



Understand Ireland

IRELAND TODAY..... 692

In a few short years, Ireland has gone from being the poster-child for economic success to a terminal patient on financial life support: what happened?

HISTORY 694

Celtic tribes, Viking marauders, Norman invaders and the English. You'll find evidence of Ireland's rich history everywhere.

THE IRISH WAY OF LIFE 708

Since 1990 the country has been transformed by prosperity, modernity, multiculturalism and the global financial crisis. But the affability, wit and humour of the Irish remains.

MUSIC 712

There's music for every occasion and every mood, from celebration to sorrow, from *céilidhs* to pub sessions.

LITERARY IRELAND..... 715

The Irish love of language and their great oral tradition has created a rich legacy of world-renowned writers and storytellers.

IRISH LANDSCAPES 718

The vibrant greenness of gentle hills, the fearsome violence of jagged coasts and the sombre light of so many cloudy days is an integral part of experiencing Ireland.

SPORTING IRELAND..... 722

For many Irish people, sport is akin to religion, and Gaelic games are at the core of Irishness.



population per sq km



Ireland Today

Still Open for Business

In 2011 Ireland went to the polls, elected a brand new government and welcomed both the Queen of England and President Barack Obama, who visited in the space of a frenzied week in May. Ireland finished eighth in the Eurovision Song Contest, which was pretty good given that they'd finished second-last the year before. But one overriding truth overshadowed everything.

For the Love of God, Go

In government since 1991, Fianna Fáil had taken credit for the Celtic Tiger but failed to convince the country that the financial meltdown of 2008 was not their fault. They were thrown out of government at the 2011 general election – their worst electoral defeat in history – from 78 seats in the 144-seat Dáil to just 20. Their coalition partners, the Greens, fared even worse: not one of their candidates was elected.

Who's Really in Charge?

The new government is a coalition of centre-right Fine Gael (traditionally Ireland's political bridesmaids) and centre-left Labour, but their policies are hamstrung by the €85 billion bailout given to Ireland by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Union (EU) and European Central Bank (ECB), which has to be repaid at a prohibitively high rate of interest and has resulted in some fairly savage cuts in public spending. In a few short years, Ireland went from being the poster-child for economic success to a terminal patient on financial life support: what happened?

Fine Gael are Ireland's largest political party, followed by Labour (Ireland's oldest) and Fianna Fáil, which was the largest party until the 2011 elections.

Top Fiction

Dubliners (James Joyce, 1914) A collection of short stories still as poignant and relevant today as when they were written.

The Speckled People (Hugo Hamilton, 2003) Superb memoir of growing up with mixed parentage, told as a novel.

Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha (Roddy Doyle, 1993) Wonderful portrait of a 10-year-old boy's trials that was made into a popular film.

The Gathering (Anne Enright, 2007) Powerful account of alcoholism and domestic abuse in an Irish family.

Room (Emma Donoghue, 2010) Inspired by the real-life case of Josef Fritzl, this harrowing, inspirational story of a mother and son's lives as abductees is beautifully told.