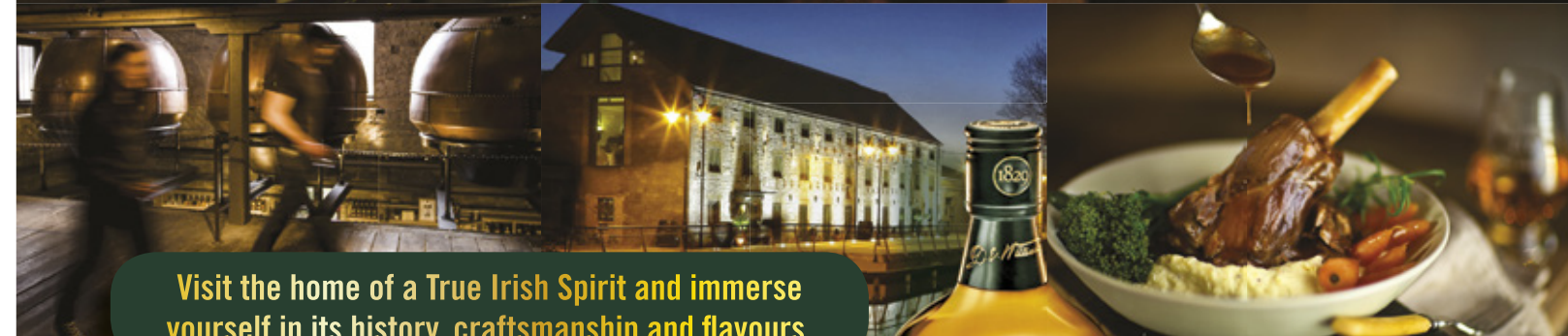
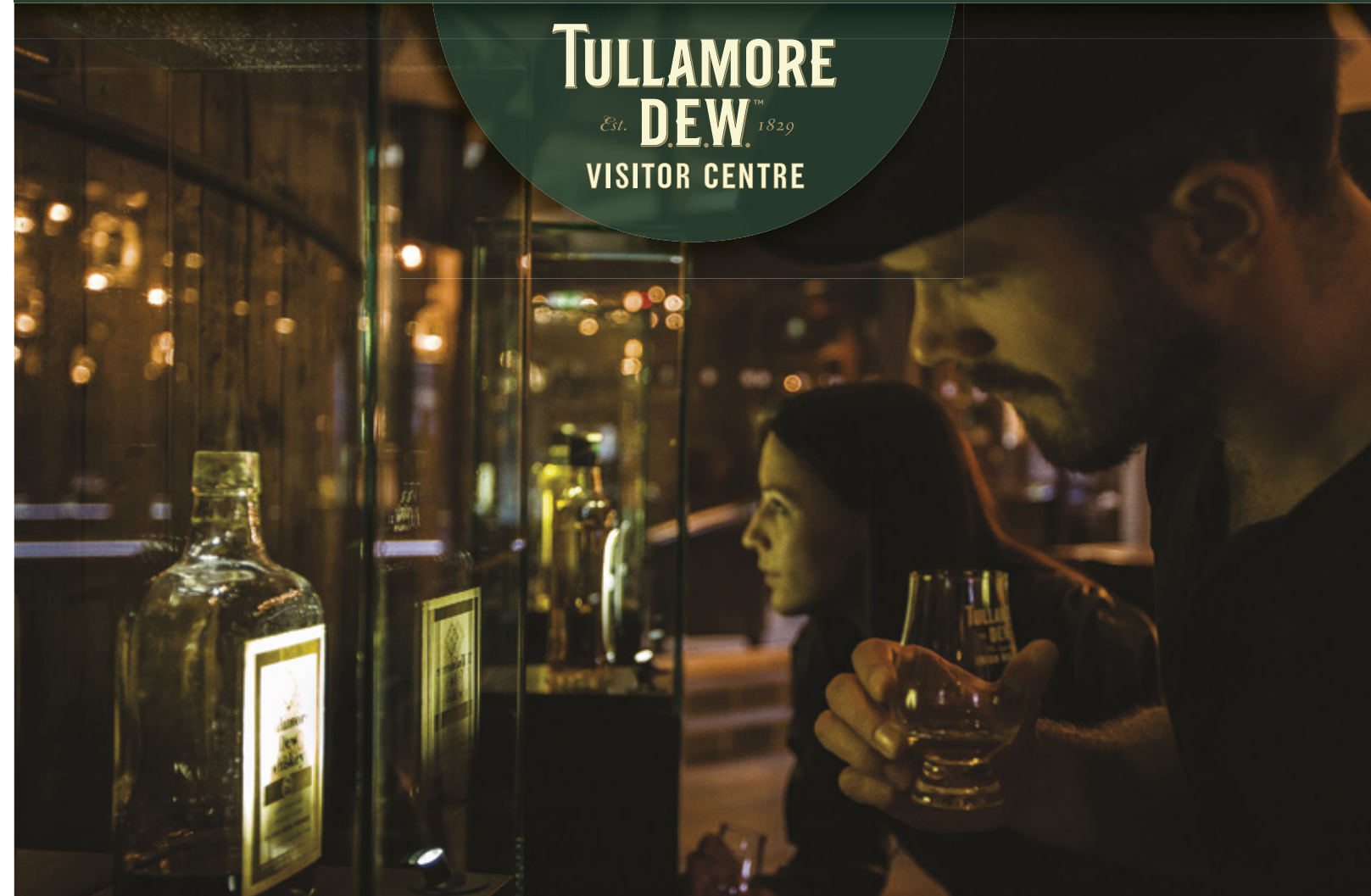
carrentalcouncil.ie

In Northern Ireland contact the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association. bvrla.co.uk

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FOX NEWS





MAP & ROUTE MILEAGE PLANNER

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



- Motorway
- Primary road
- Secondary road
- Mainline Train
- Ferry
- Airport
- Tourist Information (Year round)
- Tourist Information (Seasonal)
- Beach

Available on the App Store

To view or download a copy of the 'Great Irish Road Trips' guide, visit ireland.com

Our free Great Irish Road Trips app is available on the App Store: now there really is no such thing as a wrong turn in Ireland!

0 20 40 60 80km
0 10 20 30 40 50miles

Whilst every care has been taken to ensure accuracy in the compilation of this map, Tourism Ireland cannot accept responsibility for errors or omissions. Due to the small scale of this map, not all holiday centres can be shown. The information on this map is correct at time of going to press. © 2015 Tourism Ireland. Map creation by Michael Schmeling. www.maps.aridocean.com | Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors, CC BY-SA



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