



IRELAND

TOP SIGHTS, AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

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Welcome to Ireland

Ireland may be a small country but it deserves its big reputation: breathtaking landscapes and fascinating, friendly people, whose lyrical nature is expressed in the warmth of their welcome.

Everything you've heard is true: Ireland is a stunner. The Irish need little prodding to proclaim theirs the most beautiful land in the world, and will support their claim with examples, from the brooding loneliness of Connemara to the world-famous scenery of counties Kerry and Cork. Northern Ireland might be a different country, but it's very much the same land and you'll find its own scenic star turn along the Antrim Coast.

History is everywhere, from the breathtaking prehistoric monuments of Brú na Bóinne to the fabulous ruins of Ireland's rich monastic past at Glendalough and Cashel. More recent history is visible in the Titanic Quarter in Belfast and the forbidding Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin. 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 colourful political murals.

On the plane and along your travels you might hear it said: *tá Fáilte romhat* – you're very welcome. Or, more famously, *céad míle fáilte* – a hundred thousand welcomes. Irish friendliness is an oversimplification of a character that is infinitely complex, but the Irish are famously warm and welcoming. A hundred thousand welcomes; it seems excessive but, in Ireland, excess is encouraged.

“Breathtaking,
fascinating and friendly.”

Connor Pass (p217), County Kerry
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Contents

Plan Your Trip

Ireland's Top 12.....	4
Need to Know.....	16
Hot Spots For.....	18
Local Life.....	20
Month by Month.....	22
Get Inspired.....	25
Itineraries.....	26
Family Travel.....	32

Dublin 34

Trinity College	38
Kilmainham Gaol.....	42
Dublin Castle	44
Chester Beatty	
Library	46
National Museum	
of Ireland	48
Dublin Greenery	54
Guinness	
Storehouse.....	58
Dublin Crawl	
Walking Tour	60
Sights.....	62
Tours	67
Shopping	70
Eating	71
Drinking & Nightlife.....	75
Entertainment.....	76
Where to Stay.....	79

Counties Meath & Louth 80

Brú na Bóinne	84
Around	
Brú na Bóinne	90
Drogheda & Around.....	91

County Wicklow 92

Powerscourt Estate...	96
Glendalough.....	98
Enniskerry	104
Vale of Avoca	106

County Galway 108

Connemara	
Coastal Drive	112
Pub Crawl in	
Galway City	114
Clonmacnoise.....	116
Galway City.....	118
Connemara.....	122

Aran Islands 126

Dun Aengus	130
Inishmore	132
Inishmaan.....	133
Inisheer.....	134

County Clare 136

Cliffs of Moher.....	140
Trad Music	
Sessions	142
Ennis	144
Bunratty.....	145
Loop Head	146
Miltown Malbay	147
The Burren	148
Doolin.....	149

The Antrim Coast 152

Giant's Causeway	156
Causeway Coast	
Walking Tour	160
Portrush.....	162
Bushmills.....	163
Giant's Causeway	
to Ballycastle	164
Ballycastle	166
Glens of Antrim	167
Derry	
(Londonderry).....	170

County Cork 176

Gourmet Cork	180
Blarney Castle	182
Cork City.....	184
Midleton.....	190
Cobh	191
Kinsale	191
Bantry	194

County Kerry 196

Ring of Kerry	
Driving Tour.....	200
Skellig Michael	202
Killarney	
National Park.....	204
Killarney	208
Cahersiveen	211
Kenmare	212
Dingle Peninsula.....	213



Belfast 218

Titanic Quarter 222

Murals of

West Belfast..... 224

Sights.....226

Tours 229

Shopping 230

Eating.....231

Drinking & Nightlife...234

Entertainment.....235

Kilkenny City 238

Kilkenny Castle..... 242

Kilkenny City244

Sights.....244

Tours248

Shopping248

Eating.....248

Drinking & Nightlife...249

Entertainment..... 250

County

Tipperary 252

Rock of Cashel..... 256

Cashel..... 260

Cahir 261



In Focus

Ireland Today 266

History 268

Food & Drink.....278

The Pub282

Irish Mythological

Symbols..... 284

Literary Ireland.....286

Traditional Music..... 289

Survival Guide

Directory A–Z292

Transport300

Language 305

Index 308

Map Legend &

Symbols Key..... 314

Christ Church Cathedral (p63), Dublin

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Plan Your Trip

Ireland's Top 12

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Dublin

Capital city and the home of Guinness

Ireland's largest city (p34) by some stretch is the main gateway into the country, and it has enough distractions to keep visitors engaged for at least a few days. From world-class museums and entertainment, superb dining and top-grade hotels, Dublin has all the baubles of a major international metropolis. But the real clinchers are Dubliners themselves, who are friendlier, more easygoing and welcoming than the burghers of virtually any other European capital.

1



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Kilkenny City

Arts, crafts and medieval monuments

From its regal castle to its soaring medieval cathedral, Kilkenny (p238) exudes a permanence and culture that makes it an unmissable stop. Its namesake county boasts scores of artisans and craftspeople and you can browse their wares at Kilkenny's boutiques. Chefs eschew Dublin to be close to the source of Kilkenny's wonderful produce and you can enjoy the local brewery's beer at scores of delightful pubs.

11



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Ring of Kerry

Classic road trip through spectacular scenery

Driving around the Ring of Kerry (p200) is an unforgettable experience, but you don't need to limit yourself to the main route – there are countless opportunities for detours. Near Killorglin, it's a short hop up to the little-known Cromane Peninsula. Between Portmagee and Waterville, you can explore the Skellig Ring. The peninsula's interior offers mesmerising mountain views, so don't forget your camera!

Above: Valentia Island (p200), Ring of Kerry

12