

Ireland

Experience

| Heritage

| Food & Drink

| Culture

| Outdoors

| On Location



GIANT'S CAUSEWAY
COUNTY ANTRIM

EXPERIENCE IRELAND

*From coastal gems to
secret rural delights*

HISTORIC LANDMARKS

*Drama and romance
in Ireland's castles*

FABULOUS FOOD & DRINK

*Delicious feasts to
tempt the taste buds*

IRELAND'S CULTURE

*Urban escapes filled
with warm welcomes*

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

*Walking Ireland's
tracks and trails*

IRELAND ON SCREEN

*Discover real-life
Westeros*

Welcome



CLIFFS OF MOHER
COUNTY CLARE

Press the Green Button
for epic views and the
warmest of welcomes.



Discover more >

Ireland

WELCOME TO IRELAND

If modern life has left you yearning for more authentic experiences, then the island of Ireland is the perfect antidote. You see, Ireland is more than just a destination, it's a feeling...

It's the thrill of standing at the top of County Clare's Cliffs of Moher along the Wild Atlantic Way. It's the sensation you get at a traditional Irish music session, such as the ones that kick off in Matt Molloy's of Westport, County Mayo, or the House of McDonnell in Ballycastle, County Antrim.

It's the cool touch of the ancient stones that dot the islands of Lough Erne, County Fermanagh. The shipbuilding heritage of Belfast: the city that built the Titanic. And the chance to see the real-life locations for HBO's Game of Thrones® or the views from a Jedi knight's island hideaway, as seen in Star Wars. It's that wonderful welcome you get from the people.

Ireland is an adventure waiting to happen. So go on, press the Green Button and discover something new. ♥

 Ireland.com

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Community
ireland.com

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EXPERIENCE IRELAND

There are moments on the island of Ireland when it feels like you suddenly get it. Where your spirit feels lifted and your soul feels stirred. It might happen on a deserted Atlantic beach in mid-winter as you walk along buffeted by salty breezes, with the roar of waves in your ears and white-bellied seagulls swooping overhead. It might happen as you stroll an earthy forest trail and discover an abandoned medieval castle filled with crumbling stones and creeping ivy. Or it might happen in the middle of a traditional music session, where you can't stop your toes from tapping along to the beat. But it will happen. At some point you will experience Ireland – you'll feel it.

And there's a good reason why: for a small island on the edge of Europe, the island of Ireland has some truly unique, memory-making experiences. There's Ireland's Ancient East, where thousands of years of history come together in a swirl of Neolithic monuments, Norman castles, abbeys, churches and lavish country houses. There's Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, filled with under-the-radar attractions from quiet canals to authentic riverside villages. And there's Northern Ireland, which blends a giant spirit with legends, landscapes and literature. Add to that the friendly, feelgood cities of Dublin and Belfast, and the raw rugged beauty of the Wild Atlantic Way, and it's easy to see why Ireland is one of the most rewarding destinations in Europe.

Travel around the island of Ireland and you'll feel history all around you, from the haunting beauty of 6th century monastic sites such as Gougane Barra in the wilds of West Cork, to the ancient stone circles that rest in landscapes such as Beaghmore, County Tyrone. The legacy of the Vikings lingers on in cities such as Waterford and Dublin, while a stroll around ancient Armagh reveals why it has a reputation as the "city of saints and scholars".

But above all, what makes a trip to the island of Ireland unique is the people you meet along the way. There's a good reason why the island is famous for 100,000 welcomes – it's woven into the fabric of our culture, from the chat at the bar in pubs to the hellos you'll get on walking trails around the island. Whether you're reuniting with family, forging new friendships or just enjoying the "craic" (fun) with affable strangers, you'll suddenly realise that Ireland is a place that feels like home. ♥

Experience



LOUGH OUGHTER
COUNTY CAVAN

Dublin



TRINITY COLLEGE
DUBLIN



ROCK OF CASHEL
COUNTY TIPPERARY



COUMEENOOLE BAY
COUNTY KERRY

Belfast



CATHEDRAL QUARTER
BELFAST CITY



MUSSENDEN TEMPLE
COUNTY ANTRIM



IRELAND'S
HIDDEN
HEARTLANDS

BLESSED WITH A LANDSCAPE of glassy canals, winding rivers, lakes, forests and bogland, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands is a dream destination for outdoor enthusiasts. Here you can escape into a world of calm and connect with nature in a part of the island that feels unexplored. Discover amazing nature trails filled with history at Lough Boora Discovery Park, County Offaly; paddleboard along County Leitrim's canals; or cycle the off-road Old Rail Trail in County Westmeath.

With such an abundance of natural beauty, it's no wonder the Hidden Heartlands have become a top destination for leisure and wellness – but you'll also find a wealth of history and culture here. Peel back the centuries at the prehistoric Corlea Trackway in County Longford; explore the 6th century monastic site of Clonmacnoise, on the banks of the River Shannon; or cosy up in Sean's Bar, Athlone, established way back in 900AD!



DUBLIN

NAMED BY Lonely Planet as one of their Best in Travel destinations for 2022, Dublin welcomes every visitor with a smile and a story or two. This amazing Viking city on the River Liffey has inspired artists of every calling – and it loves to celebrate them, too, at wonderful museums and galleries including the National Gallery, the National Museums, the Irish Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Literature Ireland.

Uncover the city's political history with a tour of Dublin Castle, Glasnevin Cemetery or Kilmainham Gaol, while in the hallowed grounds of Trinity College you'll find one of the island's top treasures: a 9th century illuminated manuscript called The Book of Kells. And for a fresh take on Dublin, head outdoors. The city boasts a beautiful location on the edge of Dublin Bay, so join the locals and take a walk along the stunning Howth Cliff Path in north County Dublin.



IRELAND'S
ANCIENT
EAST

AT FIRST GLANCE, the east of Ireland is all lush green fields, busy little towns and villages, and gentle rivers. But this is a landscape that brims with incredible stories, that is packed with astonishing Neolithic monuments and has a castle around every corner.

The amazing thing about this part of the island is the sheer volume of history contained within it. Just look at Newgrange, an astonishing megalithic monument that dates back over 5,000 years, or the Rock of Cashel – a spectacular archaeological site. You can trace Ireland's medieval history through castles, abbeys and churches here, too, from the vast hulk of Trim Castle, County Meath, to the 13th century Black Abbey in Kilkenny. And if gardens are your thing, there's no better place to be, with Powerscourt House and Gardens, Mount Usher Gardens and the gardens of Lismore Castle all star attractions.



THE WILD
ATLANTIC
WAY

THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY is a rugged coastal gem that will wow you with epic moments and warm you with its friendly spirit. One of the longest coastal driving routes in the world, it boasts 1,500 miles/2,500km of raw beauty, traditional culture, cosy pubs and unforgettable experiences. Stand on the iconic Mizen Head footbridge in County Cork and you'll witness a spectacle of jagged rocks lashed by waves; explore island life on the Aran islands in County Galway, or visit the most extensive Stone Age monument in the world at Céide Fields, County Mayo.

With sky-high cliffs, craggy peninsulas, quiet bays and deserted beaches – the Wild Atlantic Way's landscapes are nothing short of spectacular. But there's more to this coastline than just stunning scenery – there's the warmth of the people; the vibrant culture, from music sessions to literary festivals; and fantastic local foods that you'll remember forever.



BELFAST

IT MAY BE FAMOUS for building the Titanic, but right now, Belfast is all about the music. In November 2021, UNESCO granted Belfast a City of Music status in recognition of its rich musical heritage and if you're looking to experience toe-tapping trad music, alternative jazz or a bit of punk rock, there's no better place.

Beyond the great tunes, Belfast is a city that's full of surprises. Wander St George's Market for a taste of the city's buzzing food scene, or dine out on refined local dishes at Michelin-starred Ox. Fancy finding out more about Belfast's maritime and shipbuilding history? Then head to Titanic Belfast and SS Nomadic. And for a view that you won't forget, make your way to Belfast Castle on the slopes of Cave Hill Country Park.

All in all, Belfast is a compelling place; a bit Victorian, a bit modern. Its story is enthralling, its people welcoming, and its contemporary culture utterly absorbing.



EMBRACE
A GIANT
SPIRIT

WITH SO MUCH TO DO in Northern Ireland, it's hard to know where to start. First stop? It's got to be the Causeway Coastal Route. This staggeringly beautiful road weaves and winds along the edge of the north Antrim coastline and serves up pulse-racing delights such as Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge and the Giant's Causeway, a UNESCO World Heritage site. There's the breathtaking beauty of Torr Head, the drama of Dunluce Castle and thrilling Game of Thrones® locations to explore!

Away from the coast, Northern Ireland will keep you charmed with its giant spirit and gorgeous landscapes. Soak up the haunting beauty of the heather-flecked Mourne Mountains, dive into local culinary traditions with a traditional bread-making class, and explore some of the region's fascinating history in places such as the Ulster American Folk Park. So come and embrace a giant spirit for yourself. ♥



HISTORIC LANDMARKS

Ireland’s historic landmarks are not all about bricks and mortar. As you walk up the 800-year-old stone steps at Hook Head Lighthouse in County Wexford; wander through the 17th century pleasure gardens at Loughcrew in County Meath; or stare up at a round tower built nearly 900 years ago by monks at Devenish Island in Lough Erne, County Fermanagh – it’s good to take some time to absorb the history embedded in these walls.

Nothing captures the imagination quite like a good story, and on the island of Ireland, you don’t have to look far to find one. In towns and villages, on hillsides and cliff-edges – especially around Ireland’s Ancient East – you’ll find battlements, fortifications and historic mansions that fizz with tales of lavish parties, fascinating characters and even a ghost or two. Take the eerie 16th century Leap Castle in County Offaly, which claims to be the “world’s most haunted location”. Or Carrickfergus, a Norman stronghold in County Antrim, which has been besieged by the Scots, Irish, English and French over its 800 year history. And just because the island’s grand country houses look genteel, it doesn’t mean they don’t have their own tales of intrigue, like Westport House in County Mayo. Today, it may be the very picture of aristocratic elegance, but step down into the dungeons and you can see the remains of the castle that once belonged to the notorious 16th century pirate queen, Grace O’Malley.

Ireland’s early Christian history is also packed with fascinating stories and beautiful settings. Dating from the mid-6th century, Clonmacnoise was established by St Ciarán on an idyllic site on the River Shannon – stroll around here and you’re catapulted back to an age of “saints and scholars”. At Skellig Michael in County Kerry – a Star Wars filming location – you can still experience what drew monks to this remote island hundreds of years ago: heart-stirring views of Little Skellig and the wild Atlantic Ocean. And on St Patrick’s Trail, which weaves through key sites linked to Ireland’s patron saint in counties Armagh and Down, beauty abounds, especially at tranquil Saul Church.

It’s inevitable that a journey into Ireland’s past will lead to Ireland’s cities, whether it’s the Viking history of Dublin and Waterford or Titanic-era Belfast. And, whichever one you visit, a compelling piece of history awaits. Walk the 400-year-old walls in Derry~Londonderry, where cannons roared during the 17th century. Travel back to the Middle Ages with a stroll along Kilkenny’s Medieval Mile. Or imagine the life of a Norman soldier at the 13th century King John’s Castle in Limerick. On the island of Ireland, you can experience history like never before. ♥



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CASTLES OF DREAMS

Ireland's castles are set in some of the most beautiful parts of the island, from tranquil lakefronts to the edge of dramatic coastal cliffs. We look at three of the most captivating...

HUNTINGTON CASTLE
COUNTY CARLOW

STEP INTO THE STORIES

Museums, galleries and visitor attractions on the island of Ireland bring the past to life, from the hopes and dreams of emigrants to the creativity of the Celts

1 EPIC – THE IRISH EMIGRATION MUSEUM *Dublin*

Winner of Europe's Leading Tourist Award at the World Travel Awards in 2019, 2020 and 2021, EPIC is a must-see on a visit to Dublin. Situated in the heart of the reinvigorated Docklands, this immersive museum traces the story of Ireland's emigrants, some of whom went on to become scientists, singers, artists, poets and presidents all over the world.

2 TITANIC BELFAST *Belfast*

This monumental museum stands at the head of the slipways where the "Ship of Dreams" was built. Inside, nine interactive galleries with original artefacts, dramatic recreations and interactive features allow you to fully immerse yourself in the history of the Titanic and the vibrant city that built her.

3 WATERFORD TREASURES *Waterford*

Reputed to be Ireland's oldest city, Waterford is packed with history and the best place to uncover it is in the trio of museums

called the Waterford Treasures. Here, the Medieval Museum, Bishop's Palace and Reginald's Tower (pictured) recount the story of the city, from its foundations 1,100 years ago by the Vikings to an era of Georgian opulence in the 18th century.

4 THE ARIGNA MINING EXPERIENCE *County Roscommon*

With a beautiful location on top of a hill in rural County Roscommon, Arigna was once a busy coal mine that operated from the 1700s until its closure in the 1990s. Today, you can take a tour right into the heart of the earth led by ex-miners who can explain first-hand about the conditions, typical working day and general life of a miner.

5 SEAMUS HEANEY HOMEPLACE *County Londonderry*

This award-winning arts and literary museum is all about the life and work of one of Ireland's greatest writers, Seamus Heaney. Located close to where Heaney grew up, the museum is a fascinating glimpse into what inspired the Nobel Laureate, with a curated collection of poetry, photographs and stories from his life.

6 JOHNSTOWN CASTLE *County Wexford*

Located just outside Wexford town in Ireland's Ancient East, Johnstown Castle, Gardens and Museum boasts a history that dates back over 800 years. Offering three attractions in one – a Gothic-Revival Castle, the Irish Agricultural Museum and gardens with lake walks and woodlands, Johnstown Castle is a fabulous destination filled with intrigue. Explore the servant's tunnel, stroll the scenic 0.9 mile/1.5km lower lake walk, and learn all about rural life and farming in Ireland. ♥

Travel around Ireland and you'll quickly discover that castles here have the power to stop you in your tracks with their sheer good looks. Whether it's a crumbling 12th century pile overlooking a glassy lake, a gracious Baronial mansion set in glistening green fields or a dramatic cliffside ruin pounded by waves, these structures never fail to surprise and delight.

If it's pretty countryside replete with woods, fields and rivers you're after, head for Huntington Castle in County Carlow. This dramatic structure was built as a garrison in 1625, probably on the site of an abbey, which in turn replaced an ancient temple, so it's no surprise that it's filled with legends, including ghostly druids and weeping ladies. Take a tour around the castle with owner Alexander Durdin-Robertson, whose descendants have been living here since the 17th century, and you'll discover everything from the stories behind the portraits, to a remarkable temple in the basement that is devoted to the Egyptian goddess, Isis. And don't miss the gardens at Huntington – laid out in the 1680s, they're filled with lawns, ponds and beautiful woodland.

A must-visit is the picturesque Dunguaire Castle. Nestled on the south shore of Galway Bay, this 16th century tower house is built on the site of a 7th century fort. It's fairly modest – as castles go – but its history takes in the clans of Ireland, Queen Elizabeth I of England, the Celtic revival of the early 20th century and a divorce case so scandalous that it triggered a change in

“HUNTINGTON WAS BUILT AS A GARRISON IN 1625 ON THE SITE OF AN ABBEY, WHICH IN TURN REPLACED AN ANCIENT TEMPLE, SO IT'S NO SURPRISE IT'S FILLED WITH LEGENDS”

the law. With the waters of Galway Bay to the north, and the barren, rocky landscape of County Clare's Burren to the south, Dunguaire has one of the most scenic locations on the island. No wonder it's the most photographed castle in the west!

For a total contrast, go north as far as you can go, to Antrim on the rugged Causeway Coast, where you'll find the ruins of Dunluce Castle. Perched on a craggy outcrop that's pounded by the waves, Dunluce is accessible over a footbridge, with a stout heart and steady feet. It seems a remote and dangerous place to live – a ship from the Spanish Armada was wrecked on the rocks, and a pair of lovers met their end below the castle – yet this wild spot is enchanting. The Earl of Ulster built the first castle here back in the 13th century, on an old Viking fort, and by the mid 16th century, it was fought over by rival clans – it's even attracted the banshee (a mythical wailing female spirit), according to legend. And you can see why: this stretch along the cliffs of Antrim lifts the heart and refreshes the soul with some of the finest views around. ♥



FABULOUS FOOD & DRINK

Seafood chowder by the fire in a wind-whipped coastal café. Traditional Irish stew in the surrounds of an 18th century market. Afternoon tea overlooking a misty lough. Food in Ireland isn't just about the taste; it's about the place, the experience, the land and sea, and the people who created it.

Whether you're enjoying locally inspired homemade sourdough pizzas at Babel Rooftop Bar in Belfast, or savouring a bowl of Killary Harbour mussels at the Misunderstood Heron food truck in the wild surrounds of County Galway's Killary Fjord, it's bound to be memorable.

To get to the heart and soul of food on the island of Ireland, a farmers' market is a good place to start. Here, busy stalls laden with artisan cheese, beech-smoked Irish salmon, soda breads and mountain lamb reflect the richness and variety of what's on offer. Farmers' markets take place all over the island, usually – but not exclusively – on the weekend. Some to look out for include the Midleton Farmers' Market in County Cork, Kilkenny Farmers' Market in the medieval city of Kilkenny, and the Walled City Market in Derry~Londonderry.

Occupying a special place in the hearts of Cork city locals, the English Market has been around since 1788 and is a great place to pick up traditional specialties, as well as freshly baked bread, fish, cheese and the Cork favourite – spiced beef. In Belfast, foodies favour the historic surrounds of the 19th century St George's Market (Fri-Sun) for everything from wild venison to fudge.

Beyond the markets, the island is packed with restaurants and cafés where you can taste traditional Irish food. Settle down to centuries of tradition with an Irish stew at Hargadon's grocery-pub in Sligo or award-winning scones and jam at The Cottage Café in Derry-Londonderry. And if you're looking to try some authentic island of Ireland foods, then keep your eye out on menus for boxty (a potato pancake), barmbrack (a fruity loaf cake that is traditionally eaten around Halloween time), and the famous Waterford blaa (a soft, floury bread roll unique to the city).

Travel around and it's not hard to see the excitement surrounding the food scene right now, from street food pop-ups to Michelin-starred gems. But for a great mix of atmosphere, tradition and great flavours, a festival is where it's at. Celebrate the very best of local oysters at the Carlingford Oyster Festival in August in County Louth; head to the Taste Ards and North Down Autumn Festival in September; or live it up in one of the island's pretties coastal towns at the Kinsale Gourmet Festival in County Cork in October. ♥

GREAT FOOD TOURS

Food tours are the perfect way to experience the pure flavours and traditional foods of each locality on the island of Ireland...

Ireland is undergoing a food revolution as the farmers, fishermen, producers and chefs realise that their green isle boasts some of the purest, richest flavours in the world. And food tours have become a popular way for locals and visitors alike to experience the best of each locality. “People always tell us they wish they had done the tour at the start of their trip,” says Caroline Wilson, who runs *Taste & Tour NI*’s food and drink-focused walking tours of Belfast city. “They’re amazed at the variety on offer – and they love that they’re getting to meet locals and not just other tourists.”

Each tour has its own distinct personality, too. About an hour and a half down the road from Belfast, *Enniskillen Taste Experience* uncovers several sides to this historic town’s food – from Tickety Moo Ice Cream which is made from the milk of an award-winning herd of pedigree Jersey cows, to contemporary fine-dining at 28 Darling Street.

Want to find out more about the foodie city of Cork? The knowledgeable guides of *Fab Food Trails* will give you the inside story on Cork’s historic English Market, where products such as tripe carry a piece of local history within them. Galway Food Tours’ *Around the Marketplace* starts with Atlantic oysters

and Irish farmhouse cheese at the medieval city’s beloved farmers’ market before you get to meet the producers and taste the flavours of award-winning restaurants and cafés. And in Derry~Londonderry, the *Made in Derry Food Tour* takes in street food and local cheese on a four-hour stroll to discover an amazing array of local foods in the surrounds of this historic walled city. Alternatively, you could dive deep into Ireland’s amazing landscape. *The Burren Food Trail* is a self-guided tour that boasts five themed trails that take you from field to plate in a region of Ireland that is fast becoming an eco-tourism hub. Fancy something more hands on? Join a Wicklow Wild Foods foraging walk, which gets you up close to wild local produce in the beautiful County Wicklow countryside. But what all these tours have in common is this: the chance to mingle with local people for a few memorable hours, while joining them in rediscovering their ancient food heritage and creating a place for it in the island’s identity. ♥

“PEOPLE ARE AMAZED AT THE VARIETY OF FOOD ON OFFER, AND LOVE THAT THEY’RE GETTING TO MEET THE LOCALS AND NOT JUST OTHER TOURISTS”

FORAGING
COUNTY WICKLOW



TASTE THE WILD
ATLANTIC WAY



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- 1 Pyke 'N' Pommes Derry~Londonderry
- 2 Sheridans Cheesemongers Galway
- 3 Harry's Shack County Londonderry
- 4 Glenarm Shorthorn County Antrim

IRELAND'S NATURAL FLAVOURS

Great flavours, passionate producers and traditions handed down through generations: there's never been a better time to enjoy a true taste of Ireland

With bountiful oceans and fertile fields, Ireland’s produce translates into pure deliciousness on the plate. Take beef for starters... Rich green pastures and small-scale farming make grass-fed beef the standard on the island of Ireland. Want to try it for yourself? Check out the Wagyu beef burgers at Derry~Londonderry’s Pyke ‘N’ Pommes food truck, or Hannan’s Glenarm Shorthorn Himalayan salt-aged sirloin at Balloo House in County Down. Lamb is the bedrock on which one of Ireland’s most famous dishes, Irish stew, is built. This casserole of lamb, potatoes, onions and carrots might be simple, but it’s enduringly popular and reflects a culinary tradition of cooking over an open fire.

From its origins in the late 1970s, Ireland’s farmhouse cheese scene has grown into one of the most exciting in Europe, with punchy new styles, including Young Buck raw milk blue cheese and well established favourites such as Durrus, Killeen and St Tola. A visit to a cheesemaker, such as Cashel Farmhouse Cheese in County Tipperary, is a great way to find out more about the cheese-making process, and farmers’ markets are ideal for meeting local producers and tasting artisan products. The flavours of the shoreline are showcased on the Taste the Atlantic trail along the Wild Atlantic Way, with tours of smokehouses, seafood producers and oyster farms. Keep your eye out in restaurants all along the island’s coastline for smoked Atlantic salmon, oysters, mussels and crab. It’s not just the fine-dining restaurants or traditional pubs where you can sample the ocean’s bounty, either. Enjoy fish fresh off the boat at Harry’s Shack on Portstewart Strand in County Londonderry or award-winning chowder at Killybegs Seafood Shack, overlooking the fishing port of Killybegs in County Donegal. For something a little different, make sure to try some of the island’s seaweeds, such as dulse or carrageen moss from the Antrim coastline. And with a new generation of well-travelled chefs eager to explore the island’s extraordinary natural larder, enjoying the great tastes of Ireland has never been easier! ♥




 A group of people are gathered in a rustic, warm-toned pub or bar. In the foreground, a man on the left plays an acoustic guitar. Next to him, a young man in a plaid shirt sits and listens. In the center, a woman plays a violin. To her right, an older man plays a uilleann pipes. On the far right, a woman plays a bodhrán. The background shows other patrons and string lights hanging from the wooden ceiling.

IRELAND'S CULTURE

Ireland's spirit can't be captured; it has to be lived. The stories, scenery, songs and special atmosphere are what bring people back here, time and again.

With over 1,865 miles/3,000km of coastline, the ocean has an inescapable influence on Ireland's culture, especially in the towns and villages scattered along its shores. From the currach boats unique to the west of Ireland to the lighthouses that stand on rocky headlands, the way of life here is dominated by the ocean. Ireland's coastal communities play a huge part in keeping the Irish language alive, with many speaking their native tongue every day, in areas that are known as Gaeltachtaí. Visit Achill Island in County Mayo, or the western parts of the Dingle Peninsula in Kerry and you'll hear locals using Irish. Further north in County Antrim and along the Ards Peninsula, the same is true for speakers of Ulster-Scots (Ullans), whose vibrant traditional music and dance traditions keep the culture alive.

For a small island, Ireland's contribution to world literature is immense. From playwrights to poets, songwriters to storytellers, Ireland's literary heritage takes in four Nobel prizewinners (George Bernard Shaw, WB Yeats, Samuel Beckett and Seamus Heaney), and continues to thrive today with Pulitzer prizewinning poet Paul Muldoon, and award-winning novelists such as Eimear McBride, Emma Donoghue, Colm Tóibín and Anna Burns. These writers follow a historic tradition of storytelling across the island of Ireland, which once took the form of folklore, heroic tales and myths passed down by people known as *seanchaí*. The ancient art of storytelling is today celebrated at events such as the Cape Clear Island Storytelling Festival in County Cork (Sept), as well as popular literature festivals such as Listowel Writers' Week, County Kerry (May); Dalkey Book Festival, County Dublin (June); and the Hillsborough Festival of Literature and Ideas in County Down (April). And in Dublin – a UNESCO City of Literature – you can get the whole story at the new Museum of Literature Ireland, which boasts multimedia exhibitions and priceless artefacts.

Of course, while many a story has been told in the firelit, stone-floored surrounds of a traditional Irish pub, they're more famous as places to hear a spot of music. Dotted around the island, from the cosmopolitan cities of Cork and Waterford to quiet rural spots such as the 17th century thatched cottage of Crosskeys Inn, County Antrim, you'll find hundreds of traditional pubs with a weekly roster of in-house musicians and guest performers. Drop in, sit back and enjoy the tunes. And if you've got the know-how, pull up a stool and join in... the more the merrier. ♥



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- 1 Cork City Gaol
- 2 The Quays Galway
- 3 Derry Girls mural Derry~Londonderry
- 4 Cork city
- 5 Galway city
- 6 The Guildhall Derry~Londonderry

THREE CITIES

With 11 cities all boasting great food, easy-going locals and lots of culture, you're sure to be busy on the island of Ireland. We've got three to get you started

GREAT FOR ATMOSPHERE: CORK

You'll feel it in the pubs, you'll notice it on the city streets and you can't miss it when you talk to the locals: Cork is a place that's proud of its heritage, its culture and its food. And rightly so! Centered on the River Lee, this buoyant small city has an easygoing vibe and boasts quirky alleys and arty districts, as well as some great pubs and restaurants. First stop? It's got to be the English Market. Packed with food stalls that brim with everything from traditional smoked fish to local cheese, this 18th century hub is a great place to get a taste for Cork's famous food culture. Stop for lunch at the Farmgate Café here, before deciding which of Cork's many attractions to head for next. You can explore the history of Cork City Gaol, enjoy art at the Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, or sample some craft beers at the Franciscan Well Brewery, and that's just for starters.

GREAT FOR STREET LIFE: GALWAY

Big-hearted, bohemian and brimming with energy, Galway is packed with the best of the west. Known as the "City of Tribes" – after the 14 medieval tribes who once ruled it – the people here

have cultivated a culturally diverse haven that remains true to its traditional roots. The streets of this city sing with an upbeat spirit... literally! Galway is famed for its buskers, with Shop Street, William Street and the historic Spanish Arch often alive with music. Oftentimes in Galway, just wandering around the city feels like a party. Come evening time, traditional Irish music pours from the doorways of many a pub, with Tig Cólí, Taaffes Bar and The Crane Bar all famed for their great tunes.

GREAT FOR CULTURE: DERRY-LONDONDERRY

Wrapped in 16th century walls, Derry~Londonderry is a small city with a big personality. You can see the imprint of the past everywhere, from the fine old buildings and narrow cobbled streets to the award-winning museums that tell the city's compelling story. But Derry~Londonderry isn't content to live in the past – a stint as UK City of Culture nurtured local artists and cutting-edge galleries such as the Void and Eden Place showcase Irish and international artists, while the Bogside Artists illustrate the power of art through their political murals. Music, too, is in the city's DNA, and a night out can begin with a blast of indie pop at the Nerve Centre and finish up with pints and traditional music in Peadar O'Donnell's pub. Add in a world-class Halloween carnival, a lively café culture and the chance to walk in the footsteps of those Derry Girls from the hit TV series, and you'll find that Derry~Londonderry hits all the right notes. ♥

FESTIVAL ISLAND

Come rain or shine, festival season never stops in Ireland, where there's always something to celebrate and everyone loves a good party

SPRING

The island of Ireland springs to life with St Patrick's Day on the 17th March. As well as the famous *St Patrick's Festival* in Dublin, there are fantastic festivities happening in Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Sligo and Kilkenny. In Armagh, where St Patrick built his first church, you can enjoy the wonderful *Home of St Patrick Festival*. Head to Mayo in the month of May and enjoy a month-long series of events including the *Achill Island Film Festival* and *Your Mayo Roots*. Still have room for more? Try the *Belfast Maritime Festival* along the city's quays with Tall Ships, nautical fun and great food.

SUMMER

Celebrating summer vibes, *Sea Sessions* is the biggest surf and music festival in Ireland, bringing thousands to the charming seaside town of Bundoran in County Donegal. *The Ould Lammas Fair* sees traditional music, dancing, horse trading, artisan markets and more take over the seaside town of Ballycastle, County Antrim. And if it's culture you're after, you're spoiled for choice with *Bloomsday* in Dublin; and the *Dalriada Festival* in Glenarm Castle, County Antrim.

AUTUMN

Festival season seriously heats up in autumn, with the *Dublin Theatre Festival* – 18 days of drama and delight – and the *Belfast International Festival*, with theatre, dance and visual arts. In Cork, the famous *Guinness Cork Jazz Festival* takes centre stage, with internationally acclaimed blues and brilliance. But it's the spookiest celebration that steals the show every autumn: *DerryHalloween* is billed as the greatest Halloween party in the world, featuring haunted houses, ghost walks and spectacular costumes. Hot on its heels is the *Púca Halloween Festival* in counties Meath and Louth. Named after the Irish word for "ghost", this fiesta takes scaring seriously!

WINTER

Voted best opera festival in the world, *Wexford Festival Opera* brings 12 whole days of operatic majesty to the southeast. Music of a totally different kind can be enjoyed at the *Atlantic Sessions* in Portrush and Portstewart with concerts in restaurants, hotels, bars and cafés along the Causeway Coast. Dublin is a great place to be in winter with a slew of festivals, including the *New Year's Festival*, which brings a carnival atmosphere to the city, and *TradFest*, which takes places in a variety of venues in or around the city's Temple Bar area in January. ♥

PÚCA FESTIVAL
COUNTY LOUTH



THE GREAT OUTDOORS

A kayaking trip down a glassy canal draped in greenery. A cycle around a lake overlooked by grand country houses and soaring forests. A walk along a windswept coastal trail by marram grass-tufted sand dunes and crashing waves. Visiting the island of Ireland is all about getting outdoors and getting active, and with such a wide diversity of landscapes from quiet green valleys to wild Atlantic beaches, experiencing the island's natural beauty couldn't be easier.

When it comes to adventures on two feet, Ireland serves up a vast array of trails, paths, routes and even walking festivals for both the novice and the experienced walker. You can enjoy edge-of-the-world views and blasts of salty sea air on cliff-edge paths around Slieve League in County Donegal, the Causeway Coast in Northern Ireland and Loop Head in County Clare. You can escape into the rich green beauty of undulating valleys such as the Glen of Aherlow in County Tipperary. And you can weave around the remarkable granite outcrops of the Mourne Mountains in County Down. There are vast walking routes around Atlantic Ocean headlands and short jaunts through ancient woods, and there's always a very warm welcome.

Ireland's waterways have witnessed everything from huge battles on the River Shannon in the 17th century to a busy era of trade and commerce on the canals in the 18th and 19th centuries. Today they are places of pure beauty, edged with an abundance of ferns and reeds and humming with birds and wildlife. Head out into the dark on a night kayaking trip on Lough Hyne, County Cork, where bioluminescence lights up the water. Or explore the maze of bays, narrow channels and islands around both Upper and Lower Lough Erne in County Fermanagh.

Ireland's Hidden Heartlands is filled with an amazing array of off-the-beaten track adventures in forest parks and bogland, as well as along canals and rivers. Try a slow adventure on a kayak down the Lough Allen Canal in County Leitrim, take it up a level with a tree-canopy walk at the Lough Key Forest Park in County Roscommon, or stroll amongst 360 million years of geology at the Cavan Burren Park in County Cavan.

One of the most incredible aspects of being outdoors on the island of Ireland is the wildlife. West Cork is a top European destination for whalewatching, while the Blasket Islands in County Kerry is known as the grey seal capital of Ireland, with a colony of over 1,000. And for some of the best birdwatching on the island, don't miss a trip to Rathlin Island in County Antrim where you can spot puffins, guillemots and corncrake. ♥



Quicker than walking but slow enough to allow you to soak up the sights and atmosphere of the countryside, Ireland's Greenways are the perfect trails for a holiday without cars

KILMACTHOMAS VIADUCT
WATERFORD GREENWAY

If you haven't heard of a Greenway before, the clue is in the name. This is a network of off-road trails for cyclists and walkers that often follows the course of Ireland's old railways. Having kicked off with the stunning Great Western Greenway in County Mayo, the concept has grown to take in all parts of the island, with one of the latest being the 80 mile/130km-long Royal Canal Greenway from Maynooth in County Kildare to Cloondara in County Longford. Whichever Greenway you choose, you'll find that this truly is an elemental way to travel: the countryside really comes alive when you're on a bike, and you can stop to take it in at your leisure.

So where to start? Well, if you're looking for a great adventure, east coast-style, the Waterford Greenway is ideal. This route crosses 11 bridges and three impressive Victorian viaducts before arriving at Dungarvan Bay. On the way, you'll encounter many of the nooks and crannies of Irish history. Castle ruins, 18th century paper mills, historic viaducts and welcoming villages — they're all part of the rich tapestry of this region.

Long before the coming of the railways this was Viking territory so you'll come across traces of their ancient settlements, and will probably be struck by how much those Norse people liked a good view. Ireland is sometimes wet, it's true; so if the weather isn't going your way, nip into a cosy pub and watch as the gentle drizzle turns the Greenways even greener.

“THIS IS A TRULY ELEMENTAL WAY TO TRAVEL: THE COUNTRYSIDE REALLY COMES ALIVE WHEN YOU'RE ON A BIKE AND YOU CAN STOP AND TAKE IT IN AT YOUR LEISURE”

These routes cross extraordinarily beautiful countryside all around the island. The Boyne Greenway begins in Dominic's Park on the south bank of the River Boyne in Drogheda, County Louth, and ends at the Battle of the Boyne Visitor Centre in Oldbridge, County Meath. It's a short one, at only 1.1 miles/1.9km but has a lovely section along the Boyne Canal.

Taking in aspects of Belfast's unique history is the Comber Greenway, which goes off-road close to the old Harland & Wolff shipyard (which built Titanic) and runs along an old railway line. A tranquil green corridor through the city eventually reaches open countryside, where you can spot Scrabo Tower in the distance. In case you're wondering — it was built in honour of a local man who fought in the Napoleonic Wars. You're never very far from history here.

No matter where you cycle on Ireland's Greenways you'll be assured of a gentle way of seeing dramatic sights. And the great thing about going by bicycle is that you always get a seat with a good view. ♥

THE SPERRINS
COUNTY TYRONE



GRAIGUENAMANAGH
COUNTY CARLOW



OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

All over the island of Ireland, you'll find secret corners that are perfect for walking, cycling, horse riding and kayaking... All you have to do is look

In the uplands of counties Tyrone and Londonderry, the wind whips across the time-weathered stones of the Sperrin Mountains. Bog cotton, heather and wild orchids dance in the breeze across bogland, quiet valleys and undulating hills. This is walking country — where civilisation drifts away and mountain summits beckon. The Sperrins is one of the island of Ireland's largest upland areas, but the landscape feels undiscovered, with ochre-coloured moorlands that go on for miles. At the western gateway to the mountains and close to the friendly town of Omagh is Gortin Glen Forest Park, which offers walking of a different kind over trails through beautiful woodland.

From its source in County Laois's Slieve Bloom Mountains, the River Barrow flows 119 miles/192km to Waterford Harbour. But one of the most beautiful sections is the Barrow Navigation in counties Carlow and Kilkenny. Bordered by gentle woodland, grassy towpaths and rolling green fields, it's tailor-made for off-grid adventures. “Undiscovered is an understatement for the Barrow”, says Martin O'Brien of the Mullichain Café in the

scenic waterside hamlet of St Mullins, “glide along these waters and you'll pass through farmland, gurgling lock gates and old villages — it's like a glimpse of times gone by.” There are plenty of places to rent kayaks and canoes to explore this pretty slice of the island, including Go with the Flow River Adventures, but there's lots to do for walkers and cyclists, too. Rent a bike from the Waterside Guesthouse or pull on your hiking shoes and walk the towpath from the town of Graiguenamanagh to St Mullins (4 miles/7km). You'll soon be into a wonderland of wildlife, where otters and kingfishers dart from the riverbanks.

Lapping the shores of Tipperary, Galway and Clare are the waters of Lough Derg. On the lough's northerly shores, the wildlife sanctuary of Portumna Forest Park is threaded with quiet cycling and walking trails — keep your eye out for the fallow deer that call the park home, along with fox, badger and even a white-tailed sea eagle. As well as activities such as horse riding, which you can enjoy in the hills around Mountshannon, Lough Derg offers plenty of hikes, from waterside strolls to heart-pumping climbs. For a walk into Irish mythology, head for Tountinna and the Graves of the Leinsterman. Tountinna means “hill of the waves” and legend has it that when the great flood came, the only people who survived were on this hill... Get to the top and you'll see why — as the entire Lough Derg valley tumbles out before you. ♥

IRELAND ON SCREEN

Luke Skywalker meditating on his rocky island retreat. Dragons soaring over the Westerosi coast. John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara falling in love against a background of green fields. There's one place that links these memorable moments – the island of Ireland.

Maybe it's the drama of the landscapes that attracts so many location scouts. When soaring sea cliffs lashed by wind and rain were required for Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince, there was no more fitting location than the Cliffs of Moher in County Clare, a highlight of the Wild Atlantic Way. The windswept grandeur of the Mourne Mountains in County Down was the backdrop for award-winning Philomena, a tender tale of a woman's search for her long lost son. And when Disney needed a fairytale village for Disenchanted, the picturesque Enniskerry in County Wicklow stepped right up.

But it's not just the island's natural beauty that appeals. Some of Ireland's greatest stars are the historic landmarks that have graced our screens. In County Meath, Trim Castle, which dates back to the 13th century, made a convincing substitute for the fortified English town of York in Mel Gibson's Braveheart. Elegant mansions such as Castle Coole in County Fermanagh (Miss Julie with Colin Farrell and Jessica Chastain) and Killruddery House in County Wicklow (Far and Away with Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, and The Tudors, among others) are like instant film sets, showcasing a bygone age of privilege and luxury. When it comes to genuine drama, the real-life tales of crime and punishment that haunt the cells of Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin and Crumlin Road Gaol in Belfast almost overshadow their appearances in films including classic crime caper, The Italian Job and the stark independent drama, Starred Up.

Ireland's cities have also had their share of the limelight. The riotous TV comedy Derry Girls paints a memorable picture of Derry~Londonderry in the 1990s and now half the fun of a visit to this historic walled city is trying to recognise locations from the show. Belfast starred as itself in The Fall, where Jamie Dornan's serial killer played mind games with Gillian Anderson's police detective. And Dublin has appeared on screen so many times that audiences have seen everything from the realism of The Commitments and Once to the sepia tones of John Huston's The Dead, adapted from James Joyce's short story of the same name.

For fans of TV and film, the island of Ireland is the perfect location whether you're exploring Galway UNESCO City of Film or touring Games of Thrones® locations in Northern Ireland. ♥

EXPLORE THE SEVEN KINGDOMS

Take off on a *Game of Thrones*® adventure through the forests, mountains, moorlands and castles of Northern Ireland

Winter is never truly over in Northern Ireland. The nail-biting saga of *Game of Thrones*® may have reached an end, but the legacy of the hit HBO show lives on in this part of the island, which is home to more Seven Kingdoms locations than anywhere else in the world.

You'll find the world of Westeros in the most unexpected places. There are the *Game of Thrones*® doors – 10 beautifully carved pieces of wood situated in pubs, cafés and inns around Northern Ireland – made out of storm-felled beech trees from the Dark Hedges (Kingsroad). At The Steensons in Glenarm, County Antrim, you can meet the resident goldsmiths who crafted the crowns worn by King Joffrey and his bride Margaery, as well as Daenerys' dragon brooches. And in Banbridge, County Down, just 24 miles/39km from Belfast, you can visit the *Game of Thrones* Studio Tour with amazing imagery and sets, as well as props and shows from the series.

Offering a range of thrilling experiences for fans of the show, Winterfell Tours allows you to really get into the spirit of things.

Plus, it's got a great location in the courtyard of Castle Ward – a spellbinding spot that doubled as Winterfell in the show. "It really felt like we had stepped into Westeros," says fan Emily O'Dwyer. "One of the highlights for me was sword fighting – that's when I really started to feel like a Stark." Authenticity is all part of the experience here. With a fur cloak on your shoulders, you can test your aim with archery, have a go at axe-throwing and even meet some dire wolves.

A great way to experience several of the filming locations at once is with a tour. And for the inside track, then a trip with McCombs Coach Tours is a good way to go, as you'll be in the company of drivers who worked on the show, ferrying *Game of Thrones*® actors to and from their Northern Ireland filming locations. Travelling along the Causeway Coastal Route, you'll visit a number of locations, including the 400-million-year-old Cushendun Caves, which featured Melisandre giving birth to the shadow assassin, and Ballintoy Harbour, where Theon Greyjoy returned to the Iron Islands. ♥

“WITH A FUR CLOAK ON YOUR SHOULDERS, YOU CAN TEST YOUR AIM WITH ARCHERY OR HAVE A GO AT AXE-THROWING”

GAME OF THRONES STUDIO TOUR
BANBRIDGE, COUNTY DOWN



GAME OF THRONES STUDIO TOUR



WINTERFELL
COUNTY DOWN

PHOTO: LUCASFILM



LUKE'S ISLAND
WILD ATLANTIC WAY

STAR POWER

You don't have to go to a galaxy far, far away to find landscapes that are out of this world. *Star Wars* and the *Wild Atlantic Way* have created the perfect cinematic double-act

If, at certain points along the Wild Atlantic Way, it feels like you're staring at a film set – that's probably because you are. But while Ireland's cinematic coastline has appeared in everything from *The Princess Bride* to *Ryan's Daughter*, its performance as a Jedi island retreat is undoubtedly its most iconic, with a starring role in both *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and *The Last Jedi*.

First port of call for cast and crew of *The Force Awakens* was the pretty village of Portmagee in County Kerry. It is close to here – 7 miles/11km out into the swell of the Atlantic Ocean – that you'll find one of the film's most iconic locations – Skellig Michael. "We were just blown away by it," says Martin Joy, Supervising Location Manager. "It certainly fed into our *Star Wars* universe". Originally inhabited by 6th century monks, this UNESCO World Heritage Site has restricted visitor numbers, but you can take a boat from Portmagee and sail around it and the surrounding area, a place Mark Hamill called "indescribable".

Today, in this quiet village it's hard to imagine a huge film crew bustling around, but Portmagee was the epicentre of the action for the *Force Awakens*. B&Bs in the area were filled with production crew, local guides including adventurer Mike O'Shea carried loads up Skellig Michael, and boatmen transported equipment and crew onto the island. Drop into the Moorings Hotel (a pre-production site for filming and location for the wrap party) and you can pull your own pint of Guinness, just like Mark Hamill did, as part of "The Force Perfect Pint Challenge".

Travel north and south along this coastline – with its moody skies, pulse-pounding cliffs and craggy headlands – and you'll encounter even more *Star Wars* locations. For *The Last Jedi*, the 6th century beehive huts of Skellig Michael were meticulously recreated on windswept Sybil Head near Ballyferriter, while the cast and crew celebrated the end of filming in Dingle's old grocery-pub, Foxy John's. Filming also took place at Brow Head in County Cork, a slice of rugged land that edges out into the Atlantic Ocean, and Loop Head in County Clare, famed for its dramatic cliffs and caves that bear the brunt of crashing tides.

And if you're wondering how it felt for locals when the Millennium Falcon and its entourage came to town, then Hugh Farren of Farren's Bar in Donegal's Malin Head tells it like it is. "It was unbelievable that *Star Wars* was filming a mile and a half away from us," he explains... "It was out of this world." ♥



ADARE MANOR
COUNTY LIMERICK



1



2



3



4



5



6

- 1 Cape Clear B&B *County Cork*
- 2 Finn Lough Bubble Domes *County Fermanagh*
- 3 Grogan's Castle *County Clare*
- 4 Kribben Cottages *County Down*
- 5 Cruising the Shannon *County Limerick*
- 6 Rock Farm Slane, *County Meath*

PLACES TO STAY

Ever slept in a lighthouse? Or how about a medieval castle? Whether you're after cool camping or a cosy B&B, Ireland has something to suit

B&BS

The Irish welcome is famous. And it's not a myth, either. Step inside a B&B on the island of Ireland, and you'll have friendly smiles at breakfast, a sociable atmosphere and the inside track on where to eat, as well as what there is to visit in the area. A B&B stay is a great way to connect, first-hand, with Irish culture. Ranging from cottages in the heart of the countryside to smart city guesthouses, they deliver relaxed, affordable accommodation in warm and welcoming family homes.

ECO-FRIENDLY SLEEPS

Ireland's green accommodation options are growing all the time, with yoga retreats on quiet islands; low impact self-catering cottages; and sustainable hotels and guesthouses. Check out Grogan's Castle in the Burren area of County Clare, a founding member of The Burren Ecotourism Network, for special ecotourism packages. Delphi Resort in County Galway, which is a member of Green Hospitality Ireland, and The Salthouse in Ballycastle, County Antrim – a luxury sustainable hotel powered by wind turbines and solar energy.

CASTLES

Cups of tea by crackling log fires, magnificent medieval interiors and an old-world ambience... a castle stay is the ultimate in style. Luxurious and indulgent – but friendly and relaxed, too – castle hotels generally sit on vast estates where you can enjoy walks into woodland, go clay-pigeon shooting, try a spot of falconry or enjoy a traditional boat trip along gentle rivers. The good news is that super-elegant five-star castle hotels can be found all over the island, from the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East to the Causeway Coast. You can even rent entire castles just for you, your friends and family, with staff who will look after your every need. There are some more affordable offerings around, too, with self-catering castles available to rent for groups both big and small.

LIGHTHOUSES

Tales of shipwrecks, adventure and tragedy swirl in the waters surrounding the beacons that are Ireland's lighthouses. Perched on cliff edges, keeping a watchful eye over the turbulent seas, these lighthouses are unique places to stay, whether you're cosying up in a lightkeeper's house or spending a few nights in the lighthouse tower. And the great thing about a lighthouse stay? It's a year-round affair; in winter, light the fire, make yourself at home and gaze at the wild seas below; in summer, enjoy late sunsets and sublime ocean views.

HISTORIC HOUSES

If your idea of relaxation is 19th century drawing rooms, book-laden libraries and breakfasts around grand dining tables, then walk through the doors of a historic Irish country house. Often owned by the original families, these beautiful houses sit on tranquil estates and offer old-fashioned informal hospitality, blazing fires, antique furnishings and candlelit dinners.

FARMHOUSES

An Irish farmhouse stay offers up a slice of authentic rural life – enjoy fresh farm produce for breakfast, great walking routes and a real sense of getting away from it all. Lots of farms offer extra activities, so you can saddle up on a pony, have a go at milking cows, or learn the art of baking Irish soda bread.

UNIQUE PLACES TO STAY

Looking for accommodation with a twist? You've come to the right place... Stay in a transparent bubble dome underneath the starry skies at County Fermanagh's Finn Lough. Give your stay in Dublin a twist by renting an early 19th century Martello Tower in Dublin Bay, originally built to defend against Napoleonic invasion. Bed down on a converted double-decker bus along the Wild Atlantic Way in Lough Corrib, County Galway, or try a snug and cosy "Shepherd's Hut" at the Tepee Valley Campsite in County Armagh.

CAMPING

Breathtaking camping spots beside the crashing ocean, eco farms with spacious bell tents and bohemian glamping surrounded by ancient woods and rippling streams – camping in Ireland delivers everything from the unique to the quirky. After all, there's nothing quite like waking up in a forest or beside the beach with the sound of the sea crunching over the pebbles, the sizzle of fried eggs and a mind-blowing sunrise!

COTTAGE STAY

Whether you're after an extraordinary adventure on the Wild Atlantic Way, an unforgettable tour through Northern Ireland, or a farm stay in the historic pastures of Ireland's Ancient East, you're guaranteed to find a lovely little self-catering cottage to suit your needs. Cottages on the island really do spring up everywhere – on remote headlands, on the edge of vast beaches and in busy cities where everything is right on your doorstep.

CRUISERS

A great way to enjoy Ireland's unspoiled waterways is by modern cruiser or traditional barge. Ideal destinations for cruising include the vast River Shannon, which weaves through the heart of the island; tranquil Lough Erne, famed for its castles, food and golf; and the angler's paradise of Lough Derg, between the counties of Clare, Tipperary and Galway. ♥



DART, Killiney County Dublin



Canal Boats Leitrim village



Carnlough Harbour County Antrim



Waterford Greenway County Waterford



Mount Errigal County Donegal



Rathlin Island ferry County Antrim

IRELAND INFORMATION

We've got the lowdown on what you need to know about the island of Ireland, from how to get around to money matters

THE BASICS

The island is about 302 miles/486km long and 170 miles/274km wide, and covers approximately 32,600 square miles. Ireland has 32 counties. There are 26 in the Republic of Ireland and six in Northern Ireland. The Republic of Ireland is a parliamentary democracy with a president as head of state. Northern Ireland has its own regional government, but is part of the United Kingdom. There are about 6 million people living on the island – 4.3 million people in the Republic of Ireland and 1.7 million in Northern Ireland. Ireland is a quite a young country too, with one third of the population is under the age of 29.

PASSPORTS AND VISAS

Passports

EU citizens need a passport or national identity card to enter the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland; while citizens of all other countries must have a valid passport.

Always check what form of ID is required with your individual airline, ferry company or travel agent before travelling and whether. And bear in mind that your children need their own passports.

Visas – British Irish Visa Scheme (BIVS)

The British-Irish Visa Scheme is a scheme which allows for short term travel between the UK and Ireland (including Northern Ireland), on the basis of a single visa, by nationals who are visa-required for the purpose of travel to or entrance into both jurisdictions. Indian citizens can now apply for one travel permit to visit both the United Kingdom and Ireland following the commencement of the British-Irish Visa Scheme (BIVS) in India on February 2015. The scheme involves the mutual recognition by Ireland and the United Kingdom of each other's short term visas.

Whether you apply for an Irish or UK visa will depend on the first point of arrival in the Common Travel Area (transit through a jurisdiction shall not count as a first point of entry for this purpose). In other words, if first arrival is in the UK, then a UK visa should be applied for; if first arrival is in Ireland, then an Irish visa is required. If you wish to visit just Ireland or the UK, then you should apply for the appropriate visa in the normal way. It will be endorsed with the 'BIVS' endorsement but this, of course, does not mean you have

to use the visa for travel to the other country. If travelling on an eligible single-entry Irish Visa, once the Common Travel Area is left, the visa is no longer valid and may not be used for re-entry to either Ireland or the UK. If travelling on an eligible multi-entry Irish Visa, re-entry to the Common Travel Area is allowed during the period of validity of the visa but the first country of arrival must be Ireland. If travelling on an eligible UK Visa, re-entry is allowed to the UK during the period of validity of the UK visa or to Ireland during the period of validity of the UK visa and current leave to enter or remain in the UK.

Under the Scheme, an eligible Irish Visa i.e. one carrying the endorsement 'BIVS' will be accepted in lieu of a transit visa in the UK. The maximum stay in Ireland with an eligible Irish visa is 90 days and in the UK with an eligible UK visa is 180 days.

'BIVS' only applies to Indian and Chinese nationals departing from India or China. All UAE nationals can travel to Ireland visa-free. All other GCC nationals can avail of the Irish Visa Waiver Scheme. Please check gov.ie and gov.uk for further details.

TRAVELLING TO IRELAND

By air

You can fly directly into Ireland from many countries, and connecting flights are available from most European cities. From London alone, over 70 flights depart daily to Ireland (and flight time is only an hour.)

By sea

Dozens of ferries enter Ireland's

ports every day from Britain and mainland Europe. There are six international ports on the island, granting easy access to your preferred destination.

GETTING AROUND

The island is quite small so whether you're travelling by air, road or rail you'll find it easy.

By road

Ireland's roads are generally of a high standard, although if you venture into the countryside they can be narrow and winding. We drive on the left-hand side. You will find car rental services at airports and ports and in city centres. Drivers require a full, valid driving license or international driving permit.

By air

Considering the small size of Ireland, there isn't much need for internal flights – the main one is the Dublin-Kerry route, which takes approximately 40 minutes, as well as flights to all three of the Aran Islands.

Public transport

Rail networks run all over the island with Irish Rail in the Republic and Northern Ireland Railways in Northern Ireland. The Dart (Dublin Area Rapid Transit) serves Dublin's coast and city area, while the Luas (a light rail service) travels across the south of the city and into the city centre. Travelling by coach or bus is economical. Bus Éireann in the Republic of Ireland and Translink in Northern Ireland

run coach tours all around the island.

By bicycle

There are plenty of bike hire shops in Ireland, and rental fees are reasonable. Most bike shops will let you rent your bike in one location and drop it off at another for a small fee. Rental price generally includes lock, pump, puncture repair kit, mudguards and carrier; insurance cover is given with all bicycles hired. Children's bikes are also available, but book well in advance.

By water

Most of Ireland's islands can be reached by ferry with numerous ferry companies providing local services. Many crossings will be subject to weather conditions, so keep an eye on local weather reports via Met Éireann (Republic of Ireland) and the Met Office (Northern Ireland).

In some cases, ferry companies will only operate seasonally, normally peak season (June to August approximately). Always check sailing times in advance.

Along with numerous islands, Ireland is home to rivers, lakes and canals, many with potential to be experienced by boat or barge. You don't need a licence to operate a cruiser or barge on the island of Ireland and you don't need experience – you'll get full training and teaching sessions along with charts and a captain's handbook before you set off on your journey.

MONEY MATTERS

In the Republic of Ireland, the official currency is the

euro. In Northern Ireland, it's £ sterling. Credit cards that have the Visa, MasterCard or American Express symbol are widely accepted. Visitors with other cards should check before they use them. ATM (cash) machines are located at most banks and in towns and city centers and accept most credit and debit cards.

SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE

The people of Ireland are famed for their lively conversation – you'll see why once you get here. English is the primary language and spoken all over the island. The Gaelic language in Ireland – Gaelige, or Irish as it's known locally – is a Celtic language and one of the oldest in the world. It is still taught in schools across the country and spoken widely in Gaeltacht (Irish speaking) regions. Ullans (Ulster-Scots) is also spoken in some areas of Northern Ireland. It's a variant of Scots, a Scottish language.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

We hope you won't need any emergency numbers during your visit, but just in case, here they are.

Emergency Police, Fire,

Ambulance numbers:

Republic of Ireland (ROI) Tel: 112 or 999

Northern Ireland (NI) Tel: 999

SALES TAX (VAT) REFUNDS

Republic of Ireland

Under the Retail Export Scheme, if you live outside of the EU, you can claim back a portion of the VAT on purchases made during your stay in

the Republic of Ireland. Most retailers participate in this VAT refund scheme and you can ask for a VAT refund form in the store once you've made your purchases.

How to claim your refund

There are three refund points in Dublin where you can reclaim your tax. You can also find refund points in Dublin and Shannon airports.

Make sure you fill in the form correctly and include a credit card number to facilitate the refund. The goods you bought must be exported outside of the EU within three months following the month of purchase and it will take between four to six weeks to receive your refund from the refund agent.

If the purchase value of any one item on your VAT refund form is €2,000 or above, you will need to present your form, goods receipt and the item your purchased to a customs official at your point of exit for a validation stamp.

For more information on tax-free shopping, check out the two main refund agents in Ireland, Tax Free Worldwide and Fexco.

Northern Ireland

You can also claim tax back on goods bought in Northern Ireland.

THE WEATHER

They say that if you're not happy with the weather in Ireland, just give it five minutes. The good news is that the climate is mild and temperate and although conditions can be changeable it's rarely extreme.

RELIGION

The Christian religion remains the most widely observed but the population welcomes a broad spectrum of faiths and beliefs. The island features a huge range of places of worship as well as a variety of specialist food stores, restaurants and religious retreats, all mirroring Ireland's diverse denominational culture.

SMOKING

There is a smoking ban in Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. It is illegal to smoke in an enclosed place of work – everywhere from pubs and restaurants, to shops, offices and on public transport. There are exceptions, including some hotels and guesthouses that provide smoking rooms. Pubs, nightclubs and hotels usually have a designated smoking area outside on the street or in a garden. Always put your cigarette butt in the ashtrays provided (which are sometimes located on walls beside an entrance door) or you could face a €100 fine for littering.

TIPPING

In some restaurants a "service charge" will apply. This means the cost of a tip is included in your bill so there's no need to leave extra. If no service charge is applied then it's totally up to you. Tips range between 10-15%, but you're under no obligation. Tipping in pubs is only customary if you're served at your table rather than at the bar.

Ireland

