


An aerial photograph of a dramatic coastline. In the foreground, a lush green golf course with distinct fairways and a winding path sits atop a dark, craggy cliff. The ocean below is a deep, vibrant blue, with white foam from breaking waves visible at the base of the cliff. In the distance, the coastline continues with more cliffs and a small, isolated island or headland. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds, suggesting a bright but slightly overcast day. The overall scene conveys a sense of natural beauty and tranquility.

THE Emerald Isle EXPERIENCE

Ireland's lush landscapes, rocky shores and storybook towns
make it a top travel destination for tourists from around the world



The Old Head of Kinsale, on the southwest coast of Ireland, is home to a world-class golf course with panoramic views.

BY GREG RIENZI

I BRAVED DUBLIN ON ST. PATRICK'S DAY

on my most recent visit to Ireland. Some Dubliners will tell you that New York City stages the holiday on an even grander scale, but there's no denying the Irish can throw one banshee of a party.

The city swells as tens of thousands come to watch a frenetic parade, revel in the twisty streets and throw down a pint—or two—of Guinness. My favorite pint was had in a pillar-box-red pub in the Temple Bar area. The place jostled with electricity as patrons packed shoulder to shoulder, desperately trying to keep beverages upright. The music blared and when U2's "Where the Streets Have No Name" came on, the crowd sang in unison.

Later that same trip, while roaming the island in a tiny rental car, we delightfully waited on a small flock of sheep to cross the road—the legendary Irish rush hour. Not a human in sight, just the white woolly animals amid a vista of low stone walls and sloped green fields.

Surprises are nice, but Ireland can be at its most charming when in stereotype.

For those of Irish descent or anyone who appreciates a picturesque landscape, the Emerald Isle remains a top travel destination, with its bounty of lush green valleys, rocky shores and storybook towns tucked into rolling hills.

"Just like the song says, visitors come to see the '40 shades of green.' It really is beautiful," says Carmel Murray, who has run a bed-and-breakfast in the west coast town of Clifden for two decades. "They also love the hospitality that they find," says Murray, and the "unpretentious but comforting" local cuisine, with its



Clockwise: The Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge, in Northern Ireland, links the mainland to the tiny Carrick Island. Built in 1520, Dunguaire Castle sits on the southeastern shore of Galway Bay. The Guinness Storehouse, located in the heart of the St. James Gate Brewery, is Ireland's No. 1 international visitor attraction. Pubs abound across the Emerald Isle. A detail from Dublin Castle.

staples of wild salmon, sausages, hearty potato-based soups and stews and brown bread.

The capital city of Dublin makes an ideal launching point for any sojourn to Ireland. Located on the east coast of the island, Dublin is bisected by the River Liffey that flows out into Dublin Bay. In 841, Vikings sailed up the Liffey and established a fortified stockade on high ground where the Poddle and Liffey rivers meet, a pond they called Dubh Linn (black pool), hence the name. On this site now sits Dublin Castle, one of the coun-

try's most famous landmarks and the former seat of British rule in Ireland.

The city attracts nearly 5 million visitors a year to its many historical and cultural gems. Dublin blends the modern and medieval in a compact 115 square kilometers, although most visitors stick to the City Centre.

Head to the coastal regions for high-cliff shores, windswept beaches, quaint villages, majestic medieval castles and seaside towns.

You'll want to wander into the Temple Bar area, located on the south bank of the Liffey and just over the Ha'penny Bridge (until a decade ago, the only pedestrian bridge over the river). The relatively small but lively bohemian district boasts a congested hodgepodge of restaurants and pubs painted in a kaleidoscope of primary colors. This pub-mad town, if you believe the claims, features the smallest, loudest, best-Guinness-pint-serving and oldest pubs in the country. (The oldest would be

the Brazen Head, dated back to 1198.)

From Temple Bar, head south to Grafton Street for some first-rate boutique shopping. Farther on up the road lies St. Stephen's Green, a public park with ponds, statues, walkways and an ornate indoor shopping plaza.

One of Europe's fastest growing cities,

Dublin now features a revitalized waterfront area known as the Docklands. The development, said to be the most ambitious urban renewal project in the country's history, has transformed unused docks into a vibrant area of waterside apartments, offices, retail space, a park and tourist attractions.

The area has a slew of new restaurants and clubs, and in the past two years celebrated the opening of the Grand Canal Theatre (Dublin's version of the Sydney



Opera House), and the O2, a Victorian warehouse turned state-of-the-art concert venue that attracts big music acts such as Rod Stewart and Pearl Jam. A convention center is in the works, as is a U2 Experience Museum and the U2 Tower, to be Ireland's tallest building and the band's future recording studio.

When you've had your fill of all Dublin has to offer, rent a car and head to the coastal regions for high-cliff shores, windswept beaches, quaint villages, majestic medieval castles and seaside towns.

The Causeway Coast and Glens in Northern Ireland ranks high on the list of possible stops. The Causeway Coastal route, roughly from Belfast Lough (bay) to Lough Foyle, includes such national treasures as the Giant's Causeway, 40,000 interlocking basalt columns, made of volcanic rock, that stand watch over the North Channel; the Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge, a 24-meter-high walkway near Ballintoy that offers stun-

IRELAND BASICS

When to go: March is a high tourist month, largely due to St. Patrick's Day, and best to avoid unless you want to take part in the holiday. The weather is ideal in August, but popular destinations within the country can get crowded then. Aim for April and September for quieter months and still pleasant weather.

What to wear: Pack some sweaters and rain gear, as you never know when it's going to get chilly or wet. Hats also come in handy.

Currency: The euro is the currency of the Republic of Ireland. Those in Northern Ireland use the sterling.

People: You will find many warm, smiling and talkative types among the 5.7 million residents of Ireland. Although the Irish still teach Gaelic in school, the language is seldom used in public and English is preferred. Feel free, however, to say "Sláinte!" (SLAN-cheh)—Gaelic for "Cheers!"—when giving a toast.

Climate: Ireland has a mild, temperate climate with summer temperatures ranging from 60 to 70 Fahrenheit (15.5 to 21 degrees Celsius), although recent highs have been in the low 80s (27 C) down south. Temps in spring and autumn are generally in the 50s (10 C-plus) and in winter between 40 and 50 F (4.5 to 10 C). Snow is rare.

Pubs: The legal drinking age is 18. Pubs in the Republic of Ireland are open seven days a week, usually from 10:30 a.m. Closing times vary from 10:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. Smoking is not allowed in any public areas, including pubs and restaurants.

Driving: On the left side of the road. A valid driver's license from the home country is required. Many roads are narrow, so don't be surprised when a delivery truck pushes you to road's edge in order to pass.

Where to stay: Ireland has some very fine hotels, but if you plan to tour the island, opt for bread-and-breakfasts. The B&B owners provide a wealth of information on where to go, and you can wake up each morning with a traditional Irish breakfast of eggs, bread and two or three types of sausage. The hefty plate will provide energy until dinner. The country's official tourism page, www.discoverireland.com, offers a search engine of more than 3,000 B&Bs.



DUBLIN TIPS & VITALS

What to do: Billed as Ireland's No. 1 tourist attraction, the Guinness Storehouse is located adjacent to the brewery that started it all. Visitors can learn about the history of the brand and the man, Arthur Guinness (1725-1803). You'll also get a complimentary pint of Guinness in the Gravity Bar, which offers a fantastic, 360-degree view of the city. Another must-see is Trinity College, for its Old Library and the



Sheep graze above Keem Beach on Achill Island, top. An ages-old custom of marking them with color makes them easy for herders to spot. The famed Ha'penny Bridge, above right, which allows pedestrians to cross over the River Liffey in Dublin, was built in 1816.

ning views of the sea and the Scottish coast; and Dunluce Castle, a 13th-century cliff-top castle, now in ruins, surrounded on either side by spine-tingling steep drops.

For outdoorsy types, the north holds plenty in store—including hiking paths, streams ideal for fly-fishing and nine challenging golf courses with magnificent sea views. The Royal Portrush Golf Club is hailed as one of the world's greatest links. Portrush is also a stone's throw from the town of Bushmills, home to the famous Irish whiskey distillery (which offers guided tours).

Next, head south to Galway City, a big town with a small feel perched on the shore overlooking Galway Bay. Galway maintains a strong artistic heritage and is a haven for music clubs, artisan stores and a never-ending lineup of festivals.

Slightly farther down the coast is The Burren, an area of limestone-layered fields, crumbling stone castles and churches, underground rivers, magnificent wildflowers and ancient monoliths.

Of course, no visit to Ireland would be complete without a cliff overlook,

and none are more expansive than the Cliffs of Moher in County Clare. The Cliffs reach 214 meters (702 feet) at their high point and spread over 8 kilometers (nearly five miles). From the cliffs one can see the Atlantic Ocean, Aran Islands, Galway Bay and the mountains of Connemara.

End your stay with a scenic drive through County Cork, which includes some of Ireland's most attractive and vivid landscapes. Must-see destinations include the medieval town of Kinsale, the quintessential fishing village Union Hall (a seal and whale watching boat tour there is a must) and Blarney, the home to the castle and Blarney Stone. Cork City and the area offer some of Ireland's best seafood restaurants.

Whichever path you take through the island, go slow and don't pass up the opportunity to stop and refuel with some brown bread and potato soup at a local pub or restaurant. You'll undoubtedly encounter a chatty barman or patron, whom you might have trouble fully understanding—but that's half the charm. 🍷

Book of Kells Exhibition. Located in the heart of Dublin City, Trinity hearkens back to the 18th century, when its magnificent library building was constructed. Inside is housed the Book of Kells, a ninth-century gospel manuscript famous for its colorful and detailed medieval Celtic art. Dublin has a wealth of museums and one of the best is the National Museum of Ireland, home to the greatest collections of Irish material heritage, culture and natural history in the world. To see Dublin, take a Liffey River cruise, a popular 45-minute sail up the river with commentary that offers some insight into Dublin folklore and history. For a less formal tour, don a Vikings hat and hop on the Viking Splash Tours, an amphibious World War II vehicle that shows off the sights by land and water. Currently, one of the most popular activities is the Dublin Literary Pub Crawl, a four-stop tour of traditional pubs with professional actors performing works of Dublin's most famous writers including Joyce, Beckett, Oscar Wilde and Brendan Behan.

Getting there: Fly into Dublin Airport, which serves all the major airlines and offers many direct flights from major cities around the world. The City Centre area is roughly six miles from the airport. Use AirCoach, Dublin Bus or taxi.

Getting around: Dublin is compact and easy to navigate, so no need to rent a car. You can walk to most points, or buy a 24-hour hop-on, hop-off pass to ride the open-top double-decker tour buses. To zip from one point of the city to another take the DART (Dublin Area Rapid Transport) or Luas tram (light rail system) red or green lines.

The Dublin Pass: For extended stays in Dublin, consider purchasing a Dublin Pass, a card that offers free entry to more than 30 of the city's top visitor attractions—including the Dublin Castle, Guinness Storehouse and Dublin Zoo—plus transport from the airport to the city and other special offers and discounts. A three-day pass costs 65 euros.

Where to shop: Grafton Street, located near Trinity College, has a long row of big

stores, little boutiques and cafes. The street—named after Henry FitzRoy, the illegitimate son of Charles II of England—runs from St. Stephen's Green in the south to College Green in the north. Buskers—including musicians, poets and mime artists—commonly perform to the crowds.

Where to get a pint: Dublin markets itself as home to 1,000 pubs, so there's no shortage of places to tipple. Some stand-outs: The Stag's Head, a favorite of James Joyce's on Dame Street near Trinity College replete with elaborate mahogany woodwork, a red Connemara marble-topped bar and a big stag's head. The Long Hall, an elegant old bar on South Great George's Street, is extensively decorated in mirrors, and has a massive carved wooden arch. You also can't go wrong at Kehoe's pub, a quirky pub on South Anne Street that offers the traditional snug and walled-in pub atmosphere. Yes, the Guinness really does taste better in Ireland, but if porter is not your style try a Smithwick's (pronounced Smit-icks).

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