

Ireland

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STAY, SEE, DO
INSPIRATIONAL IDEAS FROM
AROUND THE ISLAND

GO EXPLORE
FROM ROMANTIC CASTLES TO
INCREDIBLE TOURING ROUTES

OUTDOOR ADVENTURES
EXPERIENCE THE BEST OF IRELAND
WITH WALKING, GOLFING, HORSE
RIDING AND SURFING



Aran Islands, County Galway



Ireland Welcome

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

Jump into  Ireland

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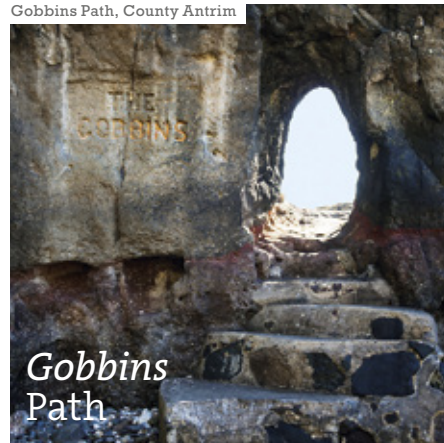
Picture This

Its name in Irish means “rocky place”. This wild part of County Clare, edged by the Atlantic Ocean, feels unreal at times with its lunar stone, ancient dolmens, and unearthly landscapes. Walk some of the many trails here and the beauty of the Burren quietly reveals itself: pretty orchids, spring gentian and primroses colour the stone, all backed by views of the swirling Atlantic. Along the Burren’s edges lie charming little villages with lively traditional music pubs: Doolin, Fanore, Lisdoonvarna and lovely Ballyvaughan. From splendid isolation to spirited nights out, the Burren is one place you’ll fall in love with.



Poulabrone Dolmen, County Clare

Gobbins Path, County Antrim



Gobbins Path

Walk in the footsteps of the Edwardians along the coastal Gobbins Path in County Antrim. The newly restored walkway clings to the edge of the rugged cliffs on this stunning slice of the coast, and offers incredible sea views, a new café, and lashings of old-world charm.



Dark Hedges, County Antrim

Game of Thrones

Three days, one magical landscape and a ton of Game of Thrones filming locations. Northern Ireland is THE place to be if you're a fan of the hit HBO series, Game of Thrones. Explore the real-life Westeros, with caves, castles, forests and the atmospheric Dark Hedges in Stranocum, County Antrim, used as the setting for the Kingsroad. This three-day self-drive itinerary features beautiful locations all over Northern Ireland.

DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT

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

Kilkenny Castle, Kilkenny



Medieval Mile Kilkenny city

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

Wild Atlantic Way

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



Dingle Peninsula, County Kerry

Titanic Belfast



Tea at Titanic Belfast

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



Dunquin, County Kerry with Lazy Days Campervan



Cruising, County Fermanagh



Clonalis House, County Roscommon



Ballygally Castle, County Antrim



Clare Island Lighthouse, County Mayo

STAY SOMEWHERE DIFFERENT

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

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

Blazing fires, grand drawing rooms and manicured gardens – surround yourself with old-fashioned opulence in an Irish castle, where you can do everything from taking tea in the library to learning the art of falconry. Enjoy indulgence at Adare Manor in County Limerick, Castle Leslie in County Monaghan, and Ballygally Castle Hotel in County Antrim. Or opt for private super-luxury at Castle Oliver in rural County Limerick, overlooking the beautiful Ballyhoura Mountains.

Beautiful grounds, well-appointed

bedrooms and personal attention make historic country houses delightful places to stay. Try the Georgian elegance of Dean's Hill in County Armagh, the pretty Ballinkeele House in County Wexford, or the Victorian Italianate style of Clonalis House in County Roscommon.

For a classic road trip with a twist, get behind the wheel of a vintage campervan and discover Ireland at your own speed. From your VW van, you can get close to the countryside and go where you want, when you want – think winding roads, deserted beaches and spectacular sunsets. You can hire vans from Lazy Days (lazydays.ie) and Causeway Campers (causewaycampers.com).

Step away from dry land for a while, and see the island from a totally different perspective. With tranquil rivers, glassy lakes and pretty villages, cruising is one of

the most relaxing ways to travel. Whether you opt to take a barge down one of the island's waterways or go for a comfortable cruiser, you can mix accommodation and activity to perfect effect. Glide down the River Shannon, laze about on Lough Erne, and enjoy the lovely little villages and scenic views along the way.

And finally, if panoramic views, dramatic locations and cosy interiors are what you're after, a lighthouse is just for you. Enjoy the "great escape" of Clare Island Lighthouse at Clew Bay in County Mayo; see the scenic east coast and sleep with ghosts at the Wicklow Head Lighthouse; or experience the history and atmosphere of Blackhead Lightkeepers' Houses in County Antrim.

For more information on accommodation, visit: ireland.com

DISCOVER ALL ABOUT... LITERATURE



Cloughmore Stone, Mourne Mountains, County Down



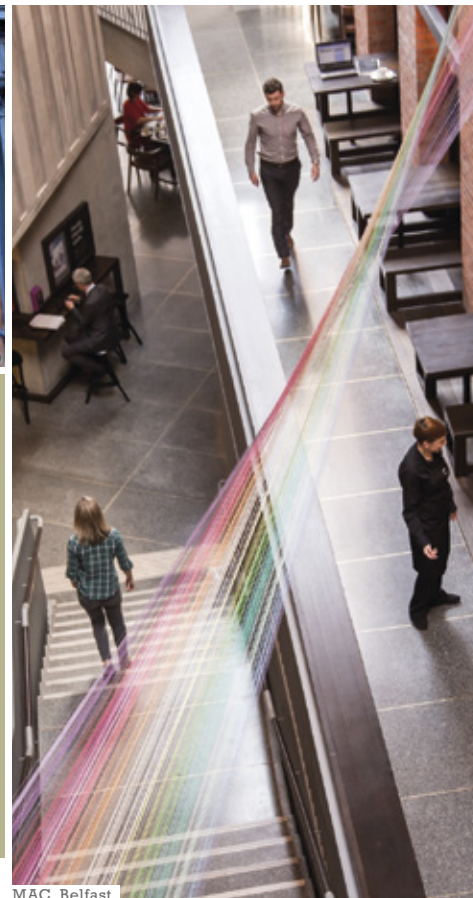
Dublin Literary Pub Crawl



Cape Clear Storytelling Festival, County Cork



Davy Byrne's pub, Dublin



MAC, Belfast



Happy Days International Beckett Festival, Enniskillen



James Joyce



Gate Theatre, Dublin

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

What's it all about?

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

Where do I start?

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

Seeking out C.S. Lewis

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

in the author's life, as well as exploring some of the influences on his writing.

The landscapes that cradle the city are also a source of inspiration – Cave Hill is believed to have triggered the creation of the sleeping giant in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Swift was born in Dublin, but was a clergyman in the parish of Kilroot, County Antrim.

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

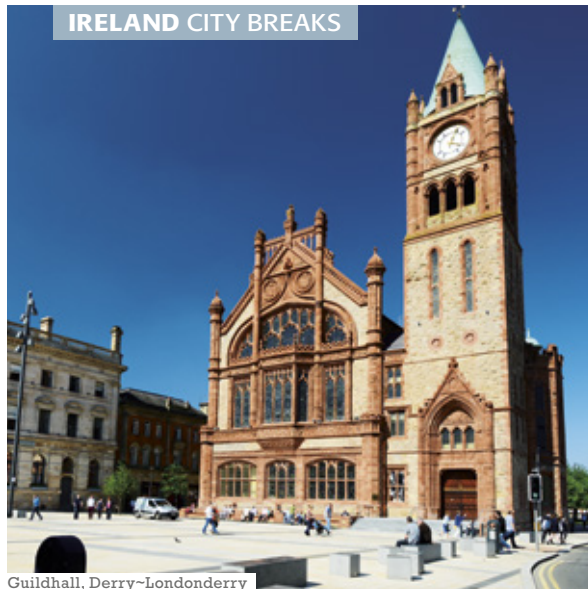
A trip around the island of Ireland uncovers endless places associated with playwrights, thinkers and poets, from small and captivating islands to craggy mountains. Who knows what this land might inspire in you?

What about festivals?

If there's one thing Ireland does well it's a festival, especially a literary one! Listowel Writers' Week Literary Festival (May/June) is now in its 44th year, and is one of the most acclaimed literary events on the island, with readings, lectures, workshops and exhibitions taking over this lively County Kerry town. Dublin makes the most of its literary culture with the Dublin Writers Festival (April) and the Dublin Book Festival (November), while the Belfast Book Festival (June) is fast becoming one of the city's most exciting events. Head to Bangor, County Down, and you'll find the Aspects Irish Literature Festival (September); while in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, where Samuel Beckett spent his late teens at school, the Happy Days International Beckett Festival draws the crowds in August. Of course, if you like to take things at a different pace, the Cape Clear Storytelling Festival, on a stunning island off the coast of County Cork, should fit the bill, with story swaps, heritage walks and concerts. Tall tales and good company – what's not to like?

DON'T MISS

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



Guildhall, Derry-Londonderry



Kinsale, County Cork



The Peace Bridge, Derry-Londonderry



Titanic Boat Tours, Belfast

CITY BREAKS

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

By Pól Ó Conghaile



At the Galway Market



St Fin Barre’s Cathedral, Cork



Black Cab Tours, Belfast



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



Waterford



Temple Bar, Dublin



Ha'penny Bridge

EXPLORING GEORGIAN DUBLIN

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

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

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

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

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



Long Room, Trinity College Dublin

Dublin five to try

Experience the best the city has to offer

Phoenix Park

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

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

Guinness Storehouse

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

Temple Bar

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

National Gallery of Ireland

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

Out of town

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



Little Museum of Dublin

Dublin's hidden corners

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



Titanic Belfast

TRAILING TITANIC BELFAST

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

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

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

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

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



Belfast City Hall

Belfast five to try

Don't miss the best of the Belfast buzz

Belfast Castle Estate

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

Belfast Bike Scheme

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

St George's Market

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

Ulster Folk and Transport Museum

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

Black Cab Tours

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

Out of town

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



Oh Yeah Music Centre, Belfast

Three Music Favourites

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



Cork cityscape

UNCOVERING CREATIVE CORK

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

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

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

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

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



St Anne's Church, Cork

Cork five to try

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

Shandon Bells

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

Cork City Gaol

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

Crawford Art Gallery

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

Huguenot Quarter

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

Sin É

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

Out of town

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



English Market, Cork

Three Foodie Favourites

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

Cities to explore

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



Galway

GALWAY

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

King John's Castle, Limerick



LIMERICK

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

WATERFORD

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

Medieval Museum, Waterford



KILKENNY

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



Kilkenny

St Patrick's Cathedral (RC), Armagh



ARMAGH

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

Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum



LISBURN

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

NEWRY

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

Newry Town Hall



DERRY~LONDONDERRY

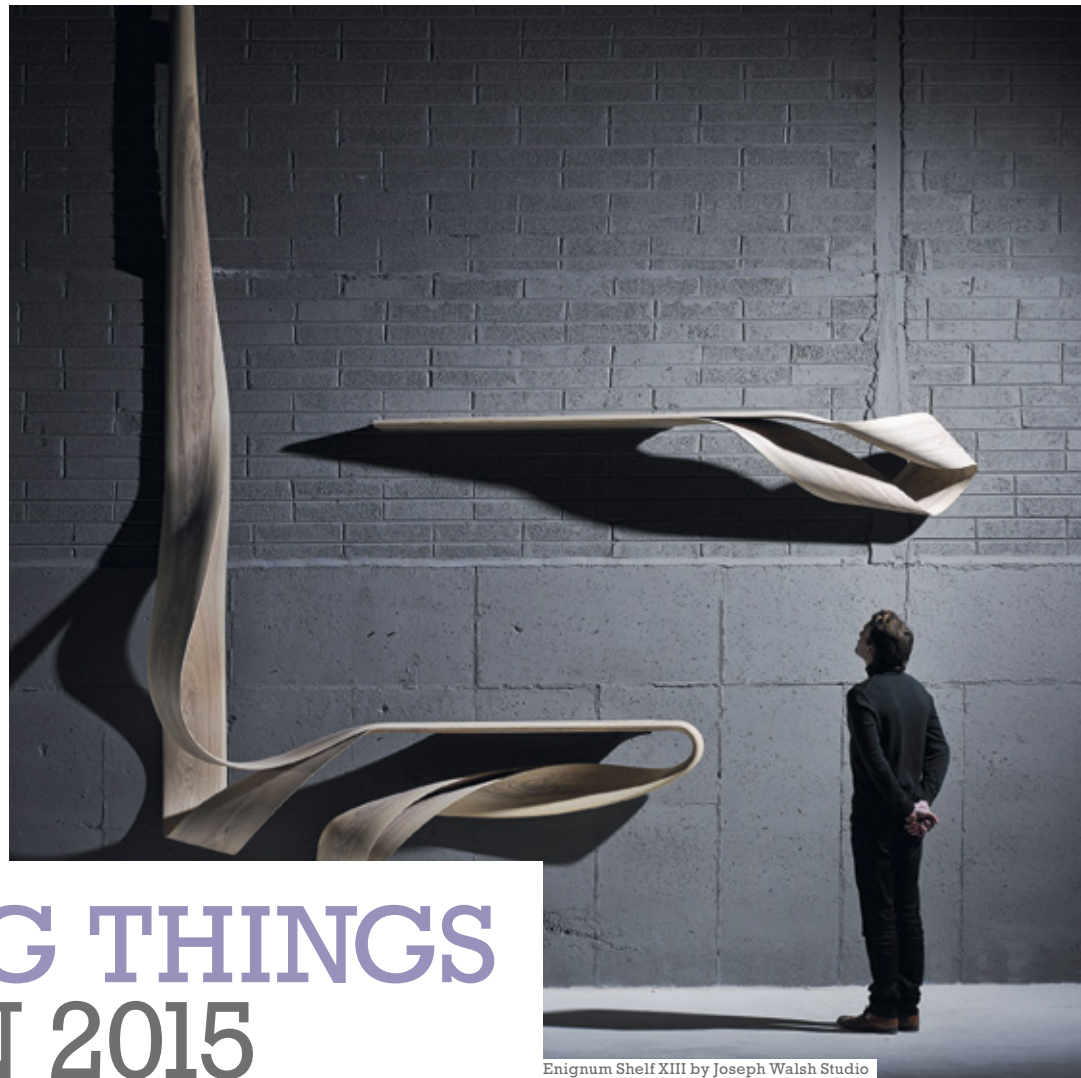
The island's only surviving walled city, Derry~Londonderry is also home to the island's youngest population. The pull of history and the push of youth gives this city an infectious vibe, which is visible in its thriving arts and music scene (the Undertones, Phil Coulter and Nadine Coyle all hail from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



City walls, Derry~Londonderry

Irish Design 2015

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



Enignum Shelf XIII by Joseph Walsh Studio

EXCITING THINGS TO DO IN 2015

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



Cruising on the River Shannon

Cruising Ireland's waterways

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



Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann, Derry~Londonderry



Spraoi Festival, Waterford

Cultural highlights of the sunny southeast

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

A taste of Fermanagh

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



Lough Erne Resort, County Fermanagh

Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann 2015

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



St John's Point Lighthouse, Killough, County Down

Mourne Coastal Route

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



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

FRESH FROM THE SEA

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



Rachel Allen

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

Seafood for the road

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

Farmers' markets have increased



Carlingford Oyster Festival, County Louth



Deanes Love Fish, Belfast



English Market, Cork

Irish soul food

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



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

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

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

What to eat

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



Seafood casserole, Mourne Seafood Bar, Belfast

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

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

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

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



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



Moran's Oyster Cottage, County Galway

Frank Hederman, Belvelly Smokehouse, Cobh, County Cork



Super-fresh scallops at Tedford's, Belfast

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

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

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

A seafood platter

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

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

Another part of the island that's

Fishy festivals

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



Fresh from the sea, Roundstone, County Galway

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

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

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

Five seafood pubs

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

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

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

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

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



Aniar, Galway

Tastes of the island

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

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



Kylemore Abbey, County Galway

FAIRYTALE ROMANCE

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



Hillsborough Castle, County Down

HILLSBOROUGH CASTLE County Down

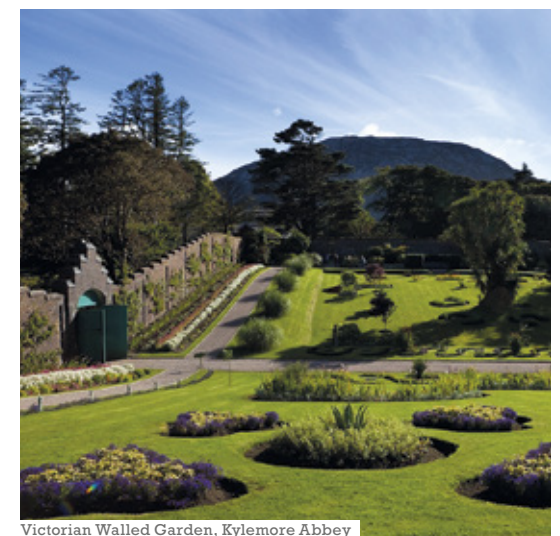
The official residence of the Queen and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is possibly the smallest royal castle – but sometimes the best things come in small packages. Now part of the Historic Royal Palaces portfolio, this captivating Georgian mansion was built by Wills Hill, the first Marquess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



Hillsborough Castle, County Down

KYLEMORE ABBEY County Galway

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



Victorian Walled Garden, Kylemore Abbey



BLARNEY CASTLE
County Cork

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



Glenveagh Castle, County Donegal

GLENVEAGH CASTLE
County Donegal

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



The gardens at Blarney Castle



POWERSCOURT HOUSE AND GARDENS
County Wicklow

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



Powerscourt Gardens, County Wicklow



Florence Court, County Fermanagh

FLORENCE COURT
County Fermanagh

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

Castles and houses
Unforgettable experiences

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



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

Castle Ward
County Down

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



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

Dunguaire Castle
County Galway

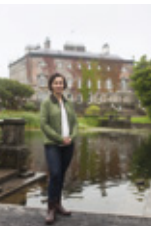
Get in touch with your inner aristocrat and experience a medieval banquet at Dunguaire Castle in the pretty town of Kinvara, County Galway. Join other diners at long oak tables and enjoy a traditional feast in a genuine 16th century castle.



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

Westport House
County Mayo

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





Clogher Head, County Kerry

ON TOUR

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

THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

By Pól Ó Conghaile

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

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



Roundstone, County Galway

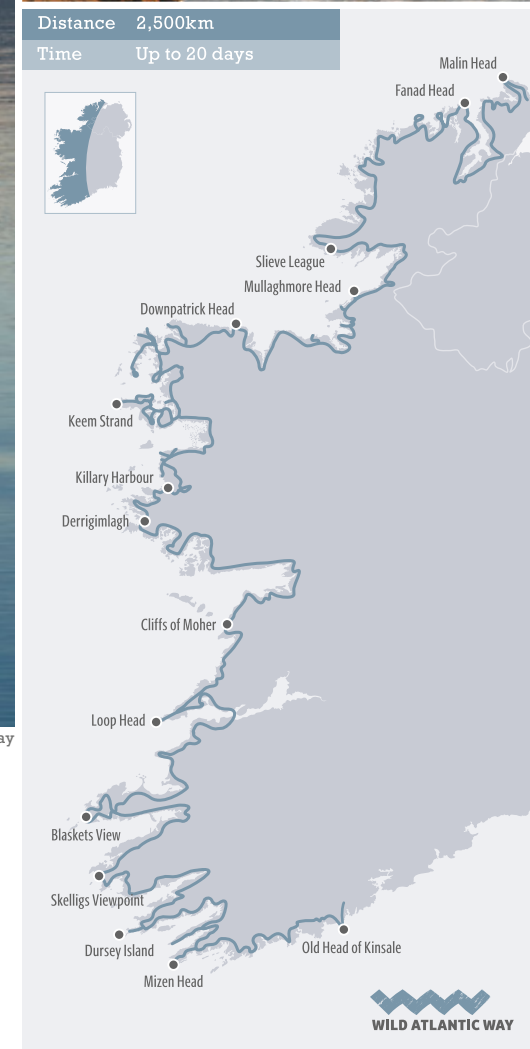
beaches, and alongside golf courses shaped by nature. From scenic set-pieces such as the Cliffs of Moher in County Clare to hidden gems such as Valentia Island in County Kerry, it follows every twist and turn of the western seaboard.

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

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



Classiebawn Castle, County Sligo



Park Hotel Kenmare, County Kerry

Along the way

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

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

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



Causeway Coastal Route

THE CAUSEWAY COASTAL ROUTE

By Alan Morrow

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

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

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

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



Giant's Causeway, County Antrim



Distance 193km
Time 1-3 days

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

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



Lost and Found, County Londonderry

Along the way

Visit

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

Eat

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

Sleep

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



Hill of Slane, County Meath

THE BOYNE VALLEY

By Emer Taaffe

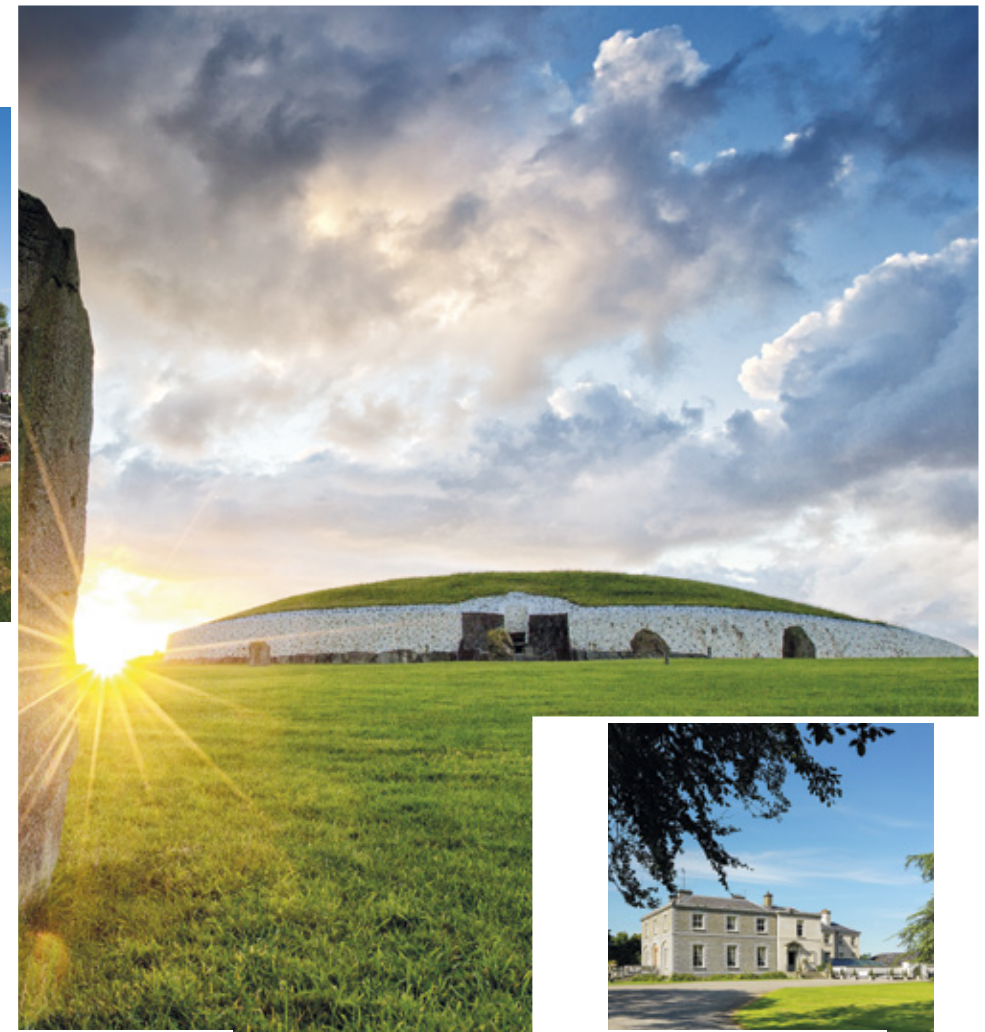
The light creeps slowly along the floor of the stone passageway. I'm in Newgrange, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This passage tomb is older than the pyramids, and I'm getting a glimpse of just what happens here on the winter solstice when the rising sun illuminates the burial chamber. It's eerie and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

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

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

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

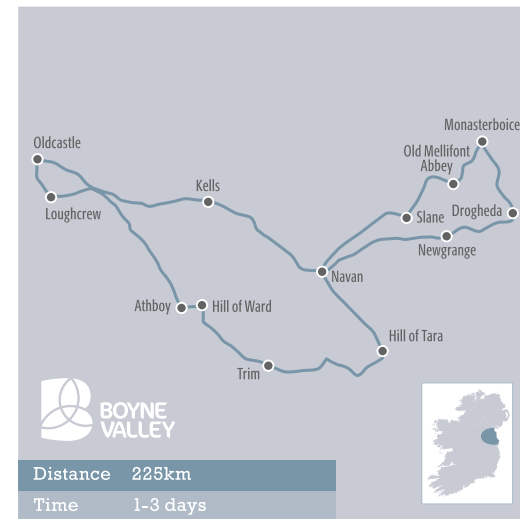
I've wandered through stately homes and heard tales of their scandalous



Newgrange, County Meath



Tankardstown House, County Meath



Distance 225km
Time 1-3 days

Along the way

Visit

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

Eat

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

Sleep

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

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

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

THE GREAT GAME

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

THE DESIGNER CHOICE

Trump International Golf Links Ireland

Doonbeg, County Clare

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

Other Designer Choices:

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



Royal County Down, County Down

THE IRISH OPEN 2015

Royal County Down Golf Club
County Down

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

Other Championship Courses:

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



Trump International Golf Links Ireland, Doonbeg, County Clare

THE HISTORICAL GEM

Killeen Castle Golf Club
County Meath

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

Other Historical Gems:

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



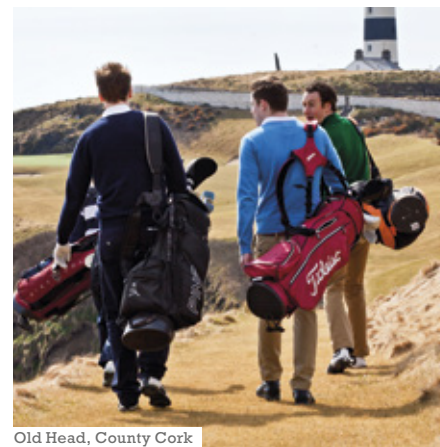
Killeen Castle, County Meath



Aerial view of Old Head, County Cork



Royal Portrush, County Antrim



Old Head, County Cork

THE BEAUTY

The Old Head of Kinsale Golf Links

County Cork

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

Other Beauties:

Carne Golf Links, County Mayo: A glorious 18-hole course along the Wild Atlantic Way.
The Island Golf Club, County Dublin: Just 15 minutes from Dublin Airport, this natural wonderland is a real gem.
Ardglass Golf Club, County Down: The Mourne's backdrop give this a wow factor.

THE STAR ATTRACTION

Royal Portrush Golf Club

County Antrim

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

More to explore:

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



Rosapenna, County Donegal

Need to know the essential information

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For more information, visit ireland.com/golf

THE WILD ONE

Rosapenna Golf Resort

County Donegal

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

More to explore:

Lahinch Golf Club, County Clare: Designed by MacKenzie, Phil Mickelson is a member here.
The European, County Wicklow: A beauty ranked in the Top 100 Courses of the World.
Portstewart Golf Club, County Londonderry: On the Causeway Coastal Route, it includes the aptly named Thistly Hollow!



GET ACTIVE

There is so much to do on the island of Ireland that it's hard to know where to begin, but with everything from surfing and kayaking to cycling, you can start your holiday with a dose of adrenaline

At the Cliffs of Moher, County Clare

WALKING THE CLIFFS OF MOHER CLIFF PATH

County Clare

In the early morning sunlight, with the seaside village of Doolin at your back, there are few better places to be than on the Cliffs of Moher Cliff Path. Reaching all the way from Doolin to Liscannor, the entire walk stretches for 12.5 miles/20km, but a good starting point is the section from Doolin to the cliffs themselves, with a distance of about 5 miles/8km. Just past the village, the track starts amid scenery that is perfectly in keeping with this part of County Clare: dry-stone walls creep over the landscape; the sea swirls at the shore; small cottages dot the rolling hills. It's beautiful, yes, but it's nothing compared to what's to come, because the further you walk, the more striking the panoramas. Precipices are slashed through the rock as the coastline dips and soars like a rollercoaster, providing you with scenery that can only be described as breathtaking. This is not an easy walk – there are ascents, there are cliff-edges and the path is uneven – but as the cliffs loom into sight, the views make every single step worth the effort.



Ballynahinch, Connemara

ANGLING IN CONNEMARA

County Galway

Bordered by Lough Corrib to the east and the North Atlantic to the west, Connemara in County Galway is a landscape of bogs, mountains, loughs, ocean views and traditional dry-stone walls. And there couldn't be a better place to mix magnificent views with excellent angling. Here, interconnected lakes and rivers are hopping with resident trout and seasonal Atlantic salmon. Lough Corrib – the second largest lough on the island – is home to some of the best wild brown trout fishing in Europe. It certainly provides a great challenge, whether you use the dry fly, wet fly, or if you prefer to dap the natural fly! And it doesn't stop there: Connemara is also a world-class destination for coarse fishing, particularly pike, which can be found in the Corrib and the lakes around Moycullen. The Connemara coastline abounds with little islands, inlets and rocky bays, which are great for shore angling or exploring by boat. And with a landscape that boasts white sandy beaches, scenic spots such as Ballynahinch, and sheltered forests, you can just enjoy the quiet beauty around you as you wait for your rod to dip.



Cliffs of Moher Cliff Path, County Clare



Horse riding, Dingle, County Kerry

HORSE RIDING THE DINGLE PENINSULA

County Kerry

The wild landscapes of the Dingle Peninsula are among the most captivating in Europe. From the rust-coloured lands around Mount Brandon to the untamed ocean that crashes against the shore at Dunquin, this place is simply magical. And there's nothing quite like galloping along the wide, open sands of a County Kerry beach. According to Horse Illustrated magazine, it's "the most exhilarating riding experience ever". Dingle Horseriding offers a variety of treks through the area, from one hour to day-long expeditions. Pass through the peninsula's Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking) area, reach out into the most westerly mainland point in Europe, be wowed with views of the Blasket Islands and the Iveragh Peninsula, and trot along quiet paths with panoramas of lakes and valleys. Your legs might be sore by the end of it, but your soul will feel refreshed.



The Dingle coastline, County Kerry



Sea kayaking on the Copper Coast, County Waterford

KAYAKING ON THE COPPER COAST

County Waterford

Right now, the Copper Coast on the island of Ireland's east side is THE place to go kayaking. Previously undiscovered, this little spot is still far from the bustling crowds, but word is quickly catching on thanks to its unique combination of sheltered sandy coves, caves, inlets and cliffs. This slice of County Waterford is a UNESCO Global Geopark, with fascinating geological remnants from the last Ice Age. And if you're wondering where it picked up its name – you can look to the metal-mining industry of the 19th century, which thrived here. But it's from the waters that you can really appreciate this beautiful coastline to the full, with its rocky inlets, extinct volcanoes and the remains of copper mineshafts hidden in the cliffs. Seapaddling.com organises Copper Coast kayaking tours in the area, and also to other gorgeous east coast locations. And after a long day kayaking, why not rest up in Waterford city.



Alive Surf School, Portrush, County Antrim

SURFING IN PORTUSH

County Antrim

The North Atlantic might not seem like the most ideal place for a surfing beginner, but with words of encouragement from Ricky Martin of Portrush's Alive Surf School, even the swells start to look warm. "We'd be telling a lie if we said our waters were of tropical temperatures; however, modern wetsuits allow us to surf all year round without getting cold!" says Ricky. "And in the summer, our beautifully clear waters attract dolphins and porpoise that regularly pop up to say hello to their neighbours on the boards!" Portrush is currently the epicentre of the surf scene in Northern Ireland, and this bustling seaside town attracts experienced surfers, as well as those keen to get started. According to Ricky, the most commonly surfed beaches around here are White Rocks, West Strand and East Strand in Portrush, as well as Portballintrae near the Giant's Causeway. And if you want to mix a little sightseeing with your surfing, you're in the right place: located on the Causeway Coast, Portrush is a great base for exploring the Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge, Dunluce Castle and the Old Bushmills Distillery.



Sheep's Head Peninsula, County Cork



CYCLING THE SHEEP'S HEAD CYCLE LOOP

County Cork

There are parts of Ireland that seem tailor-made for exploring by bike. The Sheep's Head Peninsula in County Cork is just one of them. Tranquil and unspoiled, with winding roads that are generally free of traffic, the peninsula appears untroubled by the stresses of modern life; it's a place where you can just switch off. Part of the Wild Atlantic Way, it juts out into the ocean and is tipped by a dramatically placed lighthouse. This rugged landscape can feel primeval and remote at times; gentle, soft and welcoming at others. It's perfect cycling territory – allowing you to stop off and admire views over to the Beara Peninsula, break for seafood at Arundels by the Pier in Ahakista, or seek out dolphins in the waters off the peninsula's westernmost tip. The route starts at Ballylickey and ends 75 miles/120km later in Roaring Water Bay, with a mix of heathery hills, field paths, quiet lanes and old boreens (small roads) along the way. As cycling experiences go, it's one of a kind.



Devenish Island

County Fermanagh

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

THE VIKINGS

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

Devenish Island, County Fermanagh



Viking Splash Tour, Dublin

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Clonmacnoise, County Offaly

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

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

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

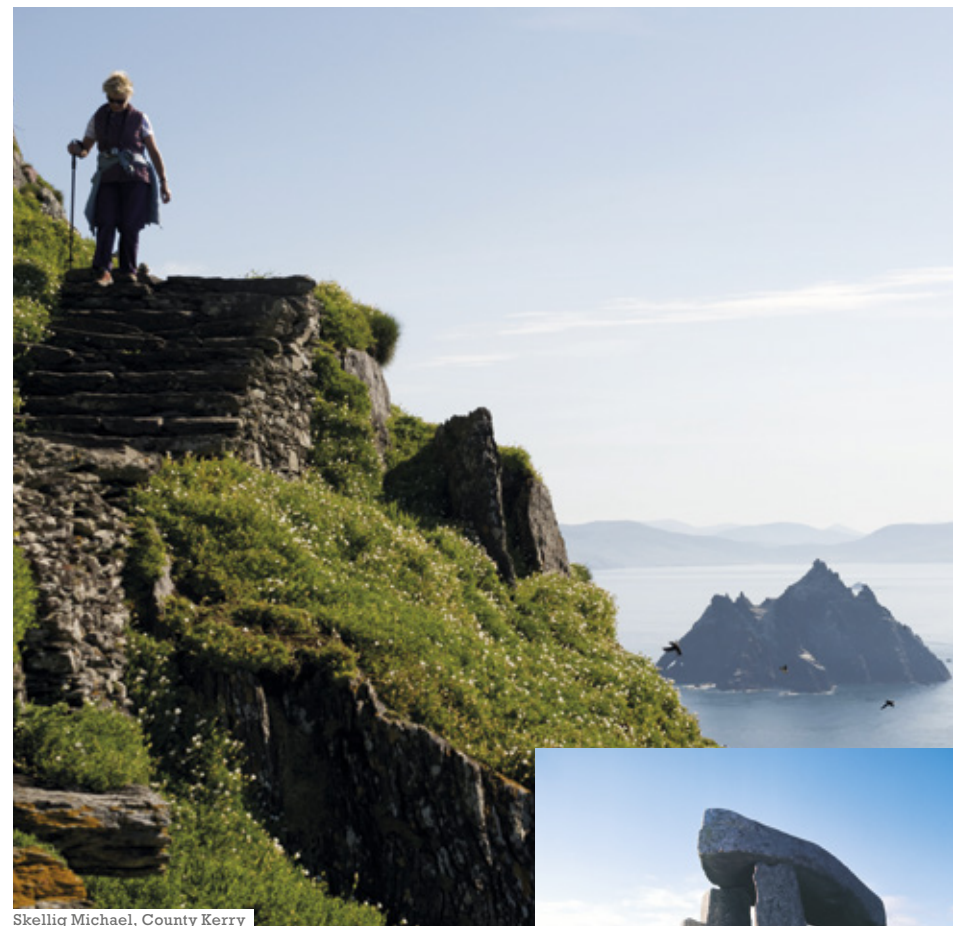
From the 830s, much larger bands of Vikings came calling. They were mostly looking for stock and provisions but gradually the attractions of actually living in Ireland dawned. The Vikings wintered for the first time on Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland, and established bases in County Louth, near the village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

did fight back along the way, Norse-Irish alliances soon became commonplace. Horned helmets aside, there is little disguising the fact that the Vikings had a penchant for violence. At least to begin with. They soon discovered monasteries were the richest source of booty and took aim for the source. Perhaps accounting for two quintessential features of the Irish landscape still standing today: round towers and high crosses.

Round towers like those at Antrim, County Antrim and Ardmore in County Waterford would have acted as lookout



Glendalough, County Wicklow



Skellig Michael, County Kerry

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

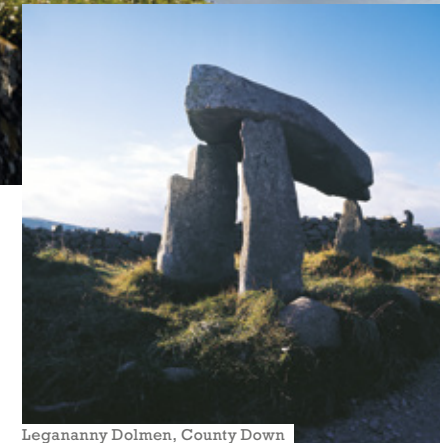
The Norse seafarers – sometimes accompanied by women from back home – had grown tired of harassing the natives, and began to settle down. But despite founding great cities such as Limerick, Cork, Waterford and Dublin, the Vikings left behind little material evidence of their sojourn in Ireland. Except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

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

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

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

Despite this new family-orientated



Legananny Dolmen, County Down

Some family names did survive, though, including MacAuliffe, “Son of Olaf”, and Doyle, an Anglicisation of Ó Dubhghaill, “son of the evil foreigner”

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

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



Dun Aengus, Inishmore, County Galway

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

Mountsandel County Londonderry

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

Clonmacnoise County Offaly

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

Dun Aengus Inishmore, County Galway

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

Skellig Michael County Kerry

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

Legananny Dolmen County Down

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



Traditional music session in Galway

A PASSION FOR MUSIC

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

PHOTO: DEREK SPEIRS



Martin Hayes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Snow Patrol, Ward Park, County Down

Contemporary sounds

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



Set dancing, County Limerick

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

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

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

Fleadh Cheoil in August – or the up-tempo beats of County Donegal, there's nothing quite like seeing it performed live, and the lack of strict rules makes it that much more spontaneous. From Matt Malloy's in Westport, County Mayo, McGrory's and Teac Jack in Donegal, to Cleary's and Ciaran's Bar in County Clare, what these venues have in common is community, inclusiveness and atmosphere. Moving beyond the fiddle, the bodhrán, the jigs and the reels, sean-nós reveals a more reflective side to Irish traditional music. This haunting style of unaccompanied Irish-language singing is rooted in the Gaeltacht regions, and developed as a way to tell the stories of everyday life. According to author Tomás Ó Maoldomhnaigh, "Songs were made to accompany the work inside and outside the home, to express the many >



Trad session, County Donegal



Temple Bar TradFest, Dublin

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Belfast Ulster-Scots Festival



Lambeag drum

Ulster-Scots music

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

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

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

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

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

Valerie says that what highlights the unique spirit of the music isn't necessarily the repertoire but how it's played and phrased in a musical context. “Irish music is played with very little accents, whereas Ulster-Scots and Scottish music has more.”

And so the music and the traditions continue? Absolutely, according to Valerie, the future is looking bright.

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

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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
www.embassyofireland.dk

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

Norway

Haakon VII's gate 1
0244 Oslo
Tel: 22 01 72 00
Fax: 22 01 72 01
Email: osloembassy@dfa.ie
www.embassyofireland.no

Sweden

Hovslagargatan 5
PO Box 10326
100 55 Stockholm
Tel: 08 5450 4040
Fax: 08 660 1353
Email: stockholmembassy@dfa.ie
www.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
www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations/british-embassy-copenhagen

Finland

Itäinen Puistotie 17
00140 Helsinki
Tel: (09) 2286 5100
Fax: (09) 2286 5262
Email: info.helsinki@fco.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations/british-embassy-helsinki

Norway

Thomas Heftyesgate 8
0264 Oslo
Tel: 23 13 27 00
Fax: 23 13 27 41
Email: britemb@online.no
www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations/british-embassy-oslo

Sweden

Skarpögatan 6-8
Box 27819
115 93 Stockholm
Tel: 08 671 3000
Fax 08 662 9989
Email: stockholm@fco.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations/british-embassy-stockholm

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 www.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; www.nda.ie

NORTHERN IRELAND

Adapt NI
Tel: 028 9023 1211; www.adaptni.org
Disability Action
Tel: 028 9029 7880; www.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 www.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; www.agriculture.gov.ie

NORTHERN IRELAND

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
Tel: 028 9052 4999; www.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).
www.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; www.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; www.psnipolice.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 2015

New Year's Day	1st Jan
St Patrick's Day Holiday	17th Mar
Good Friday (NI only)	3rd Apr
Easter Monday	6th Apr
May Bank Holiday	4th May
Spring Bank Holiday (NI only)	25th May
June Bank Holiday (ROI only)	1st June
July Holiday (NI only)	13th July
Aug Bank Holiday (ROI only)	3rd Aug
Aug Bank Holiday (NI only)	31st Aug
Oct Bank Holiday (ROI only)	26th Oct
Christmas Day	25th Dec
St Stephen's Day (ROI)	28th Dec
Boxing Day (NI)	28th 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 5 main ferry ports – Belfast, Dublin, Dun Laoghaire, Larne and Rosslare.



SEA ROUTES

DEPART	ARRIVE	CARRIER	VESSEL	DURATION
Cairnryan	Larne	P&O Ferries	Express	1hr
	Belfast	Stena Line	Superfast VII/VIII	1hr 45mins
Fishguard	Rosslare	Stena Line	Stena Express Superferry	2hrs 3hrs 30mins
	Dublin	Irish Ferries	Cruise Ferry	3hrs 15mins
Holyhead	Dublin	Irish Ferries	Dublin Swift	1hr 49mins
		Stena Line	Superferry	3hrs 15mins
		Stena Line	HSS Fast Craft	2hrs
	Dun Laoghaire	Stena Line	HSS Fast Craft	2hrs
Isle of Man	Belfast	Steam Packet Company	Fastcraft	2hrs 55mins
	Dublin	Steam Packet Company	Fastcraft	2hrs 55mins
Liverpool	Dublin	P&O Ferries	Irish Sea Ferry	7hrs 30mins
Liverpool (Birkenhead)	Belfast	Stena Line	Stena Lagan	8hrs
			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	www.irishferries.com
P&O Ferries	0871 702 3477	www.poferries.com
Steam Packet Company	0872 299 2992	www.steam-packet.com
Stena Line	0844 770 7070	www.stenaline.co.uk
Eurolines	0871 781 8181	www.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

FINLAND

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

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

AIRLINE	TELEPHONE	WEBSITE
Blue1/SAS	06 000 25 831	www.blue1.fi
Norwegian Airlines	09 231 01 600	www.norwegian.com
Finnair	0600 140 140	www.finnair.fi

NORWAY

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

AIRLINE	TELEPHONE	WEBSITE
Norwegian Airlines	815 21 815	www.norwegian.no
Ryanair	0820 040 02	www.ryanair.com
SAS – Scandinavian Airlines	05400	www.sas.no

SWEDEN

DEPART	ARRIVE	AIRLINE
Stockholm Arlanda	Dublin	Norwegian Airlines
	Dublin	SAS
Gothenburg Landvetter	Dublin*	SAS

*operates end of March – end of October

AIRLINE	TELEPHONE	WEBSITE
Aer Lingus	0859 00 00 97	www.aerlingus.com
SAS – Scandinavian Airlines	0770 727 727	www.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	0371 700 2000	www.flybe.com
	Kerry	Aer Lingus Regional	+353 (0) 818 365 044	www.aerlingus.com



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

TRAVELLING FROM DUBLIN AND BELFAST AIRPORTS INTO CITY CENTRES

DUBLIN

Arriving in Dublin Airport, the options to get into the city centre are by bus or taxi. Buses and taxis are located just outside the arrivals hall. A taxi can cost between €15-25* depending on where you are travelling within the city. Dublin Airport is located on the north side of the city so fares to this part of Dublin will normally be cheaper than if you were taking a taxi to the south side. Direct buses to the city centre and bus and train stations are available from Dublin Bus Airlink; €6* single and €10* return. Children travel half price. 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); £2.40* single and £3.60* 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 www.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 Leap Visitor card offers 72 hours unlimited travel on Airlink, Dublin Bus, Luas, DART and Commuter Rail services. It is available for purchase at Dublin Airport only, and costs €19.50 for 72 hours.

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

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Irish Rail (Iarnród Éireann)

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

Irish Bus (Bus Éireann)

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

Dublin Bus (Bus Átha Cliath)

Tel: +353 (0) 1 873 4222; www.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. www.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 www.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. www.dublinbikes.ie Cork, Galway, Limerick and Belfast (from February 2015) also have bike schemes. www.ireland.com

NORTHERN IRELAND

Translink

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

Tel: 028 9066 6630 or visit www.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 www.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 www.carrentalcouncil.ie In Northern Ireland, contact the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association. Tel: 01484 434 747 or visit www.bvrla.co.uk



THINGS TO SEE AND DO

ATTRACTIONS

For information on Ireland's attractions, check the Tourism Ireland website, www.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; www.hcgi.ie
Heritage Island
Tel: +353 (0) 1 775 3870; www.heritageisland.com

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

The Heritage Service
Tel: +353 (0) 1 647 6635; www.heritageireland.ie
CNCI (Council of National Cultural Institutions)
Tel: +353 (0) 1 677 7444; www.cnci.ie

NORTHERN IRELAND

NI Environment Agency
Tel: 028 9054 0540; www.doeni.gov.uk
The National Trust
Tel: 0844 800 1895; www.nationaltrust.org.uk
National Museums of Northern Ireland
Tel: 0845 608 0000; www.nmni.com
Northern Ireland Museums Council
Tel: 028 9055 0215; www.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 www.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; www.waterwaysireland.org

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Inland Waterways Association of Ireland
Tel: 028 3832 5329; www.iwai.ie
NORTHERN IRELAND
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Tel: 028 9025 8825; www.dcalni.gov.uk
Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland
Tel: 028 9030 3930; www.outdoorrecreationni.com
Sport Northern Ireland
Tel: 028 9038 1222; www.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 www.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; www.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; www.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; www.fai.ie

NORTHERN IRELAND

Irish Football Association
Tel: 028 9066 9458; www.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; www.rootsireland.ie
The Association of Professional Genealogists in Ireland; www.apgi.ie

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Genealogical Office (National Library of Ireland)
Tel: +353 (0) 1 603 0200; www.nli.ie
General Register Office
Tel: +353 (0) 90 663 2900; www.groireland.ie
National Archives Ireland
Tel: +353 (0) 1 407 2300; www.nationalarchives.ie

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Public Record Office Northern Ireland
Tel: 028 9053 4800; www.proni.gov.uk
General Register Office Northern Ireland
Tel: 028 9151 3101; www.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 www.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 www.ireland.com/equestrian or Equestrian Holidays Ireland at www.ehi.ie. Horse racing is a passion in Ireland and several of the world's most exciting and atmospheric race courses are here, from Punchestown and the Curragh in County Kildare to Down Royal in County Down, and Leopardstown and Fairyhouse courses. There are also a number of fabulous horse racing festivals, 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; www.goracing.ie

AIRE (the Association of Irish Riding Establishments) is a body that regulates standards at riding schools and equestrian centres in Ireland. Their website contains a list of approved and inspected members that offer a wide choice of riding facilities for every rider, regardless of ability or experience. Tel: +353 (0) 45 854 428; www.aire.ie

TOURISM ORGANISATIONS

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Fáilte Ireland Tourist Offices
www.discoverireland.ie

Aran Tourist Office
Tel: +353 (0) 99 61263

Clonkilty Tourist Office
Tel: +353 (0) 23 883 3226

Cork Tourist Office
Tel: +353 (0) 21 425 5100

Dingle Tourist Office
Tel: +353 (0) 66 9151188

Donegal Discover Ireland Centre
Tel: +353 (0) 74 972 1148

Dublin Airport Tourist Office (Terminal 1)
Tel: +353 (0) 1 605 7700

Dublin Airport Tourist Office (Terminal 2)
Tel: +353 (0) 1 605 7700

Dublin O'Connell Street Tourist Office
Tel: +353 (0) 1 605 7700

Dublin Suffolk Street Tourist Office
Tel: +353 (0) 1 605 7700

Ennis Tourist Office
Tel: +353 (0) 65 682 8366

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

Kinsale Tourist Office
Tel: +353 (0) 21 477 2234

Letterkenny Tourist Office
Tel: +353 (0) 74 912 1160

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

Tralee Tourist Office
Tel: +353 (0) 66 712 1288

Waterford Discover Ireland Centre
Tel: +353 (0) 51 875 823

Westport Tourist Office
Tel: +353 (0) 98 25711

Wexford Tourist Office
Tel: +353 (0) 53 912 3111

Wicklow Tourist Office
Tel: +353 (0) 404 69117

NORTHERN IRELAND

Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau
Tel: 028 902 46609
www.visit-belfast.com

Causeway Coast & Glens Tourism
Tel: 028 703 27720
www.causewaycoastandglens.com

Visit Derry

Tel: 028 712 67284
www.visitderry.com

Fermanagh Lakelands Tourism
Tel: 028 663 23110
www.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 www.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

Irelandhotels.com
Tel: +353 (0) 1 293 9170
irelandhotels.com
Northern Ireland Hotels Federation
Tel: 028 907 76635

Manor House Hotels and Irish Country Hotels
Tel: +353 (0) 1 295 8900

www.manorhousehotels.com
www.irishcountryhotels.com

Ireland's Blue Book
Tel: +353 (0) 1 676 9914
www.irelands-blue-book.ie

Good Food Ireland
Tel: +353 (0) 53 915 8693; www.goodfoodireland.ie

BED & BREAKFASTS

B&B Ireland
Tel: +353 (0) 71 982 2222; www.bandbireland.com

COUNTRY HOUSES

The Hidden Ireland Guide
Tel: +353 (0) 1 662 7166; www.hiddenireland.com

CAMPING & CARAVANNING

Irish Caravan and Camping Council
www.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; www.anoige.ie
Independent Holiday Hostels
Tel: +353 (0) 1 836 4700; www.hostels-ireland.com
Hostelling International Northern Ireland
Tel: 028 903 24733; www.hini.org.uk
Independent Hostels of Ireland
Tel: +353 (0) 74 973 0130
www.independenthostelsireland.com

SELF-CATERING REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Irish Self-Catering Federation
www.letsgoselfcatering.com
NORTHERN IRELAND
The Northern Ireland Self-Catering Holiday Association
Tel: 028 7082 2779
www.authenticnorthernireland.com

Visit www.ireland.com to find links and information on all approved or registered accommodation on the island of Ireland, including hotels, B&Bs, guesthouses, hostels, self-catering, camping and caravanning.



MAP & ROUTE KILOMETRE PLANNER

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



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

KILOMETRES
0 20 40 60 80km

MILES
0 10 20 30 40 50mils



To view or download a copy of the 'Great Irish Road Trips' guide, visit ireland.com
Our free Great Irish Road Trips app is available on the App Store: now there really is no such thing as a wrong turn in Ireland!

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

