

welcome to Ireland



Ireland of the Postcard

Yes, it exists. Along the peninsulas of the southwest, the brooding loneliness of Connemara and the dramatic wildness of County Donegal. You'll also find it in the lakelands of Counties Leitrim and Roscommon and the undulating hills of the sunny southeast ('sunny' of course being a relative term). Ireland has modernised dramatically, but some things never change. Brave the raging Atlantic on a crossing to Skellig Michael or spend a summer's evening in the yard of a thatched-cottage pub and you'll experience an Ireland that has changed little in generations, and is likely the Ireland you most came to see.

Tread Carefully...

...for you tread on history. Everywhere you go Ireland's history presents itself, from the breathtaking monuments of prehistoric Ireland at Brú na Bóinne to the fabulous ruins of Ireland's rich monastic past at Glendalough and Clonmacnoise. More recent history is visible in the famine museum in Cobh to the interactive displays of Vinegar Hill in County Wexford. And there's history so young that it's still considered the present, best experienced on a black-taxi tour of West Belfast or an examination of Derry's astonishingly colourful political murals.



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A small country with a big reputation, helped along by a timeless, age-caressed landscape and a fascinating, friendly people, whose lyrical nature is expressed in the warmth of their welcome.

(left) Evening at the Giant's Causeway (p658)
(below) Enjoying the craic in the Market Bar (p110), Dublin



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A Cultural Well

Ireland operates an astonishing cultural surplus. Throughout your travels you will be overwhelmed by the choices on offer – a play by one of the theatrical greats in Dublin, a traditional music ‘session’ in a west-Ireland pub or a rock gig in a Limerick saloon. The Irish summer is awash with all manner of festivals, celebrating everything from flowers in bloom to high literature.

Tá Fáilte Romhat

(Taw fall-cha row-at) – ‘You’re very welcome’. Or, more famously, *céad míle fáilte* – a hundred thousand welcomes. Why a hundred thousand when one is perfectly adequate everywhere else? Irish friendliness is a

tired cliché, an over-simplification of a character that is infinitely complex, but there’s no denying that the Irish are warm and welcoming, if a little reserved at first. Wherever you meet them – the shop, the bar, the bank queue – there’s a good chance a conversation will be struck up, pleasantries exchanged and, should you be a stranger in town, the offer of a helping hand extended. But, lest you think this is merely an act of unfettered altruism, rest assured that the comfort they seek is actually their own, for the Irish cannot be at ease in the company of those who aren’t. A hundred thousand welcomes. It seems excessive, but in Ireland, excess is fine, so long as it’s practised in moderation. Friendly but never fawning.