

Ireland

YOUR TRAVEL MAGAZINE

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TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED
THE TRUE STORIES BEHIND
IRELAND'S HOUSES, CASTLES
AND GARDENS

URBAN ADVENTURES
LIFTING THE LID ON THE ISLAND'S
HOTTEST CITIES

THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY
DISCOVER IRELAND'S
SPECTACULAR COASTLINE

MAGICAL DRIVES
TAKE TO THE ROAD WITH
AN UNFORGETTABLE TRIP

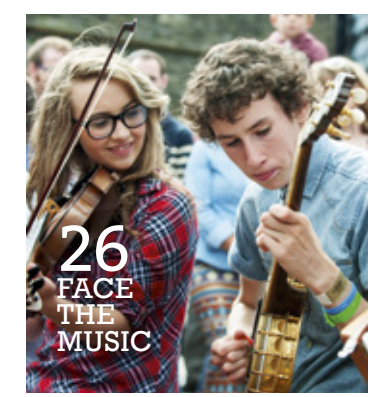
AND THE BEAT GOES ON
EXPLORING THE HEART OF
TRADITIONAL IRISH MUSIC

 **ireland.com**

WELCOME

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

Jump into  Ireland



CONTENTS

04
PICTURE THIS
Put yourself in the picture with one of Ireland's most exceptional landscapes

06
DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT
What's creating a buzz on the island of Ireland right now

07
STAY SOMEWHERE DIFFERENT
Inspirational places to lay your head for a holiday with a difference

08
Q&A WITH CATHERINE FULVIO
One of Ireland's top chefs reveals her favourite places around the island

10
URBAN LEGENDS
Laid-back city cool or medieval gem, the island of Ireland has a wealth of cities waiting to be discovered

16
THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY
Experience the awesome sights along one of the world's best driving routes

18
FRESH FLAVOURS
Pure, authentic and super-innovative, Ireland's food scene is in a league of its own

22
GREAT TALES
Discover the incredible stories behind some of the island of Ireland's historic houses, castles and gardens

26
FACE THE MUSIC
A traditional music session in Ireland is an experience that will stay with you forever

30
MAGICAL DRIVES
Take to the road with some of the most spectacular drives in Europe

34
THE GREAT OUTDOORS
From gentle cruises to the thrills of big-wave surfing

38
PLAYING THE GREATS
The island of Ireland's golf courses are world-renowned and waiting for you

42
THE PRACTICALS
Everything you need to know about organising a holiday to Ireland

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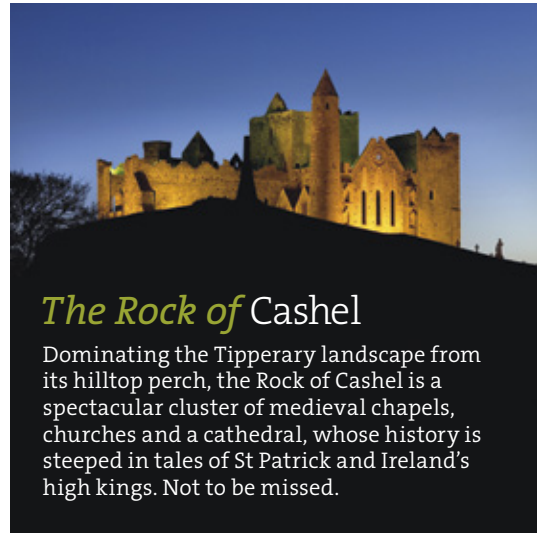
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PICTURE THIS...

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

The Skellig Islands, County Kerry



The Rock of Cashel

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



Giant's Causeway

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

DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT

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



International Appalachian Trail

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

Traditional pubs

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



The Burren

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



Blackhead Lightkeepers' House, County Antrim



Dromoland Castle, County Clare



Crom Castle, County Fermanagh



Adare Manor, County Limerick



Dromquinna Manor, County Kerry



Martello Tower, Sutton, County Dublin

STAY SOMEWHERE DIFFERENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For more information on accommodation, visit: ireland.com



Ballyknocken Cookery School

Catherine Fulvio



Sally Gap, County Wicklow



Q&A CATHERINE FULVIO

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

What makes Ireland special?

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

What is your favourite place on the island?

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

What is your favourite Irish dish?

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

What is your favourite view on the island?

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

What's your idea of a relaxing day out?

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

What are your favourite secret places?

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

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

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

How would you sum up Ireland in three words?

Magical, fun, delicious.



Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge, County Antrim

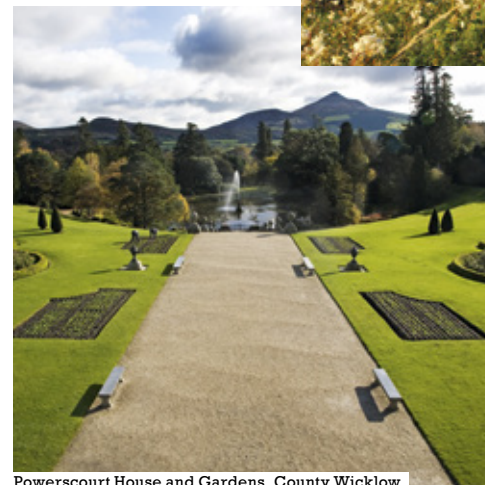
Sally Gap

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

Causeway Coast

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

Whitepark Bay, County Antrim



Powerscourt House and Gardens, County Wicklow



Poppies, County Wicklow



Galway



Waterford Quay



Temple Bar, Dublin



St Stephen's Green, Dublin



The Mall, Armagh

URBAN LEGENDS

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



River Lagan, Belfast



Guildhall, Derry-Londonderry



Ha'penny Bridge, Dublin



St Anne's Church, Cork

DUBLIN

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

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

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

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

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

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



Killiney Hill, County Dublin

Beyond the city

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

Dublin Five to see

Book of Kells, Trinity College

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

Kilmainham Gaol

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

Guinness Storehouse

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

Jameson Distillery

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

National Museum

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



Trinity College Library, Dublin



Belfast Black Taxi Tour

BELFAST

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

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

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

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

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

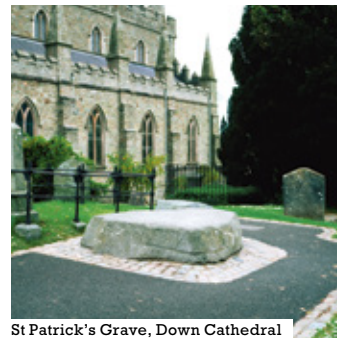
And the perfect place to toast your enjoyable Belfast experience? It has to be the Victorian-era Crown Liquor Saloon, not only one of the best bars in Belfast, but one of the best bars in the world!

Crown Liquor Saloon, Belfast



Beyond the city

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



St Patrick's Grave, Down Cathedral

Belfast Five to see

City Hall

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

St George's Market

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

Botanic Gardens

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

Titanic Belfast

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

Ulster Folk and Transport Museum

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



Titanic Belfast



Cork by night

CORK

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

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

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

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

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

English Market, Cork



Beyond the city

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



Kinsale, County Cork

Cork Five to see

Crawford Gallery

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

English Market

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

Cork City Gaol

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

Cork University

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

Walks along the River Lee

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



The River Lee Walkway, Cork

City of culture 2014



Foynes Flying Boat & Maritime Museum, County Limerick



The Hunt Museum, Limerick

LIMERICK

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

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

Why Limerick? Well, apart from the obvious literary associations, there are plenty of reasons. The Limerick City Gallery of Art sings with those greats from the Irish art world: works by Jack B. Yeats, Paul Henry, Nathaniel Hone and Eva Hamilton are just the tip of the iceberg. The University Concert Hall's architectural lines have welcomed hordes of music lovers over the years, and the city has a lively traditional music scene that takes place in traditional pubs. Looking for a museum with a difference? Try the Hunt, which has one of Ireland's greatest private collections of art and antiques, as well as attractions that range from Stone Age Ireland and Ancient Egypt to drawings by Picasso. Located within an elegant 18th century Italian-style building, the Hunt is a reason to visit the city in itself, and boasts a great riverside restaurant overlooking the River Shannon.

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



The Frank McCourt Museum, Limerick



The White House, Limerick

Limerick Pubs to enjoy

Limerick's pubs are famous for their atmosphere, culture and traditional music. Here's three to get you started...

The White House

There's poetry, open-mic sessions and more at this lively Limerick pub, which was established in 1812.

Curragower Seafood Bar

In the heart of the medieval quarter, this is said to be one of the city's oldest bars, with a lineage back to the 1700s. It's also a great place for traditional Irish music.

Bobby Byrne's Bar

Experience Limerick's passion for sport by joining the locals and watching a match on the big screen in this vibrant pub.



The Milk Market, Limerick



Galway

Four to explore

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

GALWAY Creative beauty

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

KILKENNY Medieval gem

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

WATERFORD Viking surprises

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



Reginald's Tower, Waterford



Kilkenny Castle



Peace Bridge, Derry~Londonderry



City walls, Derry~Londonderry

DERRY~LONDONDERRY Walled wonder

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

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



THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

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



Garnish Island, West Cork

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hugging Galway Bay, the coastline continues



Inisheer, County Galway

Take it further

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



Whiterocks Beach, Antrim coast



Coumeenole Beach, County Kerry



The Glens of Antrim

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Slieve League Cliffs, County Donegal



For more information visit: ireland.com

The Greenhouse, Dublin



The Cliff House Hotel, County Waterford

Lough Erne Resort, County Fermanagh



Smoked salmon and boxty pancakes

FRESH FLAVOURS

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

Smoke signals

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Roundstone Harbour, County Galway

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

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

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

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

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

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

At the market

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



Balloo House, County Down



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



English Market, Cork



Orchard Acre Farm, County Fermanagh

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

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

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



St George's Market, Belfast

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

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

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

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

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

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



Johnnie Fox's pub, County Dublin



Belfast Taste & Music Fest

Food Festivals

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

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

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

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



Irish farmhouse cheeses



Harlem, Belfast

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

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

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

Foods to look out for

Country butter

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

Fermanagh Black Bacon

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

Irish stew

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

Milleens cheese

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

Seafood chowder and fresh soda bread

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



Smoked fish platters

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

Spiced beef

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

Blaa

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

Soda farl

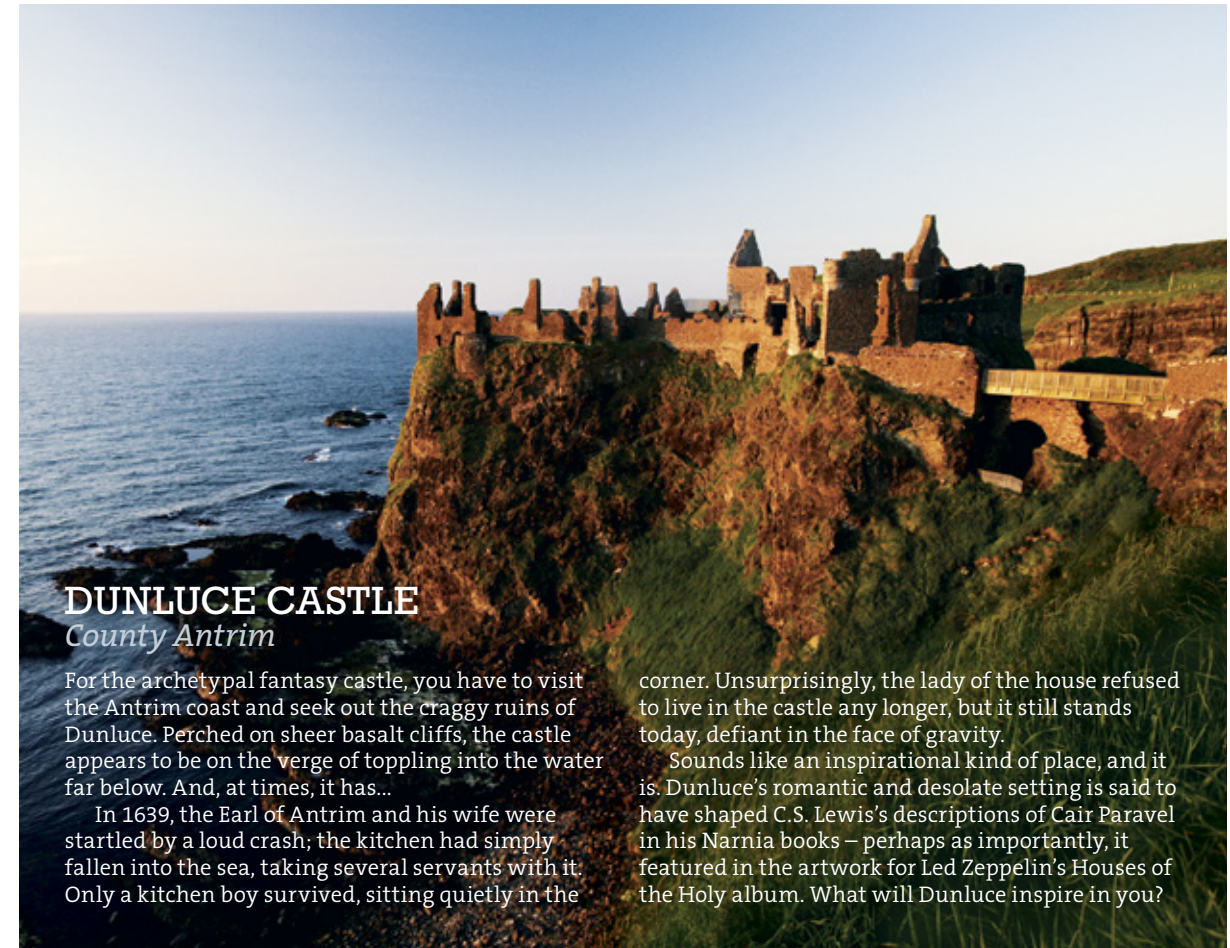
A flattened dough bread that can be eaten fresh from the griddle with butter and jam or cooked until golden and served alongside the traditional full Northern Irish breakfast, the famous Ulster fry. Delicious no matter how you eat it.



GREAT TALES

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

Blarney Castle, County Cork



DUNLUCE CASTLE

County Antrim

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

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

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

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

BLARNEY CASTLE

County Cork

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

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

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



RUSSBOROUGH HOUSE

County Wicklow

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



HUNTINGTON CASTLE

County Carlow

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

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

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



PHOTO: THE NATIONAL TRUST/BERNIE BROWN

CASTLE WARD

County Down

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

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

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



Learn

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



Luxury

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



Relax

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



Play

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



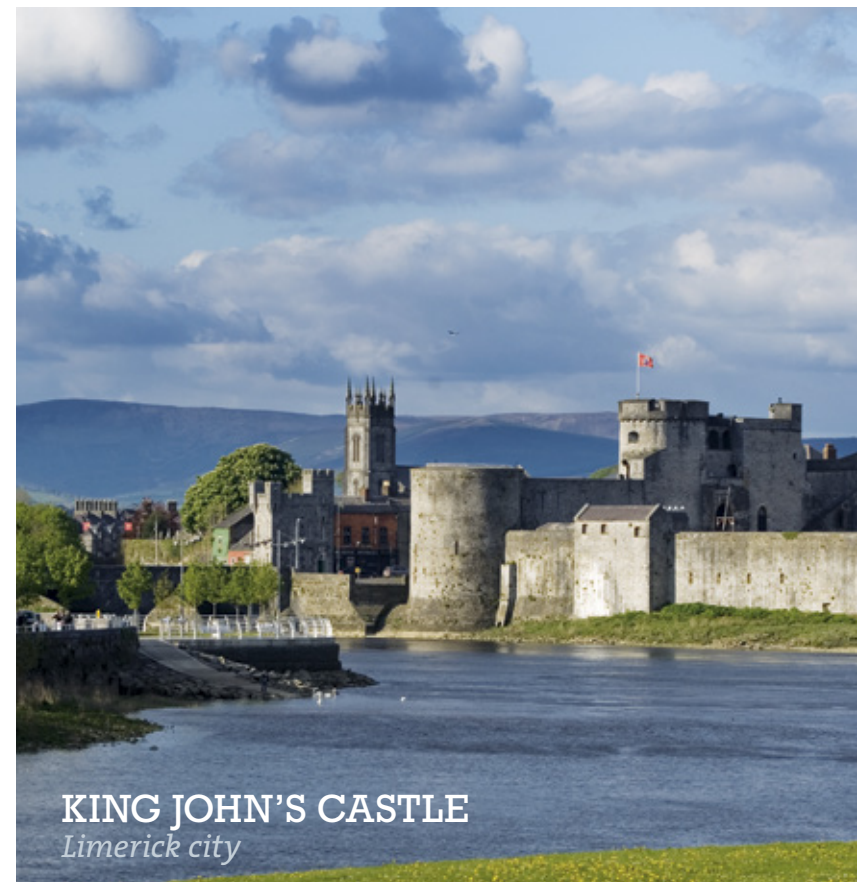
Eat

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



Cook

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



KING JOHN'S CASTLE

Limerick city

If you believe all history is living, then head for Limerick city's King John's Castle on the banks of the River Shannon, and you can practically live through its 800 years of drama. This mighty fortress at the heart of medieval Limerick is wired for 21st century technology with a stunning new visitor centre. Touch-screen points bring to life tales of torrid sieges and warfare, along with ghostly projections to make the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end!

Move out into the courtyard where you can discover the castle's remarkable archaeology and wander through scenes from a 17th century siege, while costumed guides reveal the secrets and scandals of castle life.



TRIM CASTLE

County Meath

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

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

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

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

Mount Stewart House and Gardens, County Down



Gardens to enjoy

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

Herb-rich beauty

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

A lady's delight

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

Grand designs

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

Wild at heart

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

Literary vision

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

Walled wonder

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



Dungarvan Tradfest, County Waterford



FACE THE MUSIC

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

The first time you hear the beat, the first time you watch the musicians' hands moving at the speed of light, the first time you get swept up in it all is an unforgettable experience. And there's no doubt that my first introduction to a real traditional Irish music session was one to remember. The place was Sherkin, a small island with an artistic character off the west coast of County Cork. Three of us headed off, bags packed and hopped on the ferry for the short trip from Baltimore for a weekend break.

Sherkin is the kind of place where you should expect the unexpected: the weather changes quickly here and a dramatic sunrise can often be interrupted by a swirl of dark clouds. And as a light drizzle started to descend, it seemed only natural that we ducked into the local pub, Murphy's at The Islander's Rest.

Rich with an amber glow, flickering candles and low lighting, Murphy's feels like a typical Irish pub, the kind of place that fuels your imagination. As we walked through the door, people were dancing, laughing and swirling around a group of musicians playing fiddles, guitars, bodhráns (hand-held Irish drums), banjos, concertinas and tin whistles. From that point on, it was clear we were going nowhere.

Local islanders, Americans, Germans and Swedes chatted, danced and clapped; the music never stopped, one song racing into the next as the tempos got faster and faster. The jumpy, vibrant melodies put a flutter in the feet of everyone in the pub, and we lost ourselves in the music and the people.

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

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

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



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



The John Hewitt Bar, Belfast

**Trad music pubs:
Six to try**

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

**THE JOHN HEWITT BAR
Belfast city**

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

**AN SPAILPÍN FÁNACH
Cork city**

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

**MONROE'S
Galway city**

With the musical heritage of the Connemara Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking region) flowing into this small medieval city, Galway is a must for trad explorers. It's hard to choose one place from such a great selection of pubs, but twist our arms and we'd pick Monroe's in the city center. Cozy and atmospheric, with open fires, stained glass windows and well-worn wooden flooring, there's trad seven nights a week here, and set dancing every Tuesday.



**O'DONOGHUE'S
Dublin city**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Move north up to County Sligo, and you'll soon learn that here the fiddle is king. There's an old expression that goes "As fast as a fiddler's elbow." And if you're ever at a trad session in Sligo, you'll soon see where the phrase came from. The style of fiddle-led trad music in Sligo is bouncy, fast and intricate. The melodies dip and twist, inducing fast-paced, lively dancing. If you happen to be in the area in August, check out the James Morrison Traditional Music Festival. Taking place in Riverstown, the festival honors the famous musician credited with creating the "Sligo style" of fiddle playing.



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



Playing the bodhrán



The Lambeag drum

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



**Festivals
to watch
out for...**

Ireland's cultural calendar lights up with exciting music events throughout the year. Try some music or dance classes at the Willie Clancy Summer School in Miltown Malbay, County Clare, in July; or how about the Féile an Phobail traditional festival in west Belfast in August, a buzzing event full of music and "craic" (fun). And the major highlight for 2014? It has to be the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Sligo town, the biggest traditional Irish music festival and a strong community-based event.



Enjoying the Fleadh (Irish music festival), Cavan town

MAGICAL DRIVES

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

Pól Ó Conghaile selects some to get you started



Dark Hedges, County Antrim



THE RING OF KERRY

County Kerry

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

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

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

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

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

The Ring of Kerry

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

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

Distance: 180km

Time: 3-10 days



Like that? Try this:



The Beara Peninsula

The Ring of Beara

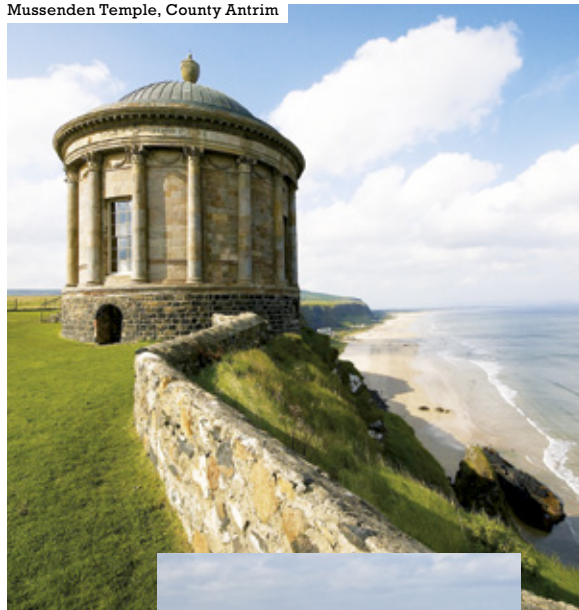
Cork and Kerry

The Beara Peninsula lies just south of the Ring of Kerry, and its driving route is just as sublime, connecting Kenmare to Glengarriff (or vice versa) via a 110km loop. Highlights include fishing towns such as Castletownbere, mountain passes and the copper mining outpost of Allihies. Once you get to what feels like the ends of the earth, go even further and take a cable car to Dursey Island (estimated population: six).

THE GAME OF THRONES TOUR

Northern Ireland

Mussenden Temple, County Antrim



Causeway Coastal Route, County Antrim



Cushendun, County Antrim

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

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

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



Distance: 174km
Time: 2 days

Like that?
Try this:



Quiet Man Cottage, Cong

Connemara
Film Trail
Galway and Mayo

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



Dungarvan, County Waterford

The Copper Coast

THE COPPER COAST

County Waterford

Distance: 42km
Time: 1 day



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

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

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

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

Like that?
Try this:



Saul Church, County Down

St Patrick's
Trail
Down and Armagh

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



Dunmore East, County Waterford



THE GREAT OUTDOORS

From high-octane surfing to scenic cruises, Ireland hits the mark when it comes to outdoor pursuits, with an unspoiled natural playground that's the envy of the world. **David Mills** gets out and about

WALKING the coasts

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

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

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

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

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



Enjoying County Fermanagh's quiet country roads

CYCLING the Kingfisher Trail

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

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

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



Cycling in Connemara

On your bike with two more cycling routes:



Cycling the Great Western Greenway

The **Beara Way** in County Cork, blessed with broken stone walls, desolate craggy hills and wave-lashed cliffs, has a fantastic 138km route taking you to the rim of the Atlantic Ocean.

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



Walking on the Antrim coast

CRUISING the Shannon-Erne Waterway

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

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

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

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



Cruising by Enniskillen, County Fermanagh

Quiet country horse riding



HORSE RIDING in County Kildare

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

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

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



The Curragh Racecourse, County Kildare

Want to go further on your horse riding adventure?

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

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



Take a laid-back break in County Limerick

SURFING in County Sligo

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

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

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

Like the sound of that? Try these:

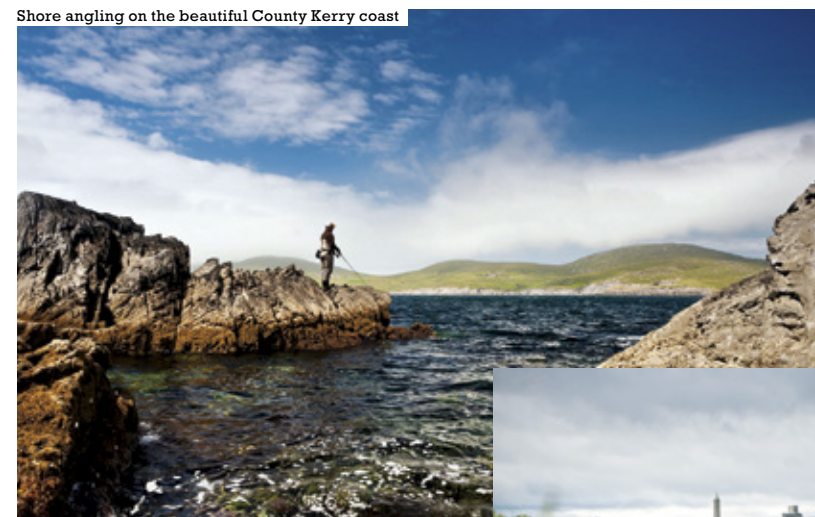
Bundoran in County Donegal has attracted surfers from all over the world, beginners and pros alike, and has a lively surf scene centred around the town.

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



Surfing along the west coast

Shore angling on the beautiful County Kerry coast



SHORE ANGLING in County Kerry

According to angling journalist Henry Gilbey, shore fishers in the northern hemisphere use the same gear, fish the same species and the same seasons. In Ireland, though, "You get more fish, less people and more open spaces. You also get so much water that you'd need several lifetimes to fish it."

Good news, isn't it? In Kerry it gets even better. A county largely defined by its romantic yet rugged relationship with the Atlantic Ocean, Kerry is a veritable paradise for shore anglers, and the waters of the staggeringly beautiful Iveragh Peninsula are the perfect angling playground.

On a good day this means bass, ray, pollock, conger eel, cod, flounder, wrasse, mullet, bull huss and mackerel. And all that surrounded by some of the island's most inspirational scenery, with locals that are famed for their warm, Kerry welcome.

If you find yourself looking north and eyeing the glittering waters of the Dingle Peninsula, you wouldn't be the first. Henry Gilbey cites Kerry's Atlantic stretch as a stand-out for shore fishing where "you could even hook a big stingray or tope from some of the beaches".

So why not take a trip to the waterside, settle down in a quiet spot and find out for yourself?



Lough Erne, County Fermanagh

Like the sound of that? Here's some more:

Ireland is often picked as an ideal spot for pike anglers, and here's why: the superb lakes, rivers and canals all over the island boast huge pike, the largest of the freshwater predators. Try **Loughs Derg, Ree and Erne**, and the Lough Oughter complex in County Cavan. Ireland's rivers, from the massive **Shannon** to the tiny **Inny** are great pike destinations, with specialist angling accommodation sprinkled along the banks.



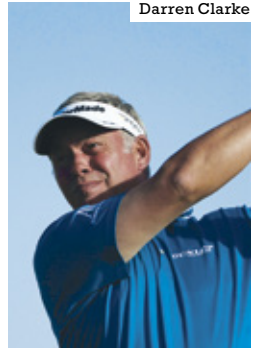
Alive Surf School, Portrush, County Antrim



OLD HEAD
County Cork



THE EUROPEAN
County Wicklow



Darren Clarke

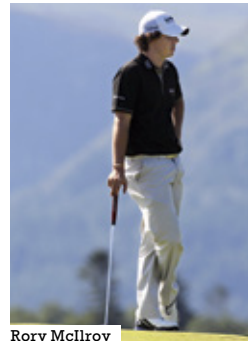


ROYAL COUNTY DOWN
County Down

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



ROYAL PORTRUSH
County Antrim



Rory McIlroy

PLAYING THE GREATS

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

Top shots

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

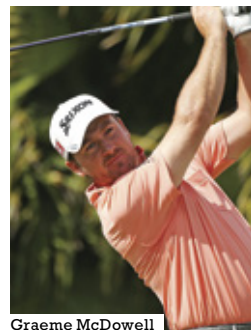
Heading south from Royal County Down, you come to the hidden gem of the County Louth

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

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

Natural beauty

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



Graeme McDowell



PORTSTEWART
County Londonderry

WATERVILLE
County Kerry

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

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

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

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

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

Drive north through Limerick into County Clare and you have the new and the old side by side with Greg Norman's modern Doonbeg links only around 32km

Built by champions

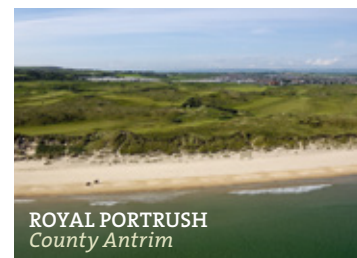
Walking the fairways of Ireland's top courses you can pit your wits against some of the greatest course designers in the world to see how you measure up

Three to try



LAHINCH GOLF CLUB
County Clare

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



ROYAL PORTRUSH
County Antrim

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

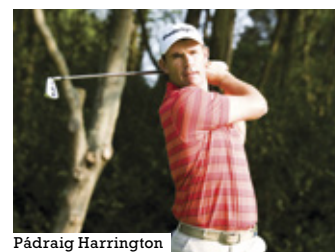


COUNTY SLIGO GOLF CLUB

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



BALLYLIFFIN
County Donegal



Pádraig Harrington

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

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

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



STRANDHILL
County Sligo

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

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

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

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

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

Need to know the essential information

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



Plan ahead

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

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

Be prepared

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

Dress to impress

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

For the lowdown on golf in the Home of Champions, visit: ireland.com/golfnow



CONTENTS

	General information & planning your trip	42
	Travelling to Ireland by sea	44
	Travelling to Ireland by air	45
	Travelling around Ireland	47
	Things to see & do	48
	Where to stay	49
	Map of Ireland	50

GENERAL INFORMATION & PLANNING YOUR TRIP

GEOGRAPHY, POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

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

LANGUAGE

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

PASSPORT/VISA REQUIREMENTS

Visitors from Nordic countries require a valid passport to enter the island of Ireland. Visitors of other nationalities should contact their local Irish embassy/consulate or their local embassy.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Denmark
Østbanegade 21
2100 København Ø
Tel: 35 47 32 00
Fax: 35 43 18 58
Email: copenhagenembassy@dfa.ie
embassyofireland.dk

Finland
1 Erottajankatu 7 A
00130 Helsinki
Tel: 09 682 4240
Fax: 09 646 022
Email: helsinkiemassy@dfa.ie
embassyofireland.fi

Norway
Haakon Vlls gate 1
0244 Oslo
Tel: 22 01 72 00
Fax: 22 01 72 01
Email: osloembassy@dfa.ie
embassyofireland.no

Sweden
Hovslagargatan 5
PO Box 10326
100 55 Stockholm
Tel: 08 5450 4040
Fax: 08 660 1353
Email: stockholmembassy@dfa.ie
embassyofireland.se

NORTHERN IRELAND

Denmark
Kastelsvej 36-40
2100 København Ø
Tel: 35 44 52 00
Fax: 35 44 52 93
Email: enquiry.copenhagen@fco.gov.uk
britishembassy.dk

Finland
Itäinen Puistotie 17
00140 Helsinki
Tel: (09) 2286 5100
Fax: (09) 2286 5262
Email: info.helsinki@fco.gov.uk
britishembassy.fi

Norway
Thomas Heftyesgate 8
0264 Oslo
Tel: 23 13 27 00
Fax: 23 13 27 41
Email: britemb@online.no
ukinnorway.fco.gov.uk/en

Sweden
Skarpögatan 6-8
Box 27819
115 93 Stockholm
Tel: 08 671 3000
Fax 08 662 9989
Email: info@britishembassy.se
britishembassy.se

MEDICAL

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

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

VISITORS WITH DISABILITIES

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

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

NORTHERN IRELAND
Adapt NI
Tel: 028 9023 1211; adaptni.org
Disability Action
Tel: 028 9029 7880; disabilityaction.org



PETS

Pets entering Ireland must comply with Ireland's requirements under the EU Pet Passport System to avoid quarantine. Pets entering the UK from the EU can travel into Ireland without quarantine, provided they satisfy the requirements of the UK Pet Travel Scheme and are cleared on arrival in the UK. Tel: 0845 933 5577 or visit gov.uk/take-pet-abroad for more information. For further information contact:

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

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

CURRENCIES

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

BANKS

Banking hours are generally 09.30/10.00 to 16.30hrs Monday to Friday. Some banks are open on Saturday in Northern Ireland. ATM (cash) machines are located at most banks and accept most credit and debit cards.

CREDIT CARDS

Visa, Mastercard, and American Express are widely accepted in Ireland. Visitors with other cards should ask in advance or see if the card is on display where they wish to use it.

VAT AND TAX REFUNDS

Visitors from the EU are not entitled to any VAT or tax refunds. Norwegians are entitled to VAT or tax refund. Look for the "Tax Free Shopping" signs in shop windows. You must fill out a valid refund document and give this to the customs authorities when you travel out of the EU.

TELEPHONE

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

Pay phones
Easy-to-use country calling cards are widely available at many outlets.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
If calling the Republic of Ireland, all telephone numbers must be prefixed with +353 (remove the first 0).
goldenpages.ie

POSTAL SERVICES

Post offices are generally open from 09.00 to 17.30hrs, Monday to Friday. Main post offices also open on Saturday between 09.00 and 12.30hrs in Northern Ireland and 09.00 and 17.00hrs in the Republic of Ireland. Please note that exact opening hours vary depending on the size and location of the branch.

SHOPPING

Shops are generally open Monday to Saturday from 09.00 to 17.30/18.00hrs with late-night shopping until 20.00hrs or 21.00hrs on Thursdays at many large stores. Sunday opening hours are generally midday until 17.00hrs or 18.00hrs (13.00 – 17.00hrs in Northern Ireland).

TIPPING

In restaurants, when a service charge is not included, 10-15% of the bill is appropriate. Taxi drivers are usually tipped by rounding up the fare to the nearest euro or pound and porters about €1.50 or £1 per bag. In pubs, tipping bar staff is at the customer's discretion.

ELECTRICAL CURRENT

The standard electricity supply on the island of Ireland is 230/240 volts AC (50 cycles). Visitors will require a transformer and plug adaptor (to convert 2-pin plugs to the standard 3-pin plugs) which can be bought at airports or electrical suppliers.

PERSONAL SAFETY

Though the general level of personal safety is high, should you be unfortunate enough to be a victim of crime, contact:

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
Irish Tourist Assistance Service
(Mon-Fri), 6-7 Hanover Street East, Dublin 2
Tel: +353 (0) 1 661 0562
Email: info@itas.ie; itas.ie

Store Street Garda Station
(Weekends and public holidays), Dublin 1
Tel: +353 (0) 1 666 8109

NORTHERN IRELAND

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

EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBERS

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
Emergency Services (Police, Fire, Ambulance, Coastal & Mountain Rescue) Tel: 112 or 999

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

PUBS

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

SMOKING RESTRICTIONS

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



PUBLIC HOLIDAYS 2014

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

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



TRAVELLING TO IRELAND BY SEA

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



SEA ROUTES

From the Nordic countries there is one connection to the UK. This is from Esbjerg, Denmark to Harwich in England.

ESBJERG FERRY CONTACT DETAILS

FERRY COMPANY	TELEPHONE	WEBSITE
DFDS Seaways	+45 33 42 30 00	dfdsseaways.dk

Below are some of the main routes from Britain to Ireland:

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

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

FERRY AND COACH OPERATORS CONTACT DETAILS

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

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



TRAVELLING TO IRELAND BY AIR

DENMARK

DEPART	ARRIVE	AIRLINE
Copenhagen	Dublin	Aer Lingus
	Dublin	Norwegian Airlines
	Dublin	SAS

AIRLINE	TELEPHONE	WEBSITE
Aer Lingus	725 4020	aerlingus.com
Norwegian Airlines	70 80 78 80	norwegian.cdk
SAS – Scandinavian Airlines	70 10 20 00	sas.dk

FINLAND

DEPART	ARRIVE	AIRLINE
Helsinki	Dublin*	Blue1/SAS
	Dublin**	Norwegian Airlines

*via Stockholm or Copenhagen **operates end of March – end of October

AIRLINE	TELEPHONE	WEBSITE
Blue1/SAS	06 000 25 831	blue1.fi
Norwegian Airlines	09 231 01 600	norwegian.com

NORWAY

DEPART	ARRIVE	AIRLINE
Oslo	Dublin	Norwegian Airlines
	Dublin	SAS
	Dublin	Ryanair
Oslo Rygge	Dublin	Ryanair

AIRLINE	TELEPHONE	WEBSITE
Norwegian Airlines	815 21 815	norwegian.no
Ryanair	820 040 02	ryanair.com
SAS – Scandinavian Airlines	05400	sas.no

SWEDEN

DEPART	ARRIVE	AIRLINE
Stockholm Arlanda	Dublin	Norwegian Airlines
	Dublin	SAS

AIRLINE	TELEPHONE	WEBSITE
Aer Lingus	0859 00 00 97	aerlingus.com
SAS – Scandinavian Airlines	0770 727 727	sas.se





REGIONAL AIRPORTS AND FLIGHTS

The following internal flights are available within Ireland.

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



TRAVELLING FROM DUBLIN AND BELFAST AIRPORTS INTO CITY CENTRES

DUBLIN

Arriving in Dublin Airport, the options to get into the city centre are by bus or taxi. Buses and taxis are located just outside the arrivals hall. A taxi can cost between €20-30* depending on where you are travelling within the city. Dublin Airport is located on the north side of the city so fares to this part of Dublin will normally be cheaper than if you were taking a taxi to the south side. Direct buses to the city centre and bus and train stations are available from Dublin Bus Airlink; €6* single and €10* return. Children travel half price. Aircoach also operates coach services from the airport to the city centre and suburban areas. Fares from €6* single and €10* return.

BELFAST

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

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

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

*Prices are subject to change.



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



TRAVELLING AROUND IRELAND

TAXIS

There are metered taxis in Belfast, Dublin, Galway, Limerick and Cork. In other areas, fares should be agreed beforehand. Taxis are most commonly found at ranks in central city locations.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The island of Ireland has a reasonably comprehensive public transport system of rail and bus services. 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. Bus services link to the rail system as well as providing access to ferry ports and airports. Recent investment in road and rail has provided more comfort for travellers, offered greater frequency of service, improved travel times and opened up new services, including the western rail link between Galway and Limerick. Rail and bus fares offer good value for the traveller, with various discount tickets available that give unlimited travel on bus and rail services.

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 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 plus special offers for shopping and eating out.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Irish Rail (Iarnród Éireann)

Tel: +353 (0) 1 836 6222; irishrail.ie

Irish Bus (Bus Éireann)

Tel: +353 (0) 1 836 6111; buseireann.ie

Dublin Bus (Bus Átha Cliath)

Tel: +353 (0) 1 873 4222; dublinbus.ie

DART (Rapid Transit Rail)

The Dublin area is served by the "DART" rapid transit rail from Howth to Malahide in north County Dublin, and via Dun Laoghaire to Greystones in County Wicklow.

irishrail.ie/DART

Dublin Luas

The Dublin Luas is a state-of-the-art Light Rail Transit (LRT) system connecting outlying suburbs to Dublin city centre with a high-capacity, high-frequency, 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, 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.

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

NORTHERN IRELAND

Translink

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

Tel: 028 9066 6630 or visit translink.co.uk

Check for specially discounted fares when travelling by public transport. For instance, the iLink card provides unlimited bus/train travel for 1 day, 1 week or 1 month.

The Enterprise

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.

INLAND FERRIES AND ISLAND BOAT SERVICES

When visiting any of the offshore islands around the Irish coastline, check out island boat services well in advance – and check again just before travelling as changes in the weather may affect services. Regular island boat services operate to the Aran Islands off the Galway coast, Rathlin Island off the north Antrim coast, Aranmore Island off the coast of Donegal, Clare Island off the Mayo coast, and Sherkin and Cape Clear Islands off the coast of West Cork. There are also several inland ferry services that ease travelling around Ireland and make the journey more interesting, such as the Strangford Lough ferry at Portaferry, County Down; the ferry across the Shannon Estuary between Tarbert, County Kerry and Killimer, County Clare; and the ferry link between Greencastle, County Donegal, and Magilligan Point, County Londonderry.

DRIVING IN IRELAND

Visitors to Ireland must bring a valid national driving licence with them, issued in the country of their permanent residence. Driving in Ireland is on the left 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 driving 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 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) and miles per hour (mph) in Northern Ireland. 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 shown otherwise. 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.

Barrier-free tolling is operational on certain motorways in the Republic of Ireland – visit eflow.ie for further information.

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 booking. 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 travelling 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** – email: info@carrentalcouncil.ie or visit carrentalcouncil.ie

In Northern Ireland, contact the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association. Tel: 01484 434 747 or visit bvrla.co.uk



THINGS TO SEE AND DO

ATTRACTIONS

For information on Ireland's attractions, check the Tourism Ireland website, ireland.com. We also recommend you try the following contacts to find out more about the wonderful range of historic houses and gardens, museums, castles, galleries and beautiful countryside when putting together itineraries.

ALL ISLAND

Houses, Castles and Gardens of Ireland

Tel: +353 (0) 87 777 6428; hcgil.ie

Heritage Island

Tel: +353 (0) 1 775 3870; heritageisland.com

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

The Heritage Service

Tel: +353 (0) 1 647 6635; heritageireland.ie

CNCI (Council for National Cultural Institutions)

Tel: +353 (0) 1 677 7444; cnci.ie

NORTHERN IRELAND

NI Environment Agency

Tel: 028 9054 0540; doeni.gov.uk

The National Trust

Tel: 0844 800 1895; nationaltrust.org.uk

National Museums of Northern Ireland

Tel: 0845 608 0000; nmni.com

Northern Ireland Museums Council

Tel: 028 9055 0215; nimc.co.uk

ANGLING

In Ireland, you'll come across a huge variety of species of fish in the large network of loughs, rivers and canals and surrounding sea. There's a superb infrastructure of angling centres and fishing boat operators and beautiful surroundings, so it's not surprising that Ireland has become one of the world's favourite destinations for game, sea and coarse angling. For more information visit ireland.com/angling

CRUISING & WATERSPORTS

The 3 main waterways for cruising are the River Shannon, the Grand Canal and the Erne Waterway System.

At present, the most developed are the Shannon-Erne Waterway and lakes. Cabin cruisers can be hired ranging in size from 2 to 10 berths. Experience in handling a boat is helpful but not essential as training is provided. Surfing, rowing, sailing, sub-aqua diving, canoeing, snorkelling or windsurfing – if you love watersports, Ireland is your perfect destination.

For navigation advice and watersports information contact:

ALL ISLAND

Waterways Ireland

Tel: 028 6632 3004; waterwaysireland.org

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Inland Waterways Association of Ireland

Tel: 028 3832 5329; iwai.ie

NORTHERN IRELAND

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Tel: 028 9025 8825; dcalni.gov.uk

Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 9030 3930; outdoorrecreationni.com

Sport Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 9038 1222; sportni.net

CYCLING

A number of companies provide guided and self-guided cycling tours and you can hire bicycles throughout Ireland. For more information visit ireland.com/cycling

GAELIC GAMES

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). For further information contact:

Tel: +353 (0) 1 836 3222; gaa.ie

RUGBY

All four provinces of Ireland have strong rugby teams and the national side, composed of players from each province, is one of the best in the world.

For further information contact:

Tel: +353 (0) 1 647 3800; irishrugby.ie

FOOTBALL

Football is hugely popular throughout the island.

For further information contact:

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Football Association of Ireland

Tel: +353 (0) 1 899 9500; fai.ie

NORTHERN IRELAND

Irish Football Association

Tel: 028 9066 9458; irishfa.com

GENEALOGY

The following associations may be useful in assisting your search to trace your ancestors in Ireland.

ALL ISLAND

The Irish Family History Foundation; rootsireland.ie

The Association of Professional

Genealogists in Ireland; apgi.ie

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Genealogical Office (National Library of Ireland)

Tel: +353 (0) 1 603 0200; nli.ie

General Register Office

Tel: +353 (0) 90 663 2900; groireland.ie

National Archives Ireland

Tel: +353 (0) 1 407 2300; nationalarchives.ie

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Public Record Office Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 9053 4800; proni.gov.uk

General Register Office Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 9151 3101; nidirect.gov.uk/gro

GOLF

With over 400 courses around the island of Ireland, including over 30% of the world's natural links courses and championship parkland courses, Ireland is now one of the world's leading golf destinations. Playing here is an unforgettable experience.

For more information visit ireland.com/golfing

HORSE RIDING & HORSE RACING

Ireland is a beautiful country to explore on horseback and you'll find a large network of equestrian centres. For more information visit ireland.com/equestrian or Equestrian Holidays Ireland at ehi.ie. Horse racing is a passion in Ireland and you'll find several of the world's most exciting and atmospheric race courses here, from Punchestown and the Curragh in County Kildare to Down Royal in County Down, and the famous Leopardstown and Fairyhouse courses. There are also a number of fabulous horse racing festivals to look out for, including those at Galway and Downpatrick.

That's not forgetting the unique Laytown Strand Races in County Meath; the event run on a long stretch of golden sand under the rules of racing is the only one of its kind in Europe. For further information and a full list of events, contact **Horse Racing Ireland**.

Tel: +353 (0) 45 455455; goracing.ie



TOURISM ORGANISATIONS

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Fáilte Ireland Tourist Offices

discoverireland.ie

Cork Tourist Office

Tel: +353 (0) 21 425 5100

Donegal Discover Ireland Centre

Tel: +353 (0) 74 972 1148

Dublin Suffolk Street Tourist Office

Tel: +353 (0) 1 605 7700

Dublin O'Connell Street Tourist Office

Tel: +353 (0) 1 874 6064

Dublin Airport Tourist Office (Terminal 1)

Tel: +353 (0) 1 485 3407

Dublin Airport Tourist Office (Terminal 2)

Tel: +353 (0) 1 944 0197

Galway Discover Ireland Centre

Tel: +353 (0) 91 537 700

Kilkenny Tourist Office

Tel: +353 (0) 56 775 1500

Killarney Discover Ireland Centre

Tel: +353 (0) 64 663 1633

Limerick Tourist Office

Tel: +353 (0) 61 317 522

Mullingar Discover Ireland Centre

Tel: +353 (0) 44 934 8650

Sligo Discover Ireland Centre

Tel: +353 (0) 71 916 1201

Waterford Discover Ireland Centre

Tel: +353 (0) 51 875 823

NORTHERN IRELAND

Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau

Tel: 028 902 46609

visit-belfast.com

Causeway Coast & Glens Tourism

Tel: 028 703 27720

causewaycoastandglens.com

Derry Visitor Convention Bureau

Tel: 028 712 67284

derryvisitor.com

Fermanagh Lakelands Tourism

Tel: 028 663 23110

fermanaghlakelands.com



WHERE TO STAY

In a country where hospitality is second nature, Ireland has a wonderful range of places to stay from the friendliest bed and breakfasts in the world to 5-star hotels. Visit ireland.com/offers to see hundreds of offers on accommodation in Ireland and to check out a range of attractive inclusive packages available from many tour operators.

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

Situated in lovely surroundings, Ireland's elegant country houses offer a truly unique place to stay often with access to a variety of pursuits, from angling to country cooking courses. Book in advance if possible. Inexpensive and comfortable, Ireland's large network of hostels give budget travellers great independence. Facilities vary so check in advance.

Camping and caravanning in Ireland's 200 sites, usually near the most beautiful scenery, is another way to enjoy the countryside on a budget. Self-catering holidays in traditional Irish cottages or modern apartments and chalets can be enjoyed in villages, towns and cities.

HOTELS & GUESTHOUSES

Irish Hotels Federation

Tel: +353 (0) 1 293 9170; irelandhotels.com

Northern Ireland Hotels Federation

Tel: 028 907 76635; nihf.co.uk

Manor House Hotels and Irish Country Hotels

Tel: +353 (0) 1 295 8900; manorhousehotels.com;

irishcountryhotels.com

Ireland's Blue Book

Tel: +353 (0) 1 676 9914; irelands-blue-book.ie

Good Food Ireland

Tel: +353 (0) 53 915 8693; goodfoodireland.ie



BED & BREAKFASTS

B&B Ireland

Tel: +353 (0) 71 982 2222; bandbireland.com

COUNTRY HOUSES

The Hidden Ireland Guide

Tel: +353 (0) 1 662 7166; hiddenireland.com

CAMPING & CARAVANNING

Irish Caravan and Camping Council

camping-ireland.ie

British Holiday and Home Parks Association

Tel: 01452 526 911; bhpa.org.uk

HOSTELS

An Óige – Irish Youth Hostel Association

Tel: +353 (0) 1 830 4555 anoige.ie

Independent Holiday Hostels

Tel: +353 (0) 1 836 4700 hostels-ireland.com

Hostelling International

Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 903 24733; hini.org.uk

Independent Hostels of

Ireland

Tel: +353 (0) 74 973 0130

independenthostelsireland.com



SELF-CATERING

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Irish Self-Catering Federation

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The Northern Ireland Self-Catering Holiday Association

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