

INTRODUCING DUBLIN



Crossing distinctive Ha'penny Bridge (p133) would once have cost you said ha'penny

OLIVER CIRENDIN

Decadent, delightful and full of surprises, Dublin packs a punch that, delivered correctly, will leave you reeling but still wanting more. That's big talk for a small capital.

Dubliners don't mind a bit of hyperbole, especially if it's to 'big up' their own beloved burg. Yet Dubs can also be brutally unsentimental about the place, which mightn't come across as sexy or as sultry as other European capitals, but aren't pretty things as easy to like as they are to forget? Dublin, they'll tell you, has *personality*, which is way more important than good looks, and will last far longer.

Which isn't to say that Dublin can't do pretty. An amble through the landscaped parks corralled by the city's rich Georgian heritage is enough to make anyone's head turn, while even half a peek at the city's myriad cultural offerings will show that it has pedigree too, these days expressed as much through its recently acquired multicultural cosmopolitanism as through its own traditional forms.

Yet Dublin's most enduring quality can be found in Dubliners themselves, both native-born and blown-in. Garrulous, amiable and witty, Dubliners at their ease are the greatest hosts of all, a charismatic bunch whose soul and sociability are so compelling and infectious that at some point during your visit you could find yourself wondering if you could possibly figure out a way of staying here permanently. And if you can't, don't worry: it'll still be here when you come back.

CITY LIFE

Crash, bang, wallop. The party that was the Celtic Tiger came to a shocking, sudden end in late 2008, leaving Dubliners to deal with the consequences of a debt crisis that has far too many numbers in it to seem real. The dust has settled somewhat, but Dubliners are still pissed off – at the banks, the government and the developers who promised a better life through bigger houses, newer cars and a wardrobe full of pricey junk, but then delivered a hefty bill that nobody seems able to pay.

Dublin is in the midst of the worst financial crisis in a century or more. There are fewer jobs and plenty of pay cuts. Negative equity is the albatross around the city's neck, with tens of thousands who bought a home in the last ten years desperately trying to figure out a way to pay the mortgage in the face of dropping house prices and growing unemployment. 'Staycation' is the new fad for many Dubliners, who once took four foreign trips a year for granted but are now put off by the cost.

Yet Dubliners are a determined and resolute lot. Half of them have been here or hereabouts before, having grown up in the grey decades that preceded the boom. The other half, the under 35s, might find it all a bit shocking and confusing, but the children of the Celtic Tiger aren't just about bling and brand new BMWs – they are the generation that grew up believing that everything is possible and that innovation, intuition and hard work will deliver the goods.

Despite common belief to the contrary, this smiling optimism is very much at odds with Dubliners' traditional fatalism, which has always been the fuel for their expertly delivered gallops humour, a necessary tool for getting through the tough times. Those tough times are back, but Dublin is no longer the same. The Celtic Tiger is well and truly dead, but its legacy will be more than just a bucket-load of debt.

HOLGER LEUE



Feel the merriment on an Irish-music pub crawl (p253) through the Temple Bar precinct

THE AUTHOR

Fionn Davenport



Half-Italian and a lifelong supporter of Liverpool Football Club, Fionn is the ideal Dubliner – a native son in love with the city of his birth but one eye forever on somewhere else. He's left the city many

times – usually looking for warmer weather or a job, but he always returns – because too much sun is bad for you and all jobs get boring. But the reason he loves Dublin so much is that it treats gallows humour as high art: why look for a straight answer when a funny one is far more satisfying. Lonely Planet has kept him busy for the last 15 years or so, but he also hosts his own radio show on Newstalk 106-108 (you can listen to Culture Shock online at www.newstalk.ie) and makes the occasional foray into television.

FIONN'S TOP DUBLIN DAY

All good days in Dublin begin with a read of the *Irish Times* and a hit of caffeine. It's sunny and warm (of course) so a stroll up Grafton St and into the calm of St Stephen's Green (p73) sets me up just right for a day in pursuit of idleness, surely a Dubliner's ulti-

mate ambition. I'll check out the newly refurbished Natural History Museum (p83) before ambling up to my favourite museum of all, the Chester Beatty Library (p72), a treasure chest of beautiful books, ancient scrolls and objets d'art. Lunch is a piadina loaf stuffed with Italian goodies from the totally fabulous Bottega Toffoli (p158) just around the corner, after which it's time to meet a friend who's taken a half-day off as a moral obligation: we make our way west, past the Guinness brewery to the exquisite grounds of the Irish Museum of Modern Art (p98) and then on to the War Memorial Gardens (p100) in Islandbridge, a marvellous open secret that few ever bother to visit. We sit by the lovely Liffey and, momentarily inspired by a bit of Joyce, 'riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay' we make our way to the South Wall. I time our walk out to the Poolbeg Lighthouse (p114) with the setting of the sun – there's surely no more romantic spot in Dublin. Dinner with friends follows at Copinger Row (p156) before a drink in the Long Hall (p176) on South Great George's St. Lovely.

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GETTING STARTED

Dublin is a cinch in virtually every respect. The city is small, easy to get around and offers no greater challenge than struggling to be cultural the morning after the night before. That is, of course, if you don't care about the gridlock or the fact that nightclubs are calling chucking out time when their equivalents in southern climes are just getting going. Otherwise, just get stuck in.

WHEN TO GO

You don't like the weather? Wait 15 minutes. So goes the old refrain about a city where it's virtually impossible to predict the climate other than to make vague generalisations about it being warmer in summer than in winter – which are true, at least most of the time. From June to August, the days are reasonably warm and – most importantly – very long. At the height of summer you won't need to turn on lights until after 10pm. It is also peak tourist season, which means there are far more people pretty much everywhere and prices are at their highest.

Not surprisingly, most of the yearly festivals occur during these times so as to take advantage of the crowds and the more favourable weather. Spring (March to May) and autumn (September to November) are usually good times for a peek, although the city's popularity as a tourist destination can often blur the lines between mid- and high-season tourism. Still, you have a better chance of some peace and quiet and the weather can be surprisingly better in April and September

than in mid-July – again, it's all part of the uncertainty principle.

Winters are dark, wet and cold, with December the wettest of all (an average 76mm of rainfall), but hey, it's Christmas and everyone is high-spirited; plus, you can enjoy indoor pleasures and you won't feel as guilty lounging in the pub. January is the only time the city's not really itself, when it's a little quiet and cranky after the festivities, and the days seem interminably gloomy.

See [p246](#) for more information on Dublin's climate.

FESTIVALS

Dubliners' need to justify their propensity for celebrating stuff – 'it's Wednesday!' – just doesn't work for some, so the city's party planners have conveniently laid on an ever-changing menu of festivals and events for everyone to feel better about their hangovers.

January

NEW YEAR'S CELEBRATIONS

Experience the birth of another year with a cheer among thousands of revellers at Dublin's iconic Christ Church Cathedral ([p96](#)).

February

JAMESON DUBLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

☎ 872 1122; www.dubliniff.com

Local flicks, arty international films and advance releases of mainstream movies

ADVANCE PLANNING

From Easter to September, queues can be horrendous at popular attractions; arrive early. Most fee-paying sights offer discounts to students, the elderly, children and families. If you're serious about sightseeing, buy the [Dublin Pass](#) ([p247](#)) as soon as you set foot in the airport – it'll give you a free ride on the Aircoach.

Two Weeks Before You Go

Advance purchase is a must if you want to take in a hit play at the [Abbey](#) ([p197](#)) or the [Gate](#) ([p198](#)). A couple of weeks ahead should be plenty of time. Ditto if you want to watch a game at [Croke Park](#) ([p124](#)), especially for the latter stages of the championship, which runs from April to September.

Three Days Before You Go

The very best of Dublin's restaurants can be pretty tough to get a booking in for the first few months of business, but you shouldn't have any problems a couple of days in advance.

ONLY IN DUBLIN

All-Ireland Finals (☎ 836 3222; www.gaa.ie) The climax of the year for fans of Gaelic games; the season's most successful county teams battle it out for the All-Ireland championships in hurling and football, on the second and fourth Sundays in September, respectively. The capital is swamped with fans from the competing counties, draped in their colours and swept along by their good-natured, family-oriented exuberance.

Bloomsday (☎ 878 8547; www.jamesjoyce.ie) Every 16 June a bunch of weirdos wander around the city dressed in Edwardian gear, talking nonsense in dramatic tones. They're not mad – at least not clinically – they're only Bloomsdayers committed to commemorating James Joyce's epic *Ulysses* through readings, performances and re-created meals, including Leopold Bloom's famous breakfast of 'kidneys with the faint scent of urine'. Yummy.

Christmas Dip at the Forty Foot Possibly the most hardcore hangover cure known to man, this event takes place at 11am on Christmas Day at a famous swimming spot below the Martello tower – made famous by James Joyce in *Ulysses* – in Sandycove, 9km from the centre of Dublin. A group of the very brave, and certifiably insane, plunge into the icy water and swim 20m to the rocks and back. With heads cleared after their frozen frolics, each heads home for Christmas lunch.

Handel's Messiah (☎ 677 2255; Neal's Music Hall, Fishamble St) *Messiah*, Handel's most highly esteemed composition and one of the most renowned works in English sacred music, was performed for the first time at this site (in today's Temple Bar) on 13 April 1742, an event commemorated with a special gala-style performance each April.

Liffey Swim (☎ 833 2434) Since 1924, at summer's end (late August/early September), hundreds of swimmers – or lunatics, as they're colloquially known – traditionally dive into the Sniffy Liffey for a swim through 2km of mud and murk in the centre of Dublin, from Rory O'More Bridge to the Custom House. There are separate handicap races for men and women and it's fun to line the bank and watch the competitors trying not to swallow a drop. You can see it depicted in Jack B Yeats' famous *Liffey Swim* painting in the National Gallery (p82).

make up the menu of the city's film festival, which runs over the last two weeks in February (see the boxed text, p192).

SIX NATIONS RUGBY

☎ 647 3800; www.irishrugby.ie
Ireland, winners of the 2009 Grand Slam, play their three home matches at the brand new Aviva Stadium in the southern suburb of Ballsbridge. The season runs from February to April; see p207 for more.

March

ST PATRICK'S FESTIVAL

☎ 676 3205; www.stpatricksfestival.ie
The mother of all Irish festivals. Hundreds of thousands gather to 'honour' St Patrick on city streets and in venues throughout the centre over four days around 17 March. Events include the three-day Guinness Fleadh music festival in Temple Bar.

May

INTERNATIONAL DUBLIN GAY THEATRE FESTIVAL

www.gaytheatre.ie
A fortnight at the beginning of May devoted exclusively to gay theatre – plays by

gay writers past and present that have a gay or gay-related theme.

June

CONVERGENCE FESTIVAL

☎ 674 5773; www.cultivate.ie; 15-19 Essex St
A five-day festival on sustainable living that takes place at the end of the month, with a diverse program of workshops, exhibitions and children's activities in Temple Bar.

DIVERSIONS

☎ 677 2255; www.templebar.ie
Free outdoor music, and children's and film events occur during weekends from June to September in Meeting House Sq.

DUBLIN WRITERS FESTIVAL

www.dublinwritersfestival.com
Four-day literature festival in mid-June attracting Irish and international writers to its readings, performances and talks.

WOMEN'S MINI-MARATHON

☎ 670 9461; www.womensminimarathon.ie
A 10km charity run on the second Sunday of the month that attracts up to 40,000 participants (including some poorly disguised men).

MARDI GRAS

☎ 873 4932; www.dublinpride.org

Dublin's Gay Pride event has turned into a weeklong festival of parties, workshops, readings and more parties at gay venues around town, although these are just to warm up for the parade that takes place – and takes over – on the last Saturday of the month.

July OXEGEN

☎ 0818 719 300; www.oxegen.ie; Punchestown Racecourse, County Kildare

Music festival over the July weekend closest to the 12th; manages to pack a few dozen heavyweight acts into its four-day line-up. Strictly for the young or the young-at-heart.

August

DUBLIN HORSE SHOW

☎ 668 0866; www.dublinhorseshow.com

The first week of August is when Ireland's horsey set trot down to the Royal Dublin Society (RDS) for the social highlight of the year. Particularly popular is the Aga Khan Cup, an international-class competition packed with often heart-stopping excitement in which eight nations participate.

DUN LAOGHAIRE FESTIVAL OF WORLD CULTURES

☎ 230 1035; www.festivalofworldcultures.com

A colourful multicultural music, art and theatre festival featuring up to 200 different acts is held on the last weekend of August in the southern suburb of Dun Laoghaire.

September

ELECTRIC PICNIC

www.electricpicnic.com

Our favourite festival of all is in the grounds of Stradbally Castle, County Laois, about 80km southwest of Dublin; this three-day experience at the beginning of September combines top-class acts with organic food and a mind-body-soul area. Let your good vibes flow.

DUBLIN FRINGE FESTIVAL

☎ 1850 374 643; www.fringefest.com

This excellent theatre showcase precedes the main theatre festival with 700 performers and 100 events – ranging from cutting

edge to crap – and takes place over three weeks. It's held in the Famous Spiegeltent, which has been erected in different positions in recent years; for more, see the boxed text, [p198](#).

BULMERS COMEDY FESTIVAL

☎ 679 3323; www.bulmerscomedy.ie

Big laughs over three weeks from an ever-widening choice of comic talents, both known and unknown. It takes place at more than 20 venues throughout the city.

October

DUBLIN THEATRE FESTIVAL

☎ 677 8439; www.dublintheatrefestival.com

This two-week festival at the beginning of the month is Europe's oldest and showcases the best of Irish and international productions at various locations around town.

DUBLIN CITY MARATHON

☎ 677 8439; dublinmarathon.ie

If you fancy a 42km (and a bit) running tour through the streets of the city on the last Monday of October, you'll have to register at least three weeks in advance. Otherwise, you can have a lie-in and watch the winner cross the finishing line on O'Connell St at around 10.30am.

DUBLIN ELECTRONIC ARTS FESTIVAL

DEAF; ☎ 872 8933; www.deafireland.com

A must for anyone into the cutting edge of music, DEAF showcases the work of some truly innovative musical – and visual – talents, both home-grown and international. From moog to movies, this is the future, now. Venues vary; check the website for details.

HARD WORKING CLASS HEROES

☎ 878 2244; www.hwch.net

The only showcase in town for unsigned Irish acts, this three-day music festival features 100 bands and musicians playing at venues on and around Camden St on the south side of the city.

SAMHAIN/HALLOWE'EN

Tens of thousands take to the city streets on 31 October for a night-time parade, fireworks, street theatre, drinking and music in this traditional pagan festival celebrating the dead, end of the harvest and Celtic new year.

November

FRENCH FILM FESTIVAL

www.irishfilm.ie

Organised by the French embassy and sponsored by Carte Noir, it showcases the best of French releases for the year.

JUNIOR DUBLIN FILM FESTIVAL

www.irishfilm.ie

A weeklong showcase of the best efforts of the world's young filmmakers, the Irish Film Institute screens an exclusive selection of movies from all over.

December

LEOPARDSTOWN RACES

☎ 289 3607; www.leopardstown.com

Blow your dough and your post-Christmas crankiness at this historic and hugely popular racing festival at one of Europe's loveliest courses. Races run from 26 to 30 December.

FUNDERLAND

Royal Dublin Society (RDS); ☎ 668 0866; www.rds.ie

Dublin's traditional funfair (from 26 December to 9 January) features all kinds of stomach-turning rides and arcade games, as well as hundreds of thousands of light bulbs and millions of reasons why the kids needn't be cooped up indoors.

COSTS & MONEY

The decline of rental costs and the price of food, coupled with the fall in value of the euro against the US dollar, means that Dublin is no longer the prohibitively expensive city it was even a couple of years ago. According to Mercer (the folks who do those cost-of-living indices), Dublin fell from 16th to 25th on the World's Most Expensive Cities list...in less than six months. It now ranks comfortably behind Paris, London and Rome on the list topped by Tokyo.

Accommodation will be your biggest expense, but the fall in prices has been most dramatic in the cost of a hotel room. A room in the city's best hotels can be had for around €200 and a bunk in a hostel dorm will go for as little as €13. In between is a broad range – from an adequate-if-anodyne room in a bog-standard business chain to a beautifully appointed room in a Georgian townhouse,

both of which can be yours for the night for between €80 and €100. If you're willing to endure a little bit of taxi trauma or the tolerance test of public transport, hotels on the north side of the city or in the salubrious suburbs south of the Grand Canal will give you far more bang for your buck. See the Sleeping chapter (p210) for more details.

A major bugbear with value-conscious Dubliners has long been restaurant prices, but even there things have improved, with many restaurants cutting the average price of their main courses by 30% in an effort to stay busy: these days, you can eat pretty well for less than €25. If you're looking to spend no more than €10 on lunch, you'd better like sandwiches. Lunch and early-bird specials – those three-course things that inevitably only ever include the menu's less inviting choices – are ubiquitous and a good way to save a few euro.

So, between a place to crash and daily sustenance, you should factor in anything between €50 (at the truly budget end of the scale) and, well, the sky's limit (OK, let's say €250) daily. Anything less than that and you're performing miracles; anything more and we want *you* to take *us* on holiday.

But Dublin is about a hell of a lot more than sleeping and eating – let's not forget the all-important nights out. The price of a pint hovers around the €5 mark (up to €5.50 in Temple Bar), so you can calculate how drunk you can actually afford to get from there. And if you're really popular, there's the round system to contend with – whereby you take turns buying a round of drinks for the group. But that roughly works out even in the end, unless of course you're only in for

HOW MUCH?

Admission to a big-name club on a Friday €15

CD €14.99

City-centre bus ticket up to €2

Cup of coffee €3

Irish Times €1.80

Petrol per litre €1.34

Pint of Guinness Temple Bar/city/suburbs
€5.50/€4.80/€4

Theatre ticket €13-25

Three-course meal with wine/beer from €35

Ticket to a Gaelic match €25-45

one or two and your 10 new friends are all looking thirsty.

If you want to give your wallet a rest, you can also have a great time in Dublin without your plastic going into meltdown. Parks are all free, as are the National Gallery (p82), National Museum of Ireland (Archaeology; p80), National Museum of Ireland (Natural History; p83), Dublin City Gallery – The Hugh Lane (p104) and pretty much all of the city's other gallery spaces – not to mention our favourite collection of all: the Chester Beatty Library (p72). Cinemas all have an early-bird price for shows up to 2pm of about €6, while there's absolutely no charge for strolling along the beach in Killiney (p230), climbing Howth Head (p227) or enjoying the entertainment on Grafton St!

INTERNET RESOURCES

BalconyTV (www.balconytv.com) Interviews and music from a balcony in central Dublin.

Beaut.ie (www.beaut.ie) A superb blog ostensibly about beauty tips but really a great commentary on the Irish and their wants.

Daft.ie (www.daft.ie) If you're looking to rent in Dublin, this is the place to look.

Discover Ireland (www.discoverireland.ie) Official website of Discover Ireland, the public face of the Irish Tourist Board.

Dublin City Council (www.dublincity.ie) Dublin Corporation's own website has a great link to live traffic cams.

Dublin Tourism (www.visitdublin.com) Official website of Dublin Tourism.

Entertainment.ie (www.entertainment.ie) One-stop shop for reviews and all kinds of listings, from comedy to films.

Nialler9 (www.nialler9.com) Best website and blog for music in the city, with reviews and listings.

Nixers.com (www.nixers.ie) A good place to check if you're looking for casual work over summer.

Overheard in Dublin (www.overheardindublin.com) Proof that the general public are better than any scriptwriter.

State Magazine (www.state.ie) Music news, reviews and gig listings.

Totally Dublin (www.totallydublin.ie) Music news, reviews and gig listings for the capital.

SUSTAINABLE DUBLIN

Dublin ain't that green, but it's trying. Its saving grace, at least in terms of reducing its carbon footprint, has been the global downturn, which has seen production drop across a range of industries.

For most Dubliners, however, carbon credits are less of a factor than financial credit, especially of the huge mortgage and massive debt kind. The bottom may have fallen out of the automobile market (new car sales fell 60% from 2008 to 2010), but they're more concerned with repayments on the one they have rather than congratulating themselves on reducing the total number of cars on the road.

What will get a Dubliner going, though, is the queue, which has done more than any Al Gore movie to remind Dubliners that life needs to get a little more sustainable. Fewer cars on the road also means reduced traffic jams; fewer foreign holidays means shorter lines at the airport when you do get the chance to travel – in short, when eco-responsibility is presented as restoring a sense of sanity, most Dubs react positively.

This is largely how they reacted in 2004 when the government passed a total smoking ban in the workplace – which also meant the pub, the restaurant and anywhere else they gather to socialise. They also responded well to the introduction of a 15c levy on plastic bags, which was raised to 22c in 2007 and resulted in a 90% reduction in use – in 2010 there was talk of doubling the tax to 44c, however, it that's probably a step too far for most people.

The best resource in town is **Cultivate** (www.cultivate.ie) (☎ 674 5773; www.cultivate.ie; The Greenhouse, St Andrew's St), Ireland's only sustainability focused living and learning centre. It has an eco-shop and lots of information stands, and hosts workshops and classes on everything from composting to green building.

ECOCABS

A clean and green solution to public transport in the city centre is to take an **Ecocab** (Map p70; www.ecocabs.ie; ☎ 10am–7pm Mar–Dec), basically modern-looking rickshaws. They can carry up to two passengers and are free of charge for short distances within the city centre – although a gratuity for your hard-peddalling driver is always appreciated. Pick one up at the top of Grafton St, by the St Stephen's Green Shopping Centre.

GREEN RESOURCES

Check out the following online resources for in-depth info on how to travel in Dublin without being an environmental bully or leaving too deep a carbon footprint:

- **Cultivate** (www.cultivate.ie) Sustainable-living centre.
- **Sustainable Tourism Ireland** (www.sustourism.ie) All-Ireland project committed to building a sustainable-tourism infrastructure.
- **Enfo** (www.enfo.ie) Ireland's public information service on environmental matters, including sustainable development.
- **Friends of the Irish Environment** (www.friendsoftheirishenvironment.net) A network of independent environmentalists that has logged up to 10,000 environment-related stories.

FLY LESS

The grounding of Irish (and European) flights throughout 2010 as a result of the Icelandic ash cloud forced locals and visitors alike to re-examine their over-dependence on airline travel, particularly for an island nation. The obvious solution is to rediscover the boat: there are numerous boat services to Dublin from Britain and often some return fares don't cost that much more than one-way tickets, not to mention the plethora of special offers designed to challenge the cheap flight hegemony. Boats arrive in Dublin Port or Dun Laoghaire; for details, see [p242](#).

STAY LONGER

An extended visit to Dublin – as opposed to the rush-in, rush-out limitations of city-

break travel – is preferable because it allows for 'slow travel', the kind of exploratory travel that allows you to take your time and get to know a place without needing to rush. And it's the only way to get to know Dubliners properly!

OFFSETTING

Paying someone else to offset your greenhouse gas emissions isn't exactly the perfect solution to the major issue of global warming, but it is a step in the right direction. The most popular offsetting program involves tree-planting, but there are other schemes such as methane collection and combustion. The **Carbon Shop** (www.carbonshop.ie) can help you calculate your emissions and work out how to offset them.

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