



Erasmus+



ÉIRE

Ballyholland P.S. Ireland
2015-2017

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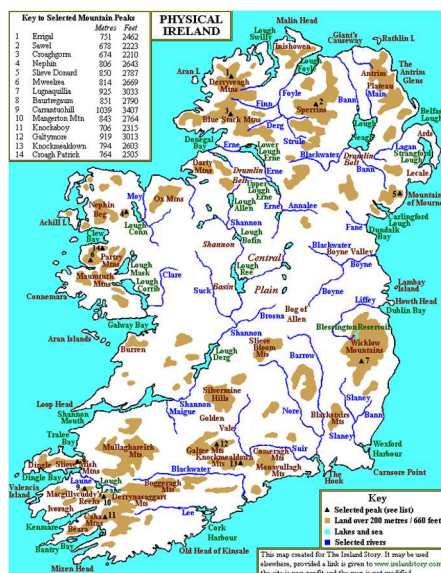
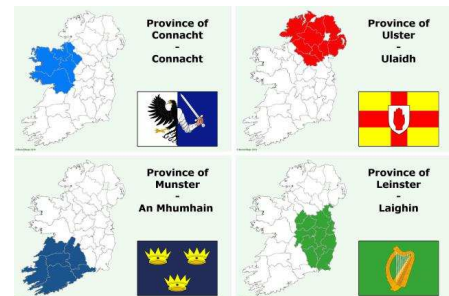


Geography

Ireland is split into four provinces, Ulster (Ulaidh), Leinster (Laighin), Munster (An Mhumhain) and Connacht (Connacht). Each province contains a certain amount of counties. Ireland comprises of 32 counties.

Ireland is an island in northwest Europe in the north Atlantic Ocean. The island lies on the European continental shelf, part of the Eurasian Plate. The island's main geographical features include low central plains surrounded by a ring of coastal mountains. The highest peak is Carrauntoohil (*Corrán Tuathail*), which is 1,041 metres (3,415 ft) above sea level. The western

coastline is rugged, with many islands, peninsulas, headlands and bays. The island is bisected by the River Shannon, which at 360.5 km (224 mi) with a 102.1 km (63 mi) estuary is the longest river in Ireland and flows south from County Cavan in Ulster to meet the Atlantic just south of Limerick. There are a number of sizeable lakes along Ireland's rivers, of which Lough Neagh is the largest.



Quick facts:

Capital City: Dublin

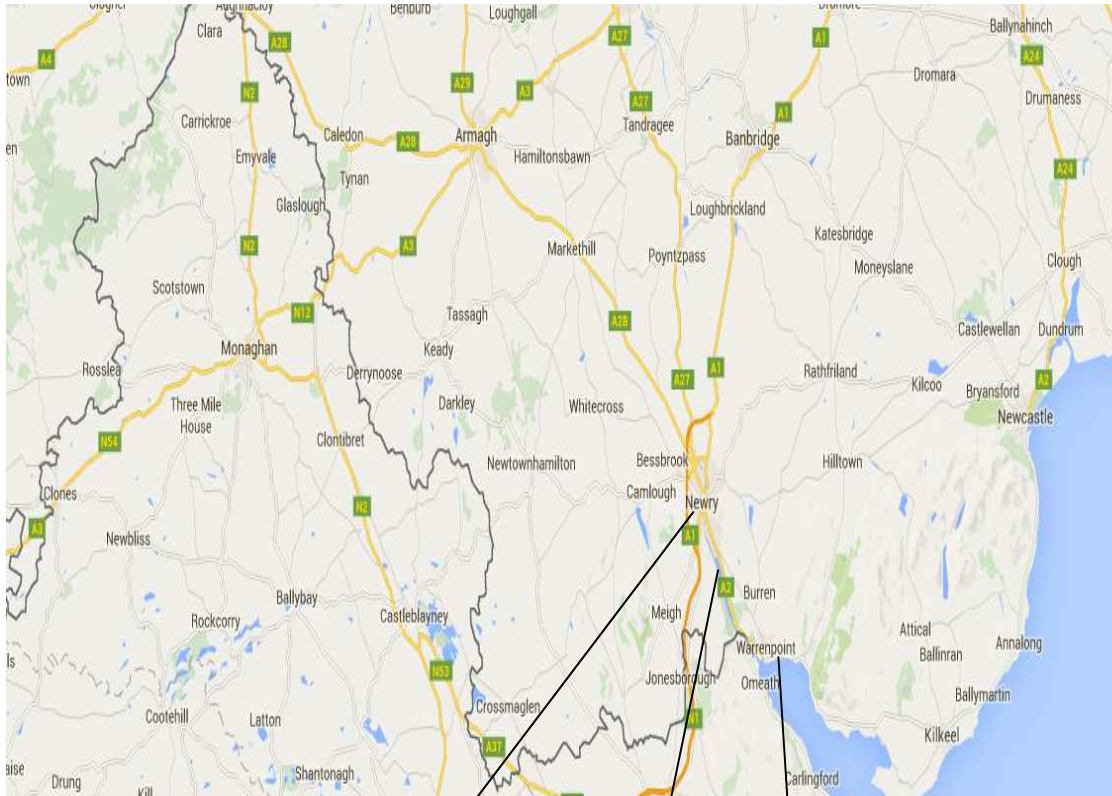
Largest River: Shannon

Largest Mountain Range: Galtee Mountains

Largest Mountain: Carrauntoohil

Largest Lake: Lough Neagh

A closer look at Ballyholland and the Surrounding Areas



Ballyholland

Newry

Warrenpoint

A brief History of Ireland

Early Irish History

Historians estimate that Ireland was first settled by humans at a relatively late stage in European terms - about 10,000 years ago. Around 4000 BC it is estimated that the first farmers arrived in Ireland. Farming marked the arrival of the new Stone Age. Around 300BC, Iron Age warriors known as the Celts came to Ireland from mainland Europe. The Celts had a huge influence on Ireland. Many famous Irish myths stem from stories about Celtic warriors. The first official language Ireland, Irish (or *Gaeilge*) stems from Celtic language.

Early Christian Ireland

Following the arrival of Saint Patrick and other Christian missionaries in the early to mid-5th century, Christianity took over the indigenous pagan religion by the year 600 AD. Irish Christian scholars excelled in the study of Latin, Greek and Christian theology in monasteries throughout Ireland. The arts of manuscript illumination, metalworking and sculpture flourished and produced such treasures as the Book of Kells, ornate jewellery, and the many carved stone crosses that can still be seen across the country.

The Viking Era

At the end of the 8th century and during the 9th century Vikings, from where we now call Scandinavia, began to invade and then gradually settle into and mix with Irish society. The Vikings founded, Dublin, Ireland's capital city in 988. Following the defeat of the Vikings by Brian Boru, the High King of Ireland, at Clontarf in 1014, Viking influence faded.

The Norman Era

The 12th century saw the arrival of the Normans. The Normans built walled towns, castles and churches. They also increased agriculture and commerce in Ireland.

Plantations and Penal Laws

After King Henry VIII declared himself head of the Church in England in 1534 he ensured that the Irish Parliament declared him King of Ireland in 1541. From this time up to the late 17th century, an official English policy of 'plantation' led to the arrival of thousands of English and Scottish Protestant settlers. The most successful plantation occurred in Ulster. From this period on, sectarian conflict became a common theme in Irish history.

The 17th century was a bloody one in Ireland. It culminated in the imposition of the harsh regime of Penal laws. These laws set about disempowering Catholics, denying them, for example, the right to take leases or own land above a certain value, outlawing Catholic clergy, forbidding higher education and entry to the professions, and imposing oaths of conformity to the state church, the Church of Ireland. During the 18th century strict enforcement of the Penal laws eased but by 1778 Catholics held only about 5% of the land in Ireland.

Union with Great Britain

In 1782 a Parliamentary faction led by Henry Grattan (a Protestant) successfully agitated for a more favourable trading relationship with England and for greater legislative independence for the Parliament of Ireland. However, London still controlled much of what occurred in Ireland. Inspired by the French Revolution, in 1791 an organisation called the United Irishmen was formed with the ideal of bringing Irish people of all religions together to reform and reduce Britain's power in Ireland. Its leader was a young Dublin Protestant called Theobald Wolfe Tone. The United Irishmen were the inspiration for the armed rebellion of 1798. Despite attempts at help from the French the rebellion failed and in 1801 the Act of Union was passed uniting Ireland politically with Britain.

In 1829 one of Ireland's greatest leaders Daniel O'Connell, known as 'the great liberator' was central in getting the Act of Catholic Emancipation passed in the parliament in London. He succeeded in getting the total ban on voting by Catholics lifted and they could now also become Members of the Parliament in London.

After this success O'Connell aimed to cancel the Act of Union and re-establish an Irish parliament. However, this was a much bigger task and O'Connell's approach of non-violence was not supported by all. Such political issues were overshadowed however by the worst disaster and tragedy in Irish history - the great famine.

The Great Famine (An Gorta Mór) 1845 - 1851

Potatoes were the staple food of a growing population at the time. When blight (a form of plant disease) struck potato crops nationwide in 1845, 1846 and 1847 disaster followed. Potatoes were inedible and people began to starve to death. The response of the British government also contributed to the disaster - trade agreements were still controlled by London. While hundreds of thousands of people were suffering from extreme hunger, Ireland was forced to export abundant harvests of wheat and dairy products to Britain and further overseas under British armed force.

Between 1845 and 1851 two million people died or were forced to emigrate from Ireland. The population of Ireland has never since reached its pre-famine level of approximately 8 million. Ireland's history of emigration continued from this point onwards with the majority of Irish emigrants going to the United States of America.

Home Rule

There was little effective challenge to Britain's control of Ireland until the efforts of Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-91). At the age of 31 he became leader of the Irish Home Rule Party, which became the Irish Parliamentary Party in 1882.

While Parnell did not achieve Home Rule (or self-government), his efforts and widely recognised skills in the House of Commons earned him the title of 'the uncrowned king of Ireland'. The impetus he gave to the idea of Home Rule was to have lasting implications.

In Ulster in the north of Ireland the majority of people were Protestants. They were concerned about the prospect of Home Rule being granted as they would be a Protestant minority in an independent Ireland with a Catholic majority. They favoured the union with Britain. The Unionist Party was led by Sir Edward Carson. Carson threatened an armed struggle for a separate Northern Ireland if independence was granted to Ireland.

A Home Rule Bill was passed in 1912 but crucially it was not brought into law. The Home Rule Act was suspended at the outbreak of World War One in 1914. Many Irish nationalists believed that Home Rule would be granted after the war if they supported the British war effort. John Redmond the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party encouraged people to join the British forces and many did join. However, a minority of nationalists did not trust the British government leading to one of the most pivotal events in Irish history, the Easter Rising.

Easter Rising

On April 24th (Easter Monday) 1916, two groups of armed rebels, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army seized key locations in Dublin. The Irish Volunteers were led by Pádraig Pearse and the Irish Citizen Army was led by James Connolly. Outside the GPO (General Post Office) in Dublin city centre, Pádraig Pearse read the Proclamation which declared an Irish Republic independent of Britain. Battles ensued with casualties on both sides and among the civilian population. The Easter Rising finished on April 30th with the surrender of the rebels. The majority of the public was actually opposed to the Rising. However, public opinion turned when the British administration responded by executing many of the leaders and participants in the Rising. All seven signatories to the proclamation were executed including Pearse and Connolly.

Two of the key figures who were involved in the rising who avoided execution were Éamon de Valera and Michael Collins. In the December 1918 elections the Sinn Féin party led by Éamon de Valera won a majority of the Ireland based seats of the House of Commons. On the 21st of January 1919 the Sinn Féin members of the House of Commons gathered in Dublin to form an Irish Republic parliament called Dáil Éireann, unilaterally declaring power over the entire island.

War of Independence

What followed is known as the 'war of independence' when the Irish Republican Army - the army of the newly declared Irish Republic - waged a guerilla war against British forces from 1919 to 1921. One of the key leaders of this war was Michael Collins. In December 1921 a treaty was signed by the Irish and British authorities. While a clear level of independence was finally granted to Ireland the contents of the treaty

were to split Irish public and political opinion. One of the sources of division was that Ireland was to be divided into Northern Ireland (6 counties) and the Irish Free State (26 counties) which was established in 1922.

Civil War

Such was the division of opinion in Ireland that a Civil War followed from 1922 to 1923 between pro and anti treaty forces, with Collins (pro-treaty) and de Valera (anti-treaty) on opposing sides. The consequences of the Civil war can be seen to this day where the political parties in Ireland have their roots in the opposing sides of the civil war. A period of relative political stability followed the Civil war.

Northern Ireland

Under the same Government of Ireland Act of 1920 that created the Irish Free State, the Parliament of Northern Ireland was created. The Parliament consisted of a majority of Protestants and while there was relative stability for decades this was to come to an end in the late 1960s due to systematic discrimination against Catholics.

1968 saw the beginning of Catholic civil rights marches in Northern Ireland which led to violent reactions from some Protestant loyalists and from the police force. What followed was a period known as 'the Troubles' when nationalist/republican and loyalist/unionist groups clashed.

In 1969 British troops were sent to Derry and Belfast to maintain order and to protect the Catholic minority. However, the army soon came to be seen as a tool of the Protestant majority by the minority Catholic community. This was reinforced by events such as Bloody Sunday in 1972 when British forces opened fire on a Catholic civil rights march in Derry killing 13 people. An escalation of paramilitary violence followed with many atrocities committed by both sides. The period of 'the Troubles' are generally agreed to have finished with the Good Friday Agreement of April 10th 1998.

Between 1969 and 1998 it is estimated that well over 3,000 people were killed by paramilitary groups on opposing sides of the conflict. Since 1998 considerable stability and peace has come to Northern Ireland. In 2007 former bitterly opposing parties the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin began to co-operate in government together in Northern Ireland though many still want to see the end of British rule in Ireland.

Republic of Ireland - 20th Century to present day

The 1937 Constitution re-established the state as the Republic of Ireland.

In 1973 Ireland joined the European Economic Community (now the European Union).

In the 1980s the Irish economy was in recession and large numbers of people emigrated for employment reasons. Many young people emigrated to the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Australia.

Irish Culture

Irish Dancing

Irish dancing or Irish dance is a group of traditional dance forms originating in Ireland which can broadly be divided into social dances and performance dances.

Irish social dancing can be divided further into *céilí* and set dancing. Irish set dances are quadrilles, danced by four couples arranged in a square, while *céilí* dances are danced by varied formations (*céilí*) of two to sixteen people. Irish step dancing, popularized in 1994 by the world-famous show Riverdance, is notable for its rapid leg and foot movements, body and arms being kept largely stationary.



Traditional Music

The most common instruments used in Irish traditional dance music, whose history goes back several hundred years, are the fiddle, tin whistle, bodhrán, flute and Uilleann pipes. Instruments such as button accordion and concertina made their appearances in Irish traditional music late in the 19th century. Modern Irish songs are written in English and Irish. Most of the oldest songs and tunes are rural in origin and come from the older Irish language tradition. Modern songs and tunes often come from cities and towns, Irish songs went from the Irish language to the English language. Unaccompanied vocals are called *sean nós* ("in the old style") and are considered the ultimate expression of traditional singing. This is usually performed solo



Irish Language (Gaelige)

Irish (*Gaeilge*), also referred to as Gaelic is spoken by the Irish people. Irish is spoken as a first language by a small minority of Irish people, and as a second language by a rather larger group. Irish enjoys constitutional status as the national and first official language of the Ireland. There was a dramatic decrease in the number of speakers, beginning after the Great Famine of 1845-51 (when Ireland lost 20-25% of its population either to emigration or death). Irish-speaking areas were hit especially hard. Since then, Irish speakers have been in the minority. This is now the case even in areas officially designated as the *Gaeltacht*. Efforts have been made by the state, individuals and organisations to preserve, promote and revive the language with the Irish language becoming one of Europe's fastest growing languages.

Sport

The Gaelic Athletic Association (*GAA*) (*Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, CLG*) is an Irish and international amateur sporting and cultural organisation, focused primarily on promoting Gaelic games, which include the traditional Irish sports of hurling, camogie, Gaelic football and handball. The Association also promotes Irish music and dance, and the Irish language.

Gaelic Athletic Association

Foundation and History

On the 1 November 1884, a group of Irishmen gathered in the Hayes' Hotel billiard room to formulate a plan and establish an organisation to foster and preserve Ireland's unique games and athletic pastimes. And so was founded the Gaelic Athletic Association/GAA. The architects and founding members were Michael Cusack of County Clare, Maurice Davin, John K. Bracken, George McCarthy, P.J. Ryan of Tipperary, John Wise-Power, and John McKay.^[10]

Cultural activities

The association has had a long history of promoting Irish culture.^[14] Through a division of the association known as Scór (Irish for "score"), the Association promotes Irish cultural activities, running competitions in music, singing, dancing and storytelling.

The Association shall actively support the Irish language, traditional Irish dancing, music, song, and other aspects of Irish culture. It shall foster an awareness and love of the national ideals in the people of Ireland, and assist in promoting a community spirit through its clubs.^[15]

Croke Park

Croke Park is the Association's flagship venue. With a capacity of 82,300, it ranks among the top five stadiums in Europe by capacity, having undergone extensive renovations for most of the 1990s and early 21st century. Every September, Croke Park hosts the All-Ireland inter-county Hurling and Football Finals as the conclusion to the summer championships. Croke Park holds the All-Ireland club football and hurling finals on every St. Patrick's Day.

Gaelic football

As well as being known as "football", the sport may be referred to as *Gaelic football* or *Gaelic*, if confusion might otherwise arise with soccer. Though it has existed for centuries in Ireland, Gaelic football was formally arranged into an organised playing code by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) in the late nineteenth century. It is the most popular sport in Ireland in terms of match attendance - in the senior football championship in the summer, attendance is upwards of 80,000 for the most prestigious fixtures.^[4]

All players are amateur. Every Gaelic footballer plays for a local club or parish team, and the best are chosen for the inter-county sides. The main national competitions are the inter-county All-Ireland Senior Football Championship and National Football League, also known as the NFL.

A Gaelic football year starts with pre-season competitions and the NFL. In early summer, the Championship begins. Each of the four provinces has its own tournament, and teams which are knocked out must do well in the 'qualifiers' if they are to gain a spot along with the four Provincial Champions in the All-Ireland quarter-finals. The All-Ireland Senior Football final is traditionally held on the third Sunday in September.



Hurling

Hurling is a sport native to Ireland, organised by the Gaelic Athletic Association. In terms of attendance figures, hurling is second only to Gaelic football. Hurling is the fastest field sport in the world.

The game has similarities to shinty and hockey. However the ball (or *sliotar*) is rarely played along the ground. Hurling is also played on a large pitch and is considerably faster than hockey.

Many aspects of the organisation of hurling are similar to football, as both sports are organised by the GAA. Amateurism and the club/county/province structure are similar. Hurling is well-attended and the most prestigious games fill Croke Park to its capacity of well over 82,000. The main competitions are the All-Ireland Senior Hurling Championship and the National Hurling League (NHL).



Camogie

Camogie is an Irish stick-and-ball team sport played by women; it is almost identical to the game of hurling played by men. Camogie is played by 100,000 women in Ireland and worldwide, largely among Irish communities. It is organised by the Dublin-based Camogie Association or An Cumann Camógaíochta.



Traditional food

Traditional food is alive and well in Ireland. In a historical sense, Ireland's culinary heritage reflects our Irish heritage and traditions. Most traditional dishes have their roots in potatoes and bread, the staple diet in bygone days and these staple ingredients are still evident in our cuisine. Traditionally the Ulster Fry was eaten for breakfast every day; nowadays that pleasure is saved for the weekend.

Irish Stew - a hearty casserole traditionally made with meat, potatoes, carrots and onions. The Ulster variety is made with steak pieces instead of lamb - cooked to a peppery slush and often served with thick slices of buttered bread.

Potato bread farl - a dense, earthy flat bread, made with potatoes, flour, and buttermilk and cooked on a griddle. This bread is the heart of every Ulster Fry and a must-buy foodie souvenir.

Soda bread farl - first baked in 19th century Ireland when local peasants added baking soda to help the dough rise. The result is thick, chunky soft bread with fluffy consistency that is best served fried as part of the Ulster Fry, or toasted with a big dollop of butter. They are also the base for popular Paddy's Pizzas.

Wheaten bread - a healthy brown bread made with whole wheat flour and delicious toasted with melted cheese or buttered and served with a big bowl of steaming broth.

Steak & Guinness pies - Steak & Guinness pie is the pub grub of choice in most parts of Ulster. The meat is cooked first, and then a pie dish is lined with puff pastry, filled with the beef and then topped with the pastry. It differs from the UK pastry-topped pie, in that the pastry is both on top and underneath, the meat. Butchers sell a wide range of pies with fillings such as mince and onion or chicken and ham.

Traditional butcher's sausages - the fine-textured sausage typical in Northern Ireland is very distinct from continental styles, and each butcher has his own unique family recipe, usually made with natural casings and hand-linked. Beef sausages seem peculiar to the north of Ireland, although they are also found in Scotland.

Boxty - predominately found in County Fermanagh, Boxty is a weighty, starchy potato cake made with 50:50 mix of cooked mashed potatoes and grated, strained, raw potato. The most common variety is boiled boxty, also known as hurley, a large round loaf which is boiled whole for several hours, allowed to rest and then sliced and fried, often with bacon.

Buttermilk - a by-product of churning butter on the farm, buttermilk is responsible for the distinctive flavour and texture of Irish breads - soda farls, potato bread, pancakes and wheaten bread.

Irish Drink

For centuries, Ireland has produced world-renowned beverages, which are distributed throughout the world. A nation famous for Guinness, obsessive tea drinkers and some of the best whiskey on the planet, Ireland's indigenous beverages offer a varied selection for any drinker.

There is no escaping the impact beverages such as Guinness and Baileys have had on the global market. It is rare to travel any to any location in the world and not be greeted by the familiar sight of an Irish drink. We have even included some of our childhood favourites that we all love to crave!

Guinness

Like silk being poured into a glass. The Guinness brand is synonymous with Ireland. In 1759, Arthur Guinness acquired a four acre site and signed a 9,000-year lease for the St. James' Gate Brewery in Dublin. The brewery became well known for brewing "porter," which was a dark ale. Over the past 250 years, the dark ale has evolved in to an unique dark stout, which is enjoyed across the globe. According to the company, over 10 million glasses of Guinness are enjoyed daily around the world.



Irish Whiskey

Ireland is home to several distilleries, which produce some of the world's finest whiskeys. Uisce Beatha is the Gaelic term for whiskey and translates to "water of life". The most common types of whiskey distilled in Ireland include single malt, single grain and blended whiskey. Examples of Irish whiskey include Black Bush, Bushmills, Jameson, Paddy, Powers, and Tullamore Dew to name a few.



Tea

Earl, chamomile, green, chai - offer any of these varieties to your average Irish person and they will most likely decline. If it's not black and doesn't contain either sugar or milk, then it's not a cup of Irish tea. Most Irish people begin their day with a cup of tea and continue to drink copious amounts of their favorite hot beverage throughout the day. Irish tea is a strong blend of several black teas, mostly Assam Indian teas. There are several Irish companies that produce tea, but Barry's and Lyons are the market leaders and are the cause of rivalry between friends and family!

Irish Coffee An Irish coffee is a coffee with a kick! This popular after-dinner drink combines coffee, Irish whiskey, sugar and freshly whipped cream. Here is our guide on how to make the perfect Irish Coffee



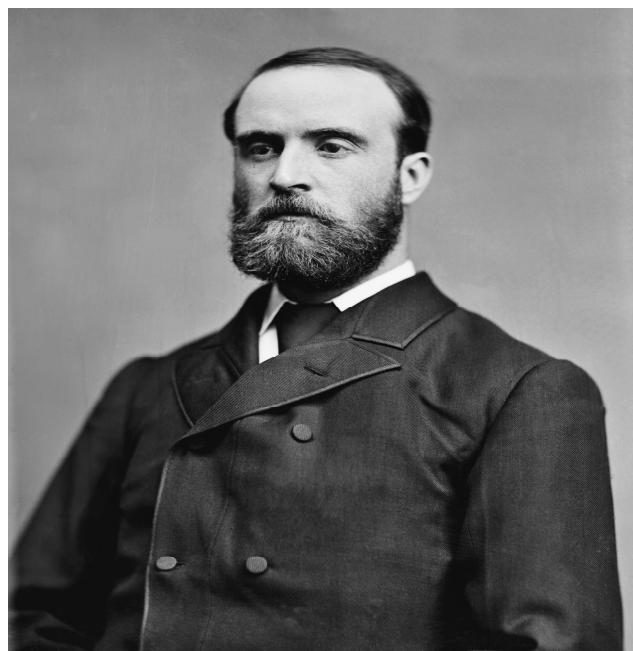
How to make an Irish coffee

Famous Irish people

St Patrick (387 – c.460) The patron saint of Ireland. He was taken to Ireland from Wales as a slave, but escaped and became a noted Christian missionary. Later tales attributed miraculous powers to St Patrick. He is recognised as the first Primate of All Ireland.



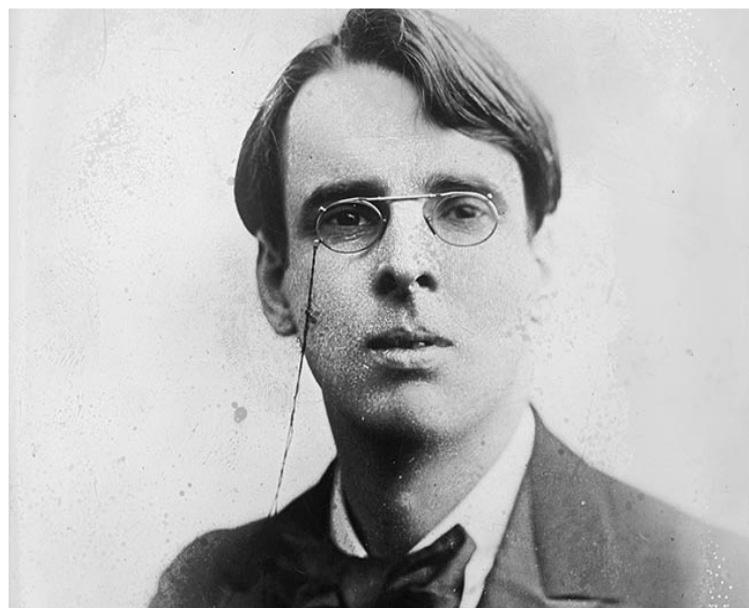
Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-1891) Irish landlord and leader of the Irish Nationalists. Parnell was influential in founding the Irish Nationalists and campaigning for Home Rule for Ireland. His leadership made Irish Home Rule one of the dominant political issues of the late 19th and early 20th Century.



Oscar Wilde (1854 - 1900) - Irish writer and poet. Born in Dublin, Wilde studied at Oxford University and became a leading wit and literary figure of London Society before his trial for libel and sodomy. He wrote satirical plays, such as 'The Importance of Being Earnest' and 'The Picture of Dorian Grey'.



W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) Irish modernist poet. W.B. Yeats was the first Irishman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923. He was a pivotal figure in the Irish literary revival. Famous works included: *The Tower* (1928) and *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1929). He was made an Irish senator in 1923.



Patrick Henry Pearse (also known as Pádraic or Pádraig Pearse; Irish: *Pádraig Anraí Mac Piarais*; An Piarsach; 10 November 1879 – 3 May 1916) was an Irish teacher, barrister, poet, writer, nationalist and political activist who was one of the leaders of the Easter Rising in 1916. Following his execution along with fifteen other leaders, Pearse came to be seen by many as the embodiment of the rebellion.



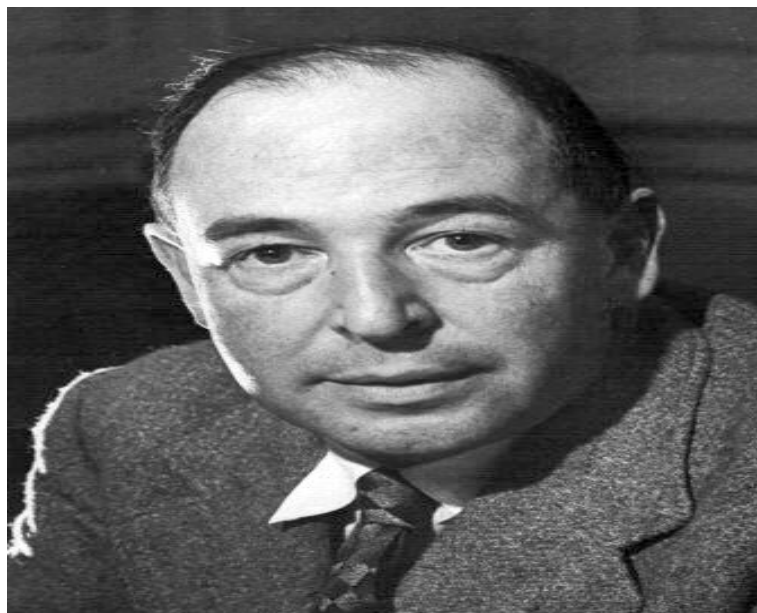
James Joyce (1882 – 1941) Irish writer from Dublin. Joyce was one of most influential modernist avant-garde writers of the Twentieth Century. His novel *Ulysses* (1922), was groundbreaking for its stream of consciousness style, which had a marked influence on other modern writers. Other works include *Dubliners* (1914) and *Finnegan's Wake* (1939).



Michael Collins (1890-1922) Irish revolutionary leader. Collins took part in the Easter Rising of 1916, and the later war of independence. Collins was killed during the Irish civil war, when he was killed by members of the IRA who felt he had sold out on a deal with the British.



C.S. Lewis (1898 - 1963) Lewis was born in Belfast, Ireland in 1898. He later moved to England, where he became a best selling author for his The Chronicles of Narnia - a children's fantasy series.



Mary Robinson (1944 -) The seventh and first female President of the Irish Republic (1990-97). Robinson brought a higher profile to the post. During her tenure, she oversaw a period of growth and social change. Mary Robinson also served as United Nations High Commissioner for human rights 1997-2002.



George Best (1946-2005) A dazzling and mercurial footballer from Northern Ireland. Best played for Manchester United and Northern Ireland. Off the pitch, his personal life was more turbulent. But, when in good form, he had a rare spark of genius.



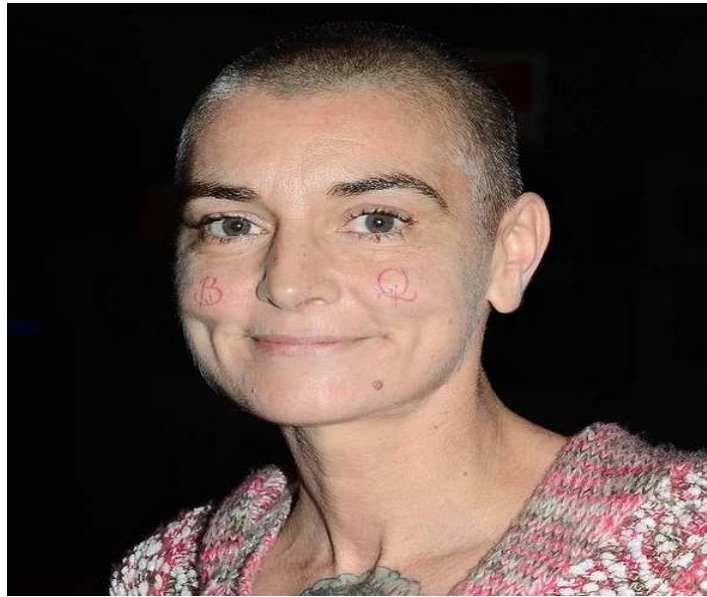
Bob Geldof (1951 -) Born in Dún Laoghaire, Ireland, Geldof rose to fame for his role as lead singer in the 'Boomtown Rats' including the hit single 'I don't like Monday's'. In the 1980s he was a principle organiser of 'Band Aid' an effort to provide a response to the famine in Africa. He has become a leading political activist and fund-raiser for Africa.



Bono (1960 -) Irish musician and humanitarian. Bono is the lead singer of U2, one of the most successful modern rock groups of all time. He has become an influential figurehead for global charity and humanitarian efforts to improve aid to the developing world. He is an influential supporter of efforts, such as Project Red and the ONE campaign.



Sinead O'Connor (1966-) Irish singer-song writer from Glenageary, County Dublin. She became world famous for her cover of 'Nothing Compares 2 U' Outside of music she has been outspoken on issues of religion, women's rights and politics



Liam Neeson - (1952) rose to prominence when he starred in the title role in Steven Spielberg's 1993 Oscar winner *Schindler's List*. He has since starred in other successful films, including the title role in the historical biopic *Michael Collins* (1996), the film adaptation of Victor Hugo's 1862 novel *Les Misérables* (1998), the epic space opera *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* as Qui-Gon Jinn(1999), the biographical drama *Kinsey* (2004), the superhero film *Batman Begins* as Ra's al Ghul (2005), the action thriller series *Taken* (2008-14), the fantasy adventure film *Clash of the Titans* (2010), the fantasy films in the *The Chronicles of Narnia* series (2005-10), and the thriller-survival film *The Grey* (2011).



Pierce Brendan Brosnan (1953 -) Brosnan appeared in films such as the Cold War spy film *The Fourth Protocol* (1987) and the comedy *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993). In 1994, he became the fifth actor to portray secret agent James Bond in the Eon Productions film series, starring in four films from 1995 to 2002



Conor Anthony McGregor (1988) is an Irish mixed martial artist who competes in the featherweight and lightweight divisions of the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC). He is the current UFC Featherweight Champion and the former Cage Warriors featherweight and lightweight champion. As of 14 December 2015, he is No. 3 in the official UFC pound-for-pound rankings and ranked as the No. 1 featherweight and No. 3 pound-for-pound fighter in the world. On the 12th December 2015, McGregor became the first Irish UFC champion when he knocked out then-No. 1 UFC pound-for-pound fighter José Aldo in 13 seconds, in what is the fastest championship victory in UFC history.



Martin O'Neill – (1952) is a football manager who is currently the manager of the Republic of Ireland national football team. Starting his career in Derry, O'Neill moved to England where he spent most of his playing career with Nottingham Forest, with whom he won the European Cup twice, in 1979 and 1980. He was capped 64 times for the Northern Ireland national football team, also captaining the side at the 1982 World Cup. O'Neill has managed Grantham Town, Wycombe Wanderers, Norwich City, Leicester City, Celtic, Aston Villa and Sunderland. He guided Leicester City to the Football League Cup final three times, winning twice. As Celtic manager between 2000 and 2005, he led that club to three Scottish Premier League titles and the 2003 UEFA Cup Final in Seville. After joining Aston Villa he achieved three consecutive 6th-place finishes in the English Premier League and guided them to the 2010 Football League Cup Final.



Bernard Brogan (1984) is a Gaelic footballer from the St Oliver Plunketts/Eoghan Ruadh club who plays inter-county with Dublin. From a famous family, Brogan, is the son of former all-Ireland winning and All Star player Bernard senior and is the brother of current Dublin players Alan and Paul. His uncle Jim was also an inter-county footballer for Dublin. Alongside most of his family, Brogan has attended St. Declan's College on the Navan Road.



Patrick Anthony "Pat" Jennings (born 12 June 1945 in Newry, County Down) During his career Jennings played for Newry Town, Watford, and in the top division with Tottenham Hotspur and Arsenal, winning the FA Cup with both of the north London rivals. In total, Jennings made over 1,000 top level appearances, and despite being a goalkeeper he scored in the 1967 FA Charity Shield.



Brian O'Driscoll (1979) is an Irish former professional rugby union player. Registered at University College Dublin R.F.C., he played at outside centre for the Irish provincial team Leinster and formerly for Ireland. He captained Ireland from 2003 until 2012, and captained the British and Irish Lions for their 2005 tour of New Zealand. He is regarded by critics as one of the greatest rugby union players of all time. O'Driscoll is the second most-capped player in rugby union history, having played 141 test matches - 133 for Ireland (83 as captain), and 8 for the British and Irish Lions. He scored 46 tries for Ireland and 1 try for the Lions in 2001, making him the highest try scorer of all time in Irish Rugby. He is the 8th-highest try scorer in international rugby union history, and the highest scoring centre of all time.



Sights

1. Boyne Valley

Brú na Bóinne (the Boyne Palace) in County Meath contains some of the most important historic sites and monuments in Ireland, and is a designated World Heritage Site. It features the massive megalithic ancient passage tombs - which are graves dating back to ancient times - of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth. These tombs are older than both Stonehenge in England and the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt. Newgrange, which was built about 5,000 years ago, is Ireland's most famous prehistoric site. It's especially famous for a spectacular event on Dec. 21, also known as the Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year. The tomb was built in such a way that on this day, it is illuminated by a narrow beam of sunlight which shines through a specially designed roof box. Those who have seen this say it's an unforgettable experience. Nobody knows why the tomb was built in the way it was, or indeed how the stones were even transported to the site. But it does seem fairly certain that Newgrange was built before the invention of the wheel. The Hill of Tara is also in Co. Meath. An archeological complex, it consists of a number of ancient monuments, including the Stone of Destiny, the Fort of the Kings and the Mound of the Hostages. Located on the River Boyne, it is said to be the actual seat of the High Kings of Ireland. Nearby is the site of the Battle of The Boyne, one of the key dates in Irish history, in which protestant William of Orange defeated Catholic James II in 1690.



2. Ring of Kerry

For many people around the world, the Ring of Kerry drive encapsulates their image of Ireland: ancient monuments, romantic castles, spectacular gardens and colorful towns and villages. The stunning scenery, dramatic coastline, charming locales and ancient archaeological treasures have been featured in postcards, film, poetry and song. Here, the idealized view of Ireland as a land of rural greenery and natural beauty springs to reality. Tourists come to Kerry to experience this rare dip into a lifestyle foreign in pace, philosophy and spirit. Each twist and turn on a drive around the Ring of Kerry reveals new sights - windswept cliffs, breathtaking scenery, spectacular lakes, rich flora and fauna, green and yellow checkered hills and unspoilt beaches. There is evidence of the region's unique heritage and culture everywhere, in the place names, the standing stones and the many archaeological sites. The 6th century beehive huts and ruined monastery on Skellig Michael are a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Also worth checking out are the stone forts at Caherciveen and Castlecove, the Neolithic stone circle in Kenmare, the 15th century Ballycarberry Castle, the magnificent O'Connell Memorial Church, Derrynane House and Gardens or the pretty 19th century Heritage town, Kenmare.

The Ring of Kerry is also highly regarded for its culinary delights, such as the local cheeses, seafood and shellfish, lamb and homemade breads. The town of Kenmare, in particular, has a number of very highly regarded restaurants. (It is thought to be the only town in Ireland that has more restaurants than pubs.) The area is a favorite among artists, writers and sculptors, and there are a number of craft shops and galleries such as Cill Rialaig showcasing their best works. It's also ideal for activity holidays, such as walking and cycling routes, diving and angling and adventures sports, to its array of championship golf courses - Waterville (An Coireán), Dooks, Kenmare and Killorglin.



3. The Cliffs of Moher

The most famous and breathtaking part of Ireland's craggy west coastline is the Cliffs of Moher area, which feature some of the most breathtaking views on the entire island. The Cliffs stretch for almost 5 miles and rise up to 702 feet over the waters of the Atlantic ocean. The amazing view from the Cliffs includes the Aran Islands, Galway Bay, The Twelve Pins and the Maum Turk Mountains. The landscape and seascape of the Cliffs of Moher have, for centuries, welcomed a multitude of visitors; close to 1 million people per year now travel to this iconic location. But don't get the wrong impression – just because many people flock to the site, this in no way spoils the experience of being there; it's easy to forget your surroundings and lose yourself in nature as you stand near the edge of the majestic cliffs.



4. Aran Islands

A trip to Galway would be incomplete without a visit to the Aran Islands, the collective name for the small islands, Inishmór, Inishmaan and Inisheer. The mystical, frozen-in-time islands are famous for their preservation of a rural existence largely unchanged, at least culturally, over the centuries. There may be some electricity there these days, but the ways of the past are carefully preserved among locals who make their living much the same way their ancestors did.



5. Giant's Causeway

The Giant's Causeway, a coastal area of about 40,000 basalt columns near the town of Bushmills in County Antrim, is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Ireland. Folklore tells us that an Irish giant named Finn MacCool once lived in the area, and from across the sea he could see a Scottish giant, Benandonner, his rival, whom he had never met. Finn challenged Benandonner to come to Ireland to fight. Because no boat was big enough to carry the giant, Finn built a causeway of stones in the water so that Benandonner would be able to make it across. When Finn realized the Scottish giant was far bigger than he had expected, he fled to the hills where his wife disguised him as a baby. This move foxed Benandonner because he thought that if the child was that big, the father would be even bigger. Benandonner fled back to the Scotland, ripping up the causeway behind him, so that Finn wouldn't be able to follow him. In truth, Giant's Causeway was created by a volcanic eruption 60 million years ago - an interesting fact, but the Finn MacCool myth is a bit more fun to believe. No matter how it came to be, the Causeway is one of the best places to walk through in the North.



6. Guinness Storehouse

A trip to Dublin's most popular tourist attraction is pretty much compulsory for any self-respecting tourist in Ireland's capital. Or, at the very least, it should be. The Guinness Storehouse tells the story of how Guinness is made and how this famous drink came to be one of Ireland's best-known exports. It is in an awesome building: its core is in the shape of a giant pint glass, and consists of seven floors. After walking around for about 45 minutes and being constantly told how wonderful Guinness is, pretty soon the subliminal messages start to kick in. Before you know it, you find yourself craving a pint of the black, delicious stuff like your life depended on it, even if you were previously not a fan. (It is, after all, an acquired taste.) The top floor, which has the Gravity Bar, is the most fun. There you get a complimentary pint of Guinness. You also get the most spectacular view of Dublin, which is worth the admission price alone.



7. Trinity College Dublin

Trinity College is Ireland's most prestigious college - and although its rivals at University College Dublin might dispute this, it's probably the best university in Ireland. But one thing not up for argument is the magnificent setting of Trinity: many of its majestic buildings are hundreds of years old. (The college was founded by England's Queen Elizabeth 1 in 1592.) Architecturally at least, Trinity is way above its nearest rivals. Although the college is best known for the Book of Kells, it's also worth going there to check out the Long Room of its old library. (Apparently, this room was the inspiration for a room called the Jedi Archives, in the movie, "Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones.") It is also worth taking one of the guided tours around the college as nearly every building seems to have an interesting story. Many of the tour guides appear to be Trinity College drama school graduates: They always seem to add a little dramatic flair to their tours.



8. The Burren

The Burren, which is formed by limestone karst plates (in other words, it's a great big rocky mass) is one of Ireland's most famous natural attractions. The limestone terrain holds a special fascination for geologists and botanists for its Mediterranean and alpine plants. Described as a botanist's paradise, the Burren has one of the most diverse and beautiful floras in Ireland: 635 different plant species (including 22 of Ireland's 27 native orchids) have been recorded here. The region also has a number of more rare and elusive species such as the carnivorous pine marten, the snake-like slow worm and the rare lesser horseshoe bat, as well as over 100 breeding birds and almost all of Ireland's native butterfly species. The diversity of species is due to a happy coincidence of natural and cultural factors. As well as the unique growing environment provided by the thick limestone and thin soil, low impact traditional farming practices such as the ancient practice of winter grazing contribute to the presence of this rich flora. The European Union has designated most of the Burren as a Special Area of Conservation, a title reserved for the finest natural environments in Europe.



9. St. Patrick's Cathedral

St. Patrick's Cathedral, Ireland's largest church, is also one of the biggest tourist attractions in Dublin. In a well close to the cathedral, St Patrick was believed to have baptized converts from paganism to Christianity. To commemorate his visit, a small wooden church was built on the site. Later, in 1191, the present building was constructed, and St. Patrick's was raised to the status of a cathedral. St Patrick's is also notable for being the first place where Handel's "Messiah" was performed, in 1742. Another interesting fact: Jonathan Swift, the author of "Gulliver's Travels," who was the dean of the cathedral from 1713-45, is buried here. While this cathedral is replete with history, St. Patrick's is not, however, a museum. It's still very much a living building with services held every day of the year. There are also sung services six days a week. The choir sings two services every day during school terms - the only cathedral in Ireland or Britain to do so.



St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, Ireland.

Photography: Peter O'Toole.

10. Croke Park

Croke Park is the stadium where Ireland's two national sports, hurling and Gaelic football, are played. It is also the headquarters of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), the sporting body responsible for these national games. It is hard to believe that Croke Park is primarily designed for amateur sports - with a capacity of around 80,000, it is the fourth largest stadium in Europe. But it's much more than merely a stadium: it has been described as the spiritual home of Irish cultural nationalism. Hurlers and Gaelic footballers - and indeed their fans - speak of Croke Park as if it were sacred ground.

"Croker" is something of a hidden secret for tourists. If you can get tickets, the chances are that you will be one of the few tourists there. The best time to get tickets is usually around May at the start of the season. To go and see a game of either hurling or football at Croke Park is to sample a unique slice of Irish life. While you're there, visit the GAA museum and go on a tour of the grand stadium.

