

Ireland

Few countries have a tourist image so plagued by cliché as Ireland. From shamrocks and shillelaghs to leprechauns, lovable rogues and 40 shades of green, there's a plethora of platitudes to wade through before you scramble ashore on the real Ireland.

But it's well worth looking beyond the tourist tat, for the Emerald Isle (oops, there we go again) is one of Europe's gems, a scenic extravaganza of lake, mountain, sea and sky that's still gorgeous enough to make your jaw drop despite the best efforts of developers to scar some of the most beautiful bits with serried ranks of holiday homes. From the lonely, wind-lashed wilderness of Donegal to the picture-postcard harbour villages of County Cork, there are countless opportunities to get outdoors and explore, whether it's surfing the beach breaks of Bundoran, cycling the coast of County Antrim, or hiking the hills of Kerry and Connemara.

There are cultural pleasures too in the land of Joyce and Yeats, U2 and the Undertones. Dublin, Cork and Belfast all have top-notch restaurants, party-on pubs and a foot-stomping live-music scene, while you can track down impromptu pub sessions of traditional Irish music in places such as Galway, Doolin and Killarney. And there's a wealth of history to discover, from medieval castles and early Christian monasteries to the powerful political murals of Belfast and Derry, and one of the biggest concentrations of prehistoric monuments in Europe.

So enjoy your Guinness by all means, but push aside the forest of shamrocks for a bit and try to get a glimpse of the real Ireland.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 84,421 sq km
- **Capitals** Dublin (Republic of Ireland), Belfast (Northern Ireland)
- **Currency** euro (€; Republic)/pound sterling (£; Northern Ireland); €1 = UK£0.94; UK£1 = €1.06; US\$1 = €0.73/£0.68; A\$1 = €0.50/£0.48; ¥100 = €0.76/£0.69; NZ\$1 = €0.41/£0.39
- **Famous for** U2, St Patrick, Guinness, green hills
- **Official languages** English, Irish Gaelic
- **Phrases** *craic* (good time); *bleedin'* (bloody); *sláinte* (cheers); would you ever (why don't you); *deadly* (brilliant)
- **Population** 5.9 million
- **Telephone codes** country code ☎ 353; Northern Ireland ☎ 44 28; international access code ☎ 00
- **Visas** not needed except by citizens of India, China and some African countries visiting the Republic of Ireland; see p710

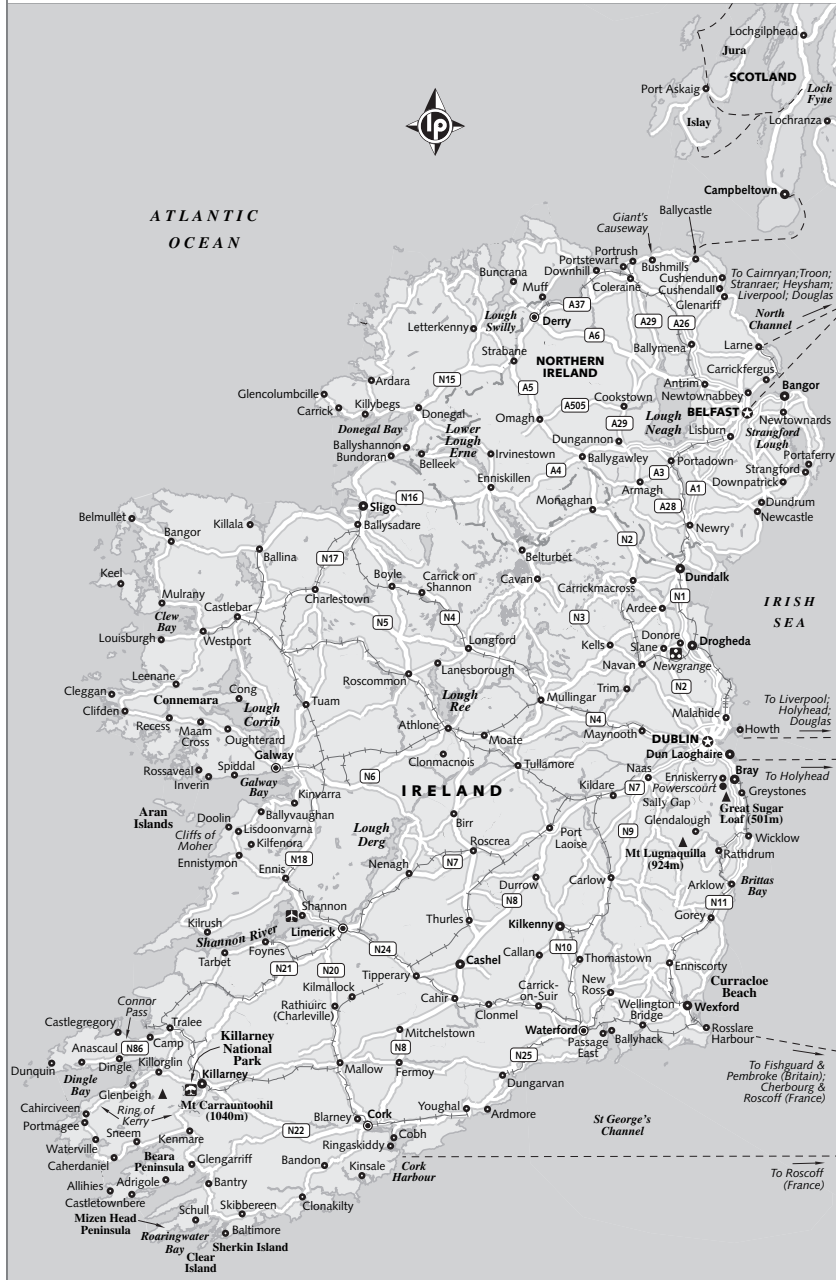


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ATLANTIC OCEAN

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To Fishguard & Pembroke (Britain); Cherbourg & Roscoff (France)

To Roscoff (France)