



Ireland **CITY GUIDES**



Welcome

WELCOME

YOUNG AT HEART, BUT WITH ANCIENT SOULS, IRELAND'S 11 CITIES MAY BE CONSIDERED TINY WHEN COMPARED TO THE WORLD STAGE, BUT THEY'RE PACKED TO THE RAFTERS AND BEYOND WITH ENERGY AND ATMOSPHERE...



Dublin



Belfast



Cork



Galway



Limerick



Derry~
Londonderry



Armagh



Kilkenny



Waterford



Lisburn



Newry



The cobble streets of Temple Bar

SLINK INTO THE SECRETIVE DUBH LINN GARDENS BEHIND THE CASTLE – THE ORIGINAL LOCATION OF THE ANCIENT “BLACK POOL” THAT GAVE DUBLIN ITS ENGLISH NAME

DUBLIN

If you take one breather in Dublin city, between museum-hopping, window-shopping and pub-crawling, take it on the River Liffey. Pick a bridge, any bridge: Dublin's got plenty, from the sleek, harp-shaped Samuel Beckett to the elegant curve of the 19th century cast iron Ha'penny. From one of the river's majestic viewpoints, a quayside catwalk of shiny modern architecture stands shoulder to shoulder with some of Dublin's most historic structures. The 200-year-old Custom House wears its neoclassical façade unfazed by the shiny glass-front spectacle of the Convention Centre Dublin a few blocks down. And on O'Connell Bridge, with the modern gleam of the Spire piercing the clouds to your left, you can look out downstream and almost imagine, as Seamus Heaney described, “the Vikings coming sniffing up the Liffey”.

From there, you could always follow your nose to the aromatic source of one of Dublin's most famous institutions: the St James's Gate Brewery with the Guinness Storehouse and skyline-skimming Gravity Bar. But that would be cheating. First go back to the very start of the city's formation with a walking history lesson of medieval Dublin, an intimate knot of small alleys and broad streets south of the Liffey. Let the hulking Christ Church Cathedral, founded around 1030AD, set the tone before exploring the medieval undercroft at Dublin Castle.

It's typical of Dublin that some of its best bits are reserved for the most curious traveller. Slink into the secretive Dubh Linn Gardens behind the castle – the original location of the ancient “black pool” that gave Dublin its English name. Or drift up to Henrietta Street, the city's earliest Georgian Street – a cobbled cul de sac that was once home to the professional elite.

Dublin's architectural grace makes it a

rewarding city to explore on foot – but you may not get far. An attempt at a stroll in the tranquil public park of Merrion Square could be torpedoed by the enticing smells coming from the weekly canal-side market that takes place every Friday lunchtime, after all it's only a few minutes' walk away.

A wander from the lush lawns of St Stephen's Green to Trinity College and its cobblestoned courtyards could easily be interrupted by a curious sign for “Dublin's Smallest Pub” hanging just above a narrow doorway.

Dublin is most certainly a place of hidden corners, pop-up restaurants and, more officially, it's a UNESCO City of Literature. That's not just a title either – Dublin truly lives literature, from fabulous historic pubs where Brendan Behan and Flann O'Brien spoke immortal one-liners, to the real-life relic of Sweny's, the pharmacy featured in James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Legendary as being a city that knows how to kick up its heels, Dublin's buoyant shopping districts off the main thoroughfare of Grafton Street buzz with the clink and chat of morning coffee, while come evening people crowd into the pavement bars and cafés. Try the hipster enclave of South William Street for perky shops and super-cool restaurants; head to South Anne Street to explore one of Dublin's favourite time-burnished pubs, Kehoe's; or explore the faded beauty of the Victorian George's Street Arcade, the city's first purpose-built shopping centre.

Sharing a pint with a local has even become a formalised process – and must-do – through the innovative City of a Thousand Welcomes initiative.

Walk the quays, cycle the canal, or uncover the eclectic cultural enclave that is Temple Bar; the options unfurl like the streets stretching for kilometres north and south of the river. We warned you – you'll need a breather.

Dublin

CITY MAP: DUBLIN



PHOTO FAR RIGHT: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



The Custom House on the River Liffey



The Ha'penny Bridge at twilight



South William Street shoppers



Traditional dish at The Pig's Ear



Café en Seine

THE EXPLORER:

TEN

ESSENTIAL THINGS TO DO

Uncover a history that bristles with intrigue or settle yourself down in one of the best pubs in the world. Whatever you choose to do in the city of Dublin, you can be sure you'll have a good time...

1 FIND OUT ABOUT LIFE ON A VIKING WARSHIP

Catapult yourself back to medieval Dublin at the entertaining and interactive Dublinia & the Viking World. And if you've kids with you, then they'll particularly enjoy finding out what life was like on a Viking longboat. Young ones – and the young at heart – can explore the excavation site, try on Viking clothes and put their head in the stocks. Models of a cobbler's shop and a medieval quayside help bring alive the world of Scandinavian invaders and the city they built in the 9th and 10th centuries.

While you're here, cross over the covered bridge into Christ Church Cathedral, founded by Sitric, the Danish King of Dublin, around 1030AD. Around 6pm, you can catch a performance of evensong (check christchurchdublin.ie for details).

In the crypt, track down the delicate mummified figures of a cat and rat who seem caught in a permanent cartoon chase and are known to Dubliners as "Tom and Jerry".

2 EXAMINE THE "MOST BEAUTIFUL BOOK IN THE WORLD"

One of Ireland's most stunning treasures, The Book of Kells is the artistic star of an exhibition in the Old Library of Trinity College. This lavish masterpiece, often called "the most beautiful book in the world", is an illuminated copy of the gospels in Latin and is famous for its workmanship. The book is a marvel of early Christian art dating from around the 9th century and is believed to have been produced by monks on a remote Scottish island.

Make your way upstairs to the Long Room Library, which was the inspiration for the computer-generated imagery of the Jedi Archive in Star Wars Episode II. After you have finished your tour, spend a few minutes wandering around the college grounds. The Oregon maples with their huge girths are the oldest trees in this beautiful green space.

3 FIRE YOUR IMAGINATION WITH AGE-OLD ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES

Awaken your mystical spirit with a look at the stunning gold collars in the ground floor of the National Museum of Archaeology. Dating from the Bronze Age, the Gleninsheen collar is the most beautiful of them and was worn by chiefs for important occasions. It was found by a farmer



Christ Church Cathedral



Trinity College Library, home to the Book of Kells



The Shelbourne Hotel

THE BOOK OF KELLS IS A LAVISH MASTERPIECE OFTEN CALLED "THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BOOK IN THE WORLD". IT'S A MARVEL OF CHRISTIAN ART CREATED BY MONKS AND DATING FROM THE 9TH CENTURY

in 1932 and is in the Ór: Ireland's Gold collection. Ancient discoveries made in bogs during turf cutting are displayed in the Treasury and reflect 15 centuries of artistic achievement. The magnificent 8th century Ardagh Chalice, a silver cup, is the greatest example of Celtic art ever found. You will also see the Tara Brooch and the Clonmacnoise Crozier. It's no surprise the museum boasts the largest collection of Celtic antiquities in the world.

4 PULL A PINT AND RAISE YOUR GLASS TO THE CREAMY "BLACK STUFF"

A brilliant way to take in the layout of the city is from the glass-enclosed Gravity Bar in the Guinness Storehouse. Panoramic views open up before you in Dublin's highest bar; from this elevated spot the city is surrounded on one side by water and on the other by mountains. In the old grain storehouse you can touch, taste and smell the creation of the world's most famous stout, a dark brew made with roasted malt. Audiovisual and interactive displays outline the fascinating brewing process in the exhibition area and you even have the chance to pull your own pint – a delicate art that requires practice

to make perfect. Don't forget to sample a complimentary pint in the bar – it's free with your admission ticket. Connoisseurs say the Guinness here is the best tasting anywhere in the world since it hasn't had to travel.

5 LISTEN TO YEATS READ HIS POETRY

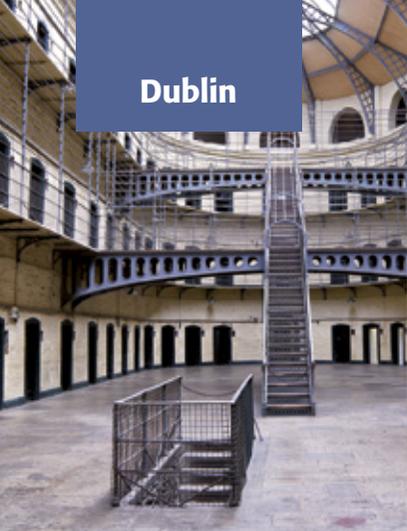
Celebrate the life and work of Ireland's most illustrious poet, W.B. Yeats, at the National Library. Yeats's papers and letters give an insight into his unrequited love for Maud Gonne. Through the wonders of technology you can browse digitally and turn the pages of a notebook that Gonne gave to Yeats in Paris in 1908. It is known as the "PIAL Notebook" from Per Ignem Ad Lucem (Through Fire to Light). You can hear Yeats reading his poetry and watch short films about his writing life.

While you're here, savour the atmosphere by peering into the main reading room with its dramatic sky blue dome ceiling.

For a complete contrast, Marsh's Library, small but perfectly formed, is the oldest public library in Ireland and is situated adjacent to St Patrick's Cathedral. Its oak bookcases hold 25,000 printed books mostly relating to the 16th and 17th centuries. If you love the smell of old books and maps, this is the place for you, and children are particularly welcome.

The library hasn't changed since it opened more than 300 years ago and is one of the few places in Dublin still used for its original purpose. And if you're feeling in need of a break, or just want to sit down and flick through a tome, there's no better place. >

Dublin



Kilmainham Gaol



The Cake Café

6 GET UP CLOSE TO A CARAVAGGIO

The dramatic moment from the Passion when Christ is betrayed by Judas is the big attraction at the National Gallery. The Taking of Christ by Caravaggio was produced when he was at the peak of his career and is believed to include a self-portrait of the artist. The list of canvasses in residence here is outstanding: more than 3,000 paintings including 17th century French, Dutch, Italian and Spanish schools, as well as Van Gogh and Claude Monet. Highlights include works by Titian, Rubens, Van Dyck and J.M.W. Turner. For more artistic nourishment make your way to the unforgettable Jack B. Yeats watercolours, especially *The Liffey Swim*, which typifies his enthusiastic recording of Dublin life. Pick out the character in the brown fedora, thought to be Yeats himself, and the woman in a yellow hat, his wife Cottie. The gallery's Millennium Wing stages international exhibitions and has an excellent shop for books on art and gifts, as well as a large children's section.

7 TASTE THE CODDLE AND COLCANNON IN TEMPLE BAR

Don't miss a walk or even an aimless wander through Temple Bar. Artists, musicians and writers have made this bohemian part of the city their home since the 1980s. With its warren of car-free cobbled streets, alternative culture, and vast range of activities, the area throws up many diverse possibilities: art-house cinema, film archive, galleries, music and arts centres, a Saturday morning farmers' market – never mind the biggest collection of restaurants and bars in

one area. This is THE place for a revitalising lunch of freshly made soup, crunchy salads, crêpes or inventive sandwiches, and it buzzes with excitement and music at night. Want to try some genuine Dublin food? Look out for the spicy local speciality Gur cake or traditional fare such as Dublin coddle (sausage, bacon, onion and potato stew), colcannon (bacon and cabbage) or boxty (a potato and flour pancake).

There's plenty to amuse kids, too, since they have their very own excellent cultural centre, The Ark. Drop into the National Photographic Archive for changing exhibitions about Irish life and an amazing collection of half a million photos. Next door, the Gallery of Photography shows a roster of photographic exhibitions.

8 BE MOVED BY KILMAINHAM GAOL

Chilling cells and eerie corridors bring history to life at Kilmainham Gaol, the largest unoccupied building of its kind in Europe. Built in the 1790s, the prison is closely connected with Ireland's struggle for independence and reflects painful periods from the past. Browse the museum and join a guided tour to make the most of your time. In the prison chapel there's an audiovisual summary of the Nationalist struggle. The 1916 corridor contains cells that housed the captured commanders of the Easter Rising and leads to the atmospheric stone-breakers' yard where 14 of them were executed.

There's also an absorbing exhibition on the history of the prison and its restoration. It closed when the last prisoner, Éamon de Valera, was

PHOTO FAR LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



The National Gallery of Ireland

BEWLEYS ATTRACTS MANY BRANDS OF CAFÉ-SITTERS: NOVELISTS IN SEARCH OF MATERIAL, NEWSPAPER READERS, PHONE TEXTERS AND SOLO THINKERS

released in July 1924. He later went on to be President of Ireland. Spend some time in this thought-provoking place full of resonance and you'll understand why Kilmainham is etched into the memory of the city.

9 SINK INTO A SOFT SEAT IN A CAFÉ

For a multi-sensorial experience, soak up a blend of hand-roasted coffee or try the Dublin Morning Tea in Bewley's café on Grafton Street. It's all part of the education of a good nose, so sink into a comfy red velvet seat and drink in the ambience of marble sculptures and six glorious stained-glass windows by the 20th century artist Harry Clarke. Bewley's feels like it's been around since time immemorial but, in fact, it traces its history to the 1840s. The poet Brendan Kennelly describes Bewley's as "Dublin in miniature, a coffee capital within the Capital of Ireland". It attracts many brands of café-sitters: novelists in search of material, newspaper readers, phone texters and solo thinkers. At lunchtime, actors perform readings upstairs in the café theatre.

Dublin is awash with blissful cafés and traditional Irish tea rooms, from the Cake Café and the Queen of Tarts to the Silk Road Café at the Chester Beatty Library. Fancy a

decadent afternoon tea? If you want to mix with high society, head for the glamorous Lord Mayor's Lounge in the Shelbourne Hotel with its blazing fires and glittering Waterford Crystal chandeliers. Sit up straight, pour the Earl Grey from a china pot and select finger food from a three-tiered silver tea stand. The hotel was used for the drafting of the Irish Constitution in 1922.

10 TRACE THE FOOTSTEPS OF JAMES JOYCE

They've named a handsome bridge after him, his debonair statue stands near O'Connell Street, and a pub and study centre both bear his name. Of course it's James Joyce, author of *Ulysses*. Joyce's famous novel was set in the city on the day of his first date with Nora Barnacle, 16 June 1904. It's known as Bloomsday after the character Leopold Bloom, whose strolls trace Joyce's map of the city. Dublin celebrates the date every year with special events, walking tours and a pilgrimage to Davy Byrne's pub for a Gorgonzola cheese sandwich and glass of Burgundy. Liam Proud's murals of Joycean Dublin grace the pub's walls.

At any given lunchtime in Sweny's shop – the pharmacy mentioned in the book – you can hear live readings from Dubliners and other Joyce works. Run by volunteers, the shop retains the original front and still stocks lemon-scented soap – an ideal present for literary souvenir-hunters. Groupies will also want to check out the James Joyce Centre as a starting point for guided tours, or follow the *Ulysses* trail marking the route of Leopold Bloom, with Robin Buick's 14 bronze relief pavement plaques.

Dublin

MY CITY:

HELEN BEAUMONT

"One of the things I love about Dublin is our wonderful bay – we're surrounded by water from Howth all the way round to Dalkey, Killiney and beyond. I grew up near Sandymount and still live within walking distance of Sandymount Strand – it remains one of my favourite places in Dublin. I cross the River Liffey – another of Dublin's superb water features – twice a day and love Grattan Bridge with its outlandish half-fish, half-horse lamp standards. I'm a huge fan of the Luas, Dublin's tram service, which I catch to the National Museum of Decorative Arts and History at Collins Barracks, where I work. I'll fully admit to bias, and to being lucky enough to work in one of the most fantastic environments in Dublin – Collins Barracks, the building and museum, is one of Dublin's unmissable sights. On nights out I still love the fact that I can walk to most places in Dublin – one of my favourite public spaces is Hanover Quay with its amazing red sculptures that light up after dark."

Helen Beaumont
Education Officer at the National Museum of Ireland



Killiney Bay



A view from Grattan Bridge



From historical walking tours to the elegance of a horse-drawn carriage or a cruise on the river, the city has a large variety of guided tours covering a range of themes

The best way to get the hang of the sights is on a [hop-on/hop-off tour](#) run by Dublin Bus and City Sightseeing Dublin, where the guides provide an entertaining commentary that'll have you laughing your way around the city. Dublin Bus Tours offers a variety of tours including a Dublin City Tour and Ghost Bus Tour.

Dublin is a walker's city par excellence and there are many tours with erudite and jovial guides. [The Dublin Literary Pub Crawl](#), running since 1988, is one of the best to learn about the list of authors who have left their mark on the life of this most writerly of cities. Taken by actors, it is a hilarious romp through the work of, amongst others, Joyce, Beckett, Wilde and Behan. It evokes their work and their lives, and at the same time manages to squeeze in a drink in a couple of great pubs.

Pat Liddy – author, artist and historian – is no stranger to the [Dublin walks scene](#). One of

the highlights of his tour is an extraordinary photographic wall mural featuring Dublin's remake of Da Vinci's The Last Supper. You can also download Liddy's excellent iWalks on your MP3 player.

Ireland is going through a decade of anniversaries and if you want to brush up on history, then sign up for the [1916 Rebellion Walking Tour](#). It's an absorbing walk taking in

YOU CAN TAKE YOUR OWN TOUR BY RENTING ONE OF THE DUBLINBIKES – HEAD FOR THE CANAL, OVER BRIDGES, OR PEDAL YOUR WAY THROUGH LEAFY PARKS AWAY FROM TRAFFIC

the events of the Easter Rising. [Dublin Footsteps](#), meanwhile, mixes the architecture of the Georgian city with literature.

[Dublin by Numbers](#), run by Ingenious Ireland, organises puzzling pathway trails for children from age six. Download the activity sheet from the website, bring chalk, pencil and string for

measuring. The trail starts at the main entrance to St Stephen's Green.

Wander the streets and you will hear the unmistakable "Viking Roar" coming from the [Viking Splash Tours](#). Get on board with a Viking helmet and roar like a pillager as you pass landmark sites. The tours are held in amphibious World War II vehicles and plunge into the water at Grand Canal Dock.

If you want serious exercise then Dublin by Bike holds a three-hour tour as well as a 90-minute one that takes in all the main sights; or try [Dublin City Bike Tours](#) whose motto we like: "Let the wheels do the walking". You can also take your own tour by renting one of the dublinbikes (there are multiple stations around the city) and escaping on two wheels. Head for the canal, over bridges, or pedal your way through leafy parks away from traffic. There are three-day tickets available.

Sports fans are well catered for, too. You can tour the impressive [Aviva Stadium](#), home of international rugby

matches. While few sports in Ireland can rival the intensity of a Gaelic football final, you will only get a ticket if you have the right contacts. If you can't get to a match, the next best thing is to join a tour of the [Croke Park Experience](#). Here, uncover the fascinating history of the organisation, which traces its roots to the 1890s.

FIVE FOR FREE

For a major European capital, Dublin has an astonishing amount of things to do that don't bust the budget. Here are five free city favourites...

1 SIDESTEP THE CROWDS AT THE SECRETIVE IVEAGH GARDENS

Bypass the crowds in the city centre and head for the park. St Stephen's Green and the tranquil Merrion Square are recommended. Wander into Phoenix Park, the largest public park in Europe, and you will come across fallow deer. To really avoid the crowds, make your way to an extra special secret walled place, Iveagh Gardens, with its cascade fountain, statues, woodlands and a sunken lawn. The waterfall has rocks from each of Ireland's 32 counties. Immerse yourself in the box-hedges, soft grass and blissful silence, always keeping an eye out for cheeky squirrels or arrogant foxes.

2 ABSORB THE BANTER OF A SLICE OF STREET LIFE

For a true flavour of quintessential Dublin life, Moore Street market is a fine example of a typical outdoor fruit, vegetable and flower market. It has been part of the fabric of the city for years and tourists love the vendors' wit. From early morning, the stalls are piled high with apples, oranges, pears and bananas, so take an appreciative stroll through it to hear the good-humoured haranguing of street traders.

3 PEEK AT THE CHAOTIC GLORY OF AN ARTIST'S STUDIO

Call in and see the amazing studio of the artist "superstar" Francis Bacon – it's exactly how he left it. After his death it was brought from London to the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, where it was reassembled. Bacon, who was born in Dublin, spent his working life in London and is regarded as one of the 20th century's greatest artists. The Irish Museum of Modern Art, also free, showcases the work of Irish artists such as Sean Scully, Louis le Brocqy and Dorothy Cross. And you'll also find Picasso, Miró and Damien Hirst pieces.

4 BE DAZZLED IN A CHAPEL

Walk along Dame Street to City Hall for the Story of the Capital exhibition and do two things: look down at the beautiful mosaic floor and read the official Dublin city motto: Obedientia Civium Felicitas Urbis (Obedient citizens make a happy city), and then look up at 12 frescoes on the rotunda above depicting legends and historical scenes.

Beside Dublin Castle, the Chapel Royal next to the Record Tower is where the Irish crown jewels were once kept. It's a must-visit for every tourist. The interior is a heady combination of richly detailed Gothic, 15th century French stained-glass alongside wood carved pillars, and the expressive figures of Faith, Hope and Charity.

5 GAZE AT A STUFFED SHARK

Want to see some stuffed animals? Known affectionately to Dubliners as The Dead Zoo, the Museum of Natural History is a fabulous place. Packed with tigers, hippos, dinosaurs, birds, and, most intriguingly, stuffed sharks, it houses two million specimens. Children – as well as parents – can happily spend hours here.



Samuel Beckett Bridge



Powerscourt Townhouse Centre



Art on St Stephen's Green



The Natural History Museum



Iveagh Gardens

OUT AND ABOUT

There are many tempting one-day coach excursion destinations from Dublin, so if it takes your fancy get beyond the city and experience everything from heritage to country walks



Powerscourt House and Gardens



Japanese Gardens

GLENDALOUGH

Glendalough in the Wicklow Mountains evolved from a hermitage founded by St Kevin 1,400 years ago, and is still a revered place set in a stunning steep-sided valley between two lakes. It's a beautiful location for picnics and gentle walks along the boardwalks and trails that twist around the grounds. If you're feeling energetic, head for the surrounding steep hills and winding paths.

IRISH HORSE MUSEUM

We Irish love our horses and at the informative Irish Horse Museum at the Irish National Stud in County Kildare, you can see recordings of both flat and national hunt races. If you are here in spring, then the beautiful foals may be prancing around the paddocks.

JAPANESE GARDENS

Near the stud, the Japanese Gardens, created in the early 20th century, are recognised as among the finest Asian gardens in the world. A series of landmarks runs along a path symbolically charting the human progression from birth to death.

NEWGRANGE

A trip to Newgrange in County Meath should be on every visitor's itinerary. The excellent Brú na Bóinne Visitor Centre is the starting point for tours of Newgrange, Europe's most important Neolithic burial mounds. Built around 3200BC, it is several hundred years older than the Pyramids and is the site of Ireland's most visited

passage grave. We love the enigmatic side to it. The Celts left no written records so no one can say with any certainty how the people who built it transported the huge stones to the spot.

JOHNNIE FOX'S

A mountain road in south County Dublin will take you to, reputedly, Ireland's highest pub – Johnnie Fox's in Glencullen. Overflowing with bric-a-brac, the pub has featured prominently in the social evolution of Ireland and can trace its origins to 1798.

POWERSCOURT HOUSE AND GARDENS

County Wicklow's Powerscourt House and Gardens is one of the grandest and most beautiful 18th century estates in Ireland. The house was restored in the 1990s and the gardens are considered among the finest in Europe. The Italianate landscape designed in the mid-19th century survives while the nearby Powerscourt waterfall, at 398ft or 121m, is the tallest in Ireland.



The passage tomb at Newgrange



IN THE CATHEDRAL QUARTER – ONE OF THE OLDEST PARTS OF BELFAST – TRADITIONAL PUBS RUB SHOULDERS WITH COOL HOTELS, WHILE WINE BARS AND BISTROS ARE HIDDEN IN ATMOSPHERIC ALLEYWAYS

BELFAST

Bursting with confidence and contemporary cool, Belfast is one of Europe's true renaissance cities. From playing über-hip host to the MTV Europe Music Awards to being a centre of all things Titanic, the capital of Northern Ireland is a city you'll adore.

Belfast's modern history is reflected in wall murals that continue to be a fascination for visitors and an inherent part of public art, with everything from political themes to tributes to local footballing legend George Best. These days, though, Belfast is all about the future with music, culture, literature, architecture and sport contributing to the city's progressive personality.

Radiating from the bright St Anne's Square, the Cathedral Quarter – once the oldest part of Belfast – is an area full of character with a very modern vibe. Old pubs rub shoulders with cool hotels, while wine bars and bistros are hidden in atmospheric alleyways. Along the cobbled streets, a former banana warehouse is now a circus school; a previously derelict building is now a busy brasserie; a seed merchant's is a hip hotel.

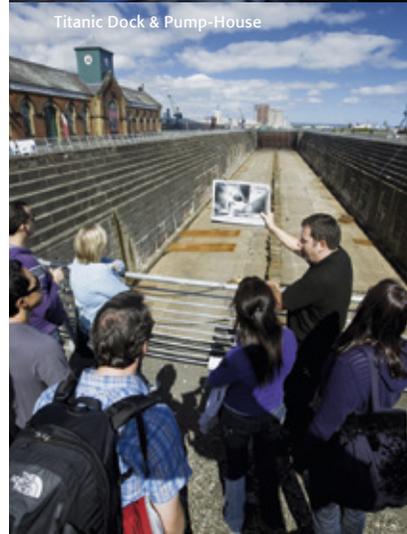
Today, Belfast's cultural scene reflects the city's optimism. The eye-catching Metropolitan Arts Centre (MAC) has firmly established Belfast's place on the artistic map and throughout the year festivals abound. Take your pick from the long-established Belfast Festival at Queen's to a songwriting jamboree, listen to the Ulster Orchestra on home ground, join in the merriment at the Festival of Fools or enjoy an Irish gig at Féile an Phobail, Ireland's biggest community festival.

The regeneration of Belfast is an amazing success story and has created a huge amount for holidaymakers to see and do, not least of which is the critically acclaimed Titanic Belfast, the biggest Titanic attraction in the world. And with a history rooted in shipbuilding, it's no surprise that much of Belfast's past revolves around the River Lagan. Rejuvenated and lively, this waterfront area is now one of Belfast's most interesting districts.

Want to branch out from the city? The stunning Giant's Causeway is just an hour away. Prepare to be wowed.

Belfast

CITY MAP: BELFAST



THE EXPLORER:
TEN

ESSENTIAL
THINGS
TO DO

Belfast's energy will revive your spirits, whether you're visiting the incredible Titanic Belfast or watching the fast-paced excitement of a Belfast Giants ice hockey game

1 TAKE YOUR SEAT FOR A TRULY TITANIC EXPERIENCE

Immerse yourself in the story of the Titanic in the city that made her. The tragedy is commemorated with a huge exhibition centre at the very place where the liner was built. Opened in 2012, Titanic Belfast is the same height as the ship and is made up of nine galleries spread over six floors telling the story from rivets to requiem.

Allow at least three hours to take in a mix of moving images, special effects and reconstructions. Jump on to a fibreglass cart and you'll be whisked away on a ride through the busy shipyard's sights, sounds and sensations from 1912. The fit-out gallery with its virtual tour of life on board gives a fascinating perspective of being on the ship.

Titanic Beneath is one of the most astonishing

exhibits featuring a bird's eye view of the debris on the seabed. It includes haunting images from the wreck made up in a montage of thousands of underwater photographs. Stand on the transparent floor and witness what is left of the ship 3,874m below the waves. Look closely and you may see boilers, a funnel or the bow gliding past slowly like a giant ghost fish.

2 EXCITE YOUR SENSES AT THE COLOURFUL ST GEORGE'S MARKET

For an authentic blast of Belfast life, make your way to the renovated St George's Market opposite the Belfast Waterfront Hall; it's in full flow on Friday, Saturday and Sunday mornings. More than 150 traders set up stalls laden with everything from antiques to cured meats. Mussels, whelks and sprats from Strangford Lough are amongst the offerings at Ireland's largest indoor fish market.

Looking for something for a picnic? Try some local, organically grown fruit and vegetables, as well as an array of artisan chocolates and homemade cakes. Brendan Megarity, who sells pastries there, says the market is a fabulously welcoming place: "The camaraderie is fantastic and we are conscious of quality and diversity that appeals to visitors."

Tuck into a Belfast belly-buster or Ulster fry, which will fill you up for the day. Stop at Piece of Cake Bakery and choose from a range of 20 breads; or linger over a Number Six espresso, the house coffee at S.D. Bell's, who have

Belfast's famous Black Taxi Tour

3 TOUR THE MURALS BY TAXI

One of the best ways to see Belfast's famous wall art is to sign up for a Black Taxi Tour. Knowledgeable drivers give an informative history lesson, and the wide range of themes cover political turmoil and sectarian conflict, as well as commemoration of much older historic and religious events. More recent murals celebrate sporting and cultural excellence or social and economic issues. The tradition of political murals is more than 100 years old but, as you'll note, some of the subjects depicted through this artistic preoccupation hark back much further than this. Wherever you go, the colourful work of the wall artists, from the romantic to the surreal, will astonish you – don't forget to bring your camera.

4 ENJOY BELFAST'S MUSICAL HERITAGE AND WALK THE CATHEDRAL QUARTER

The strains of Brown-Eyed Girl may well ring in your ears when you drop into the Oh Yeah Music Centre to find out about Van Morrison and the rest of the gang. Broken guitars, old album covers and torn jackets are on display in a converted whiskey warehouse. Belfast – and the Northern Irish music scene – has produced

St George's Market

PAINTING, SCULPTURE, PHOTOGRAPHY, PRINTMAKING AND INSTALLATION ART ARE ALL SHOWCASED IN THE TIGHT NETWORK OF STREETS IN THE CATHEDRAL QUARTER

a long list of legends that has set toes tapping all over the world.

After your visit, wander through the tight network of streets in the Cathedral Quarter, which is awash with small galleries along red-bricked streets. Painting, sculpture, photography, printmaking, and installation artists with digital and video work are all showcased. One of the best is the Golden Thread Gallery with links to the Venice Biennale, which runs an Electronic Art International Symposium.

The Northern Ireland Print Gallery is a hotbed of crafts where street performers regularly entertain crowds on summer Sundays. For a musical and artistic contrast, make your way to Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich, an Irish Language arts centre. They've an art gallery and busy café, as well as a tourist information point.

5 CHEER ON THE BELFAST GIANTS

Since they arrived in 2000, the Belfast Giants – the city's first ice-hockey team – have taken the place by storm and have built up a huge fan base. Made up mostly of North Americans, the team plays its games in the Odyssey Arena. >



Belfast



Shopping in Belfast



Legends Night – Oh Yeah Music Centre



Ulster Orchestra at Waterfront Hall with Antoni Wit

Their motto: "In the land of the Giants, everyone is equal" gives the team mass appeal and there's an electric atmosphere at games; the season runs from September to April.

Rock and pop gigs are also held at the Odyssey Arena, which, as well as being home to the team, is also a massive entertainment complex with a cinema, IMAX theatre, and indoor bowling alley, as well as cafés, bars and restaurants. You'll also find an interactive science discovery centre known as W5. It has a cool, hands-on approach to interpreting science, boasting a staggering 180 interactive exhibits. With a futuristic feel, children can do everything from exploring the weather to building bridges or robots.

6 CATCH A SHOW AT THE MAC

The starkly beautiful Metropolitan Arts Centre (MAC) looms over the Cathedral Quarter as a new flagship home of the arts. Six stories tall and with two theatres, three galleries and dance studios, along with a bar and restaurant, the inspirational MAC is the centrepiece of St Anne's Square. Here, visual art forms collide and collaborate, mixing local and international art, theatre and dance. The musical parameters stretch from opera through to vintage Broadway shows and rock. You may catch Belfast's musical wizard, Peter Wilson (better known as Duke Special), or a show for children by Cahoots Theatre Company. For attention-grabbing exhibitions, the centre borrows works from the

National Gallery of Scotland, the Tate in London, and the Guggenheim in Bilbao.

7 BE WOWED BY THE TREASURES IN THE ULSTER MUSEUM

An exquisite jewel pendant studded with rubies, the tiny gold salamander still sparkles even after more than 400 years in the Atlantic. The salamander was a good luck charm on a wooden fighting ship where fire was a big danger. Part of a hoard of gold ornaments from the Spanish Armada vessel Girona, it's on display in the second floor of the Ulster Museum. But don't leave yet: there's a whole rejuvenated museum to explore, which is bristling from a multi-million pound redevelopment.

The museum's forte is the history and prehistory of Ireland using exhibitions to trace the rise of Belfast's crafts and trades. There are marvels wherever you go and it's impossible to fully appreciate everything in a day. The doors open to rooms on geology, European and American art, the history of the Troubles, and much more. Children particularly love the skeleton of the extinct Irish giant deer, as well as the famed Egyptian mummy Takabuti.

8 SEE WHERE ACTOR LIAM NEESON STARTED OUT

Since it was rebuilt in 2011, the Lyric Theatre has re-established itself as a prized cultural organisation with a diverse repertoire of classical, popular, and contemporary drama. Well-known Irish plays and works by new

FOR A DOWN-TO-EARTH BELFAST EXPERIENCE, TUCK INTO A HEARTY BOWL OF IRISH STEW AT THE CROWN LIQUOR SALOON, ONE OF THE CITY'S MOST CHERISHED LANDMARKS

writers feature on the bill. Brian Friel's plays are a staple at the theatre – in fact, its patron Liam Neeson made his 1976 stage debut here in Friel's much-loved work *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Frequently, the work of two of Belfast's leading contemporary playwrights, Marie Jones and Martin Lynch, is performed at the Lyric. Their popular plays fizz with the energy of Northern Irish dark humour, and are also sometimes staged at the elegant Grand Opera House or Waterfront Hall.

9 EXPERIENCE THE GLAMOUR OF COCKTAIL HOUR AT THE MERCHANT

Splash the cash and pay homage at the bar of the opulent Merchant Hotel, which is good enough for the likes of Meryl Streep and Tom Hanks. And as we're in a literary city that has produced greats such as C.S. Lewis, Brian Moore and Louis MacNeice, it seems appropriate to order a Hemingway daiquiri. Settle on a high stool and watch in awe as the tuxedoed mixologist combines rum with fresh lime, grapefruit juice and Maraschino liqueur. Expensive, yes, but this is the real deal.

For a more down-to-earth Belfast experience, tuck into a hearty bowl of Irish stew at the Victorian Crown Liquor Saloon, one of the city's most cherished and decorative landmarks. The interior of the pub is really quite something with its decorative mahogany. The cosy snugs – private drinking areas known to regulars as "confessional boxes" – fill up at lunchtime, so get a seat early and order a drink using the antique push-button bell.

10 SHOP THE SQUARE AND SEE THE CITY

The glittering steel Victoria Square shopping centre has brought the big name franchises to Northern Ireland. The building has transformed the Belfast skyline, and the shiny shops attract thousands into the city for a fix of retail happiness. It's worth climbing to the dome where you can see wide views of the city centre and beyond. Visitors have been known to spend an entire day at this one-stop shop. You'll find independently run fashion and interior shops, fine art and antique galleries, handcrafted jewellery, health food shops, and beauticians; as well as cafés, delis, ice-cream parlours, sleek restaurants and bars that would shame a street on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Don't miss the Victorian-styled Maryville Tea Rooms, which will transport you back to another era and bring a warm glow to finish off your shopping trip.

Looking for something a bit more boutique? Check out the socialising and shopping at Lisburn Road.

Belfast

MY CITY:

SEAN KELLY

"My daily walk to work takes me up Waring Street and across into Bridge Street through the heart of the Cathedral Quarter. To this day, I am still often overcome by a sense of the history of the area. This is the oldest part of Belfast and these are streets where sea voyages were planned and revolutions plotted, and where Belfast's newspapers came into being and are still produced. This is where the city built its industrial reputation in arcane industries, such as rope making, haberdashers, leather merchants, umbrella, bellows, whip and trunk makers. The ideals of the French Revolution burned through these streets. A recent survey uncovered over 50 organisations involved in creative activity in the area. Alongside such activity, a burgeoning service and hospitality industry has emerged. The well-established Duke of York has been joined by the egalitarian and arts-friendly ethos of the John Hewitt bar, while many other pubs offer nourishment for the body and occasionally the mind."

Sean Kelly
 Director of the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival held annually in May



Duke of York Pub



The John Hewitt bar



TOURS

From an open-top bus tour through the main Belfast sights with Belfast City Sightseeing, to a whole host of Titanic-related tours, there are many different ways of seeing Belfast...so you can do it your own way, in your own time

More than 10 companies offer taxi tours of Belfast. They include Belfast City Black Taxi Tours, Taxi Traks and Black Taxi Tours. Most tours last 60-70 minutes.

A variety of guided walking tours includes the Historic Belfast tour, the Blackstaff Way tour, as well as separate themes on historic pubs and ghost walks.

The Belfast Music bus tour runs once every two weeks on a Saturday, and takes you through the heart of this rock and roll city.

Belfast iTours are a new way to see the city with nine separate tours covering 70 points of interest. You can download these audio-visual walking tours from the Belfast Welcome Centre or other pick-up points.

Apart from the bus and taxi tours, which stop off at the Titanic Quarter, many companies offer more detailed guided walks around the shipyard, focusing on the story of the Titanic.

Colin Cobb runs Titanic Walking Tours, which gives

the Titanic experience.

You can savour a walk through Sir Thomas Andrews' Belfast (he designed the Titanic) with a Blue Badge guide.

Belfast City Sightseeing operates a two-hour Titanic Explorer bus from the city

ON THE TWO-HOUR TITANIC TOUR WITH BELFAST CITY SIGHTSEEING, A COLOURFUL FLAVOUR IS ADDED WITH CHARACTERS FROM THE SHIPYARD DRESSED IN PERIOD COSTUME

you access to the slipways, as well as to Titanic's Dock and Pump-House, and the drawing rooms.

Titanic Tours Belfast is run by Susie Millar, the great-granddaughter of a crew member who sailed on the liner, and is perfect if you're looking for a personal touch to

centre. It includes a 45-minute walking tour of the shipyard. A colourful flavour is added with characters from the shipyard dressed in period costume.

The Lagan Boat Company will take you on to the water on its daily Titanic Boat Tours and also runs a separate Belfast Lough tour.

FIVE FOR FREE

Some of the city's best-known public buildings, such as the City Hall, and Parliament Buildings at Stormont, home of the Northern Ireland Assembly, hold free tours. You can also attend free lunchtime concerts, featuring the Ulster Orchestra taking in the glory of the Ulster Hall

1 TOUR THE CITY HALL

Free tours of the grandiose City Hall are held each day. They last 45 minutes and afterwards you can wander through the permanent exhibitions on the city's history: Waking a Giant and No Mean City. Following the tour, walk around the grounds to the Titanic Memorial Garden, which was opened in 2012. It's a moving tribute and alphabetically lists the names of all those who died in the sinking back in 1912.

2 SMELL THE FRAGRANT BLOSSOMS IN THE BOTANIC GARDENS

Breathe in the scented air in this glorious haven of grass, trees, flowers and walks that slopes down to the River Lagan. Peer inside the curved-iron and glass Palm House, a conservatory marvel, or the Tropical Ravine House with its outstanding collection of tropical flora and Killarney ferns. It's a very tranquil and laid-back way to spend an afternoon.

3 WATCH OVER BELFAST FROM A GREAT HEIGHT

For a spectacular panoramic view over the city, take the path uphill from Belfast Castle to McArt's Fort in Cave Hill Country Park. If tiredness creeps in, head inside for the excellent eight-minute video, Watching over Belfast, which tells the story of the area with a backdrop of outstanding panoramic views. Cave Hill's most famous feature, Napoleon's Nose, is thought to have been the inspiration for Gulliver's Travels author, Jonathan Swift, and is a very popular walking spot with Belfast locals.

4 SNIFF THE PAST AT THE ATMOSPHERIC LINEN HALL LIBRARY

A comfy central hideaway, the Linen Hall Library's origins stretch back to 1788, making it the oldest library in Belfast. A hushed atmosphere pervades this sedate setting with an unparalleled collection of 80,000 documents relating to the Troubles. Glance through free newspapers and reflect on an early librarian, Thomas Russell, who was hanged in 1803 for supporting an Irish uprising. Free weekly tours provide a great introduction to the collections, while you can keep the kids entertained with a reading space and jigsaws for children on level 2 – with no silence policy here, thankfully.

5 RELIVE THE 1941 BELFAST BLITZ

Not many people know that Belfast suffered serious loss of life in a WWII blitz. The 900 people who died in 1941 are remembered in a permanent exhibition at the Northern Ireland War Memorial. Look out for a poignant piece of ceramic artwork, April Showers Bring Forth May Flowers, which depicts bombs and flax flowers on a wall. Other highlights include a stained-glass window and bronze relief memorial by sculptor Carolyn Mulholland.



Cave Hill



Titanic Memorial – Belfast City Hall



Linen Hall Library



Statue of C.S. Lewis



Mount Stewart Jazz Festival

OUT AND ABOUT

There's no shortage of surrounding places of interest to visit on day trips from Belfast. If you don't have a car, don't worry, many bus and taxi companies run guided day-long tours

GET FOLKSY AT A TRANSPORT MUSEUM

Spend a half-day at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum delving into social history, heritage and transport. It's great fun to spend some time at Ballycultra here – a typical town of the early 1900s – which comes alive with costumed guides who practice skills such as lace-making, spinning, weaving and wood turning. It's a 15-minute drive east of Belfast on the road to Bangor.



Go back to the future at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum

A STately HOME WITH A DIFFERENCE

The stately neoclassical house, Mount Stewart, is owned by the National Trust and is full of delightful clutter and historic personality. The gardens are a particular highlight here, with Mediterranean-style formal sections and wooded areas that are perfect to while away the hours in.

Don't miss the Temple of the Winds – a copy of a similar structure in Athens. The house is an ideal stopping-off place on a tour of Strangford Lough, ending with a visit to pretty Portaferry.

A 12TH CENTURY CASTLE THAT'S LOOKING GOOD FOR ITS AGE

One of Ireland's oldest and largest castles, Carrickfergus Castle, which was built in 1180, is still in pretty good shape. Walk through the 13th century gatehouse into the heart of the building, where the five-storey keep (tower) stands with walls eight feet thick, and feel the historic atmosphere bear down upon you. Carrickfergus is a 15-minute drive north of Belfast, or you can catch a train from Belfast's Central or Yorkgate Stations.

TAKE A TRIP TO THE GIANT'S CAUSEWAY

Day trips to the Giant's Causeway, a UNESCO World Heritage Site just over an hour's drive along the spectacular Antrim coast, are run by tour companies including McComb's Coach Travel, Allen's Tours and Value Cabs. Some tours also take you to the exhilarating Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge nearby, with its



Giant's Causeway

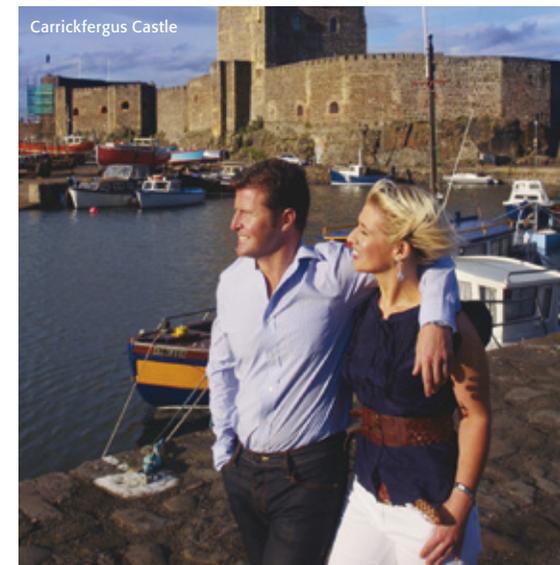
heart-stopping views of crashing waves. It's a place much loved by adrenaline junkies, but don't worry, crossing the swaying rope bridge isn't as scary as it looks, and is an experience that many visitors cherish forever. The Causeway lies just over an hour's drive north of Belfast.

VISIT IRELAND'S OLDEST PUB

Grace Neill's bar in Donaghadee, County Down, is reputed to be the oldest pub in Ireland and is said to boast a ghost or two. There are, of course, many rivals who claim a longer pedigree, but Grace Neill's is listed in the Guinness Book of Records and has hosted luminaries such as Peter the Great, Franz Liszt and John Keats over the years. These days, it's a great place to stop off for a drink and a bite to eat with menus for vegetarians, children and even those in need of an express lunch.

TEE OFF AT RORY MCILROY'S GOLF CLUB

Enjoy a tee off at one of the main golf courses in and around Belfast – or at Holywood Golf Club, home of Rory McIlroy, winner of the US Open 2011. You can walk the same fairways as the world famous golfer and enjoy the food and fun that makes the club so popular. Set in the Hollywood Hills of County Down, the club boasts beautiful views of Belfast Lough and the Antrim coast, and is seven miles from the city.



Carrickfergus Castle

Cork



Cork Farmers' Market



Cork Jazz



Cork Opera House



Relaxing in one of Cork's many hotels



Ballymaloe

CORK'S CULTURE IS SPICED WITH A DASH OF QUICK-FIRE HUMOUR, AND ITS FRIENDLY NATURE AND THE RELAXED ATTITUDE OF ITS PEOPLE HAVE ATTRACTED MANY NATIONALITIES TO MAKE THE CITY THEIR HOME

CORK

Cosmopolitan yet unmistakably Irish, grand yet intimate, Cork is a city with a distinct historical and cultural identity. In its galleries, art centres, theatres, churches and university, the city is a hustle of activity throughout the year.

Located on the southwest coast of Ireland, Cork is perched on the River Lee, which snakes its way through the city centre. Historically, the river has been one of the most important influences on the city ever since its original role as an ancient monastic settlement.

The river divides the city into north and south, with an island in the middle, and runs all the way into Cork Harbour, which is one of the world's largest and most impressive natural harbours, and a hive of activity opening out into the Celtic Sea.

Get talking to locals and they'll soon let you know that you're in the "real capital of Ireland", as Corkonians consider their city to be. It's also somewhere with arguably the most happening food scene on the island. Put simply: you can't come to Cork and not try the artisan cookery and produce. Whether it's bread or cheese, handmade chocolates or unique Turkish delight, culinary surprises pop up at every turn. The city's seafood also deserves special mention; little wonder as fresh fish is hauled in every day from local ports for the tables of Cork's stylish restaurants and elegant hotels.

Buoyed by the visit of Queen Elizabeth II in

2011, the English Market is a definite must-do for those with any sort of appetite. Sensory overload is the dish of the day at this bustling covered market with its razzle-dazzle of alleyways. Delis sit alongside organic farm food, sandwich stalls and cafés, along with an array of produce that you'll not see this side of the souks of Marrakesh. Look out for the local speciality tripe and drisheen (a type of black pudding). This market is somewhere you'll find hard to tear yourself away from, but there is a whole lot more to explore in Cork.

Tree-lined streets – especially St Patrick's Street, which is known to locals as the "Pana" – graceful avenues, an appealing tangle of narrow lanes, stone bridges and limestone quays make the city eminently walkable.

Visitors come to gaze at art, listen to opera, take in a play, or enjoy the vibes at the acclaimed autumn Jazz Festival. You can pack a huge amount into a weekend. Bursting with acclaimed restaurants, tapas bars and lively pubs, there's a lot going on in Cork to make it a brilliant weekend break away.

Cork is an easily navigable spot, and a good way to get to know its layout is with one of the three Cork Walks around the City Centre Island, South Parish, and Shandon areas. And whether you follow a tour or amble around by yourself, you'll soon discover that Cork is a city best explored on foot, with a stop-off for some food, a pint of Beamish stout or a bout of music along the way.

Cork



A traditional pub



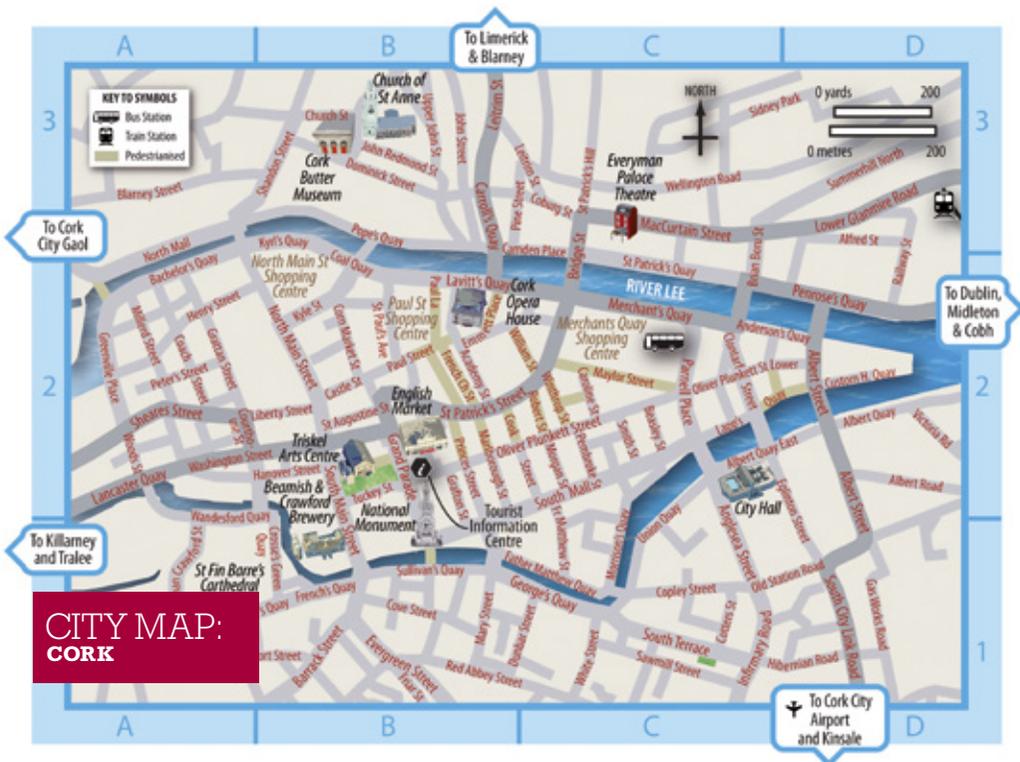
J.F.K. Park



Delicious foods at the English Market

THE EXPLORER: TEN

CORK IS AN EASILY NAVIGABLE SPOT, AND A GOOD WAY TO GET TO KNOW ITS LAYOUT IS WITH ONE OF THE THREE CORK WALKS AROUND THE CITY CENTRE ISLAND, SOUTH PARISH, AND SHANDON AREAS



CITY MAP: CORK

ESSENTIAL THINGS TO DO

Cork's lively personality is irresistible, and seeking out its attractions is an exercise in pure enjoyment

1 DISCOVER CORK ON A FORK

A visit to Cork – both the city and the county – is a trip into a land of bountiful food. Whether you're looking for lunch or dinner, or simply a snack and a drink, you'll soon understand why everyone raves about it. Michael Ryan, owner of the Cornstore Restaurant, is one Cork's many passionate foodies. "We're known for our hospitality and customer focus," he says. "There's a self-belief here – Cork is a confident place that visitors appreciate."

Over in Shandon's Cultural Quarter, the story of how butter became Ireland's most important food export is told in absorbing detail at the Cork Butter Museum. Historically, the butter roads were vital arteries in Cork and Kerry. In the 18th century, buttermen travelled them in big groups in case of attacks by highwaymen.

Farmers' markets thrive throughout the county of Cork and are wonderful platforms for new food producers. One of the best to visit for

the sheer enthusiasm of its punters, along with the wonderful produce on its stalls, is Middleton, east of the city. On Saturday mornings here you can try Declan Ryan's Arbutus handcrafted breads or O'Driscoll's fish, fresh from the sea. Not far away, Ballymaloe Cookery School is recognised as one of the leading places to hone your culinary skills under the watchful gaze of famous Irish chef Darina Allen.

2 EXPERIENCE A MARKET LIKE NO OTHER

At the O'Connell family stall in "fish alley" in the English Market they sell more than 20 types of fish. Mackerel, red mullet and hake are fresh from the ports of Union Hall and Castletownbere.

Full of a rich vein of Cork humour, the market was brought to world attention by the visit of Queen Elizabeth, who was apparently wowed by what she saw. And no wonder, shelves here groan with Irish artisan produce and farmhouse cheeses.

Looking for something truly unusual? Find out about the delicious story of Hadji Bey, a Turkish delight that was unique to Cork in the early 20th century and which has recently been reintroduced. Niall Daly at the Chocolate Shop calls it an essential part of Cork's past. "In my 12 years at the market, no product has been talked about as much as Hadji Bey. It's a catalyst for people's memories and is symbolic of Christmas and Easter."

3 BASK IN CHORAL EVENSONG

Look out for the stunning golden resurrection angel at St Finbarre's Cathedral. Local superstition says that if the angel – which faces the city – ever falls, it would signal the end of the world. With its three majestic spires, the cathedral is the most complete example of French Gothic architecture in Ireland. The cathedral's pedigree stretches back through 14 centuries of worship and it ranks as one of Ireland's longest-established religious settlements.

Consecrated in 1870, the cathedral is on a historic site that was once the entrance to medieval Cork. History has it that St Finbarre established a monastery here around 650AD. Finbarre is also acknowledged as being the founder of Cork (his name means "fair headed" in Irish, by the way). >

Cork



Cork Jazz Festival

As you walk through the main front door, keep an eye out for the statues of the five wise virgins and five foolish virgins standing at either side. The gilded dome roof is rich in mosaics, while the walls are lined with red Cork marble.

Visitors are welcome to attend midday prayers or choral evensong to savour the architectural beauty of this magnificent building. For many, the 3,000-pipe organ steals the show and the wonderful afterglow of evensong leaves a memorable impression.

4 CHOOSE YOUR OWN SONG TO PLAY TO THE PEOPLE OF CORK

Put on your ear plugs, climb the bell tower at St Anne's Church and pull the ropes hard to ring the bells. Choose your own tune, from Amazing Grace to Waltzing Matilda. The bell tower and church are made from local sandstone and limestone, while the clock is known as the four-faced liar because the four dials on the tower rarely show the same time. Organist John Mustard says St Anne's has been intertwined with the life of Cork since 1722 and is the oldest church in continuous use in the city. "It has been connected to an old part of the city for a long time," John notes. "It used to be a large parish but many people moved away. Now we have parishioners from Uganda, India and other countries so it's thriving again."

5 BE DAZZLED BY STUNNING JEWELLERY AND 7,000 YEARS OF HISTORY

An exquisite piece of gold jewellery in the shape of a tiny wren nestles in the archaeological

gallery on the ground floor of the Cork Public Museum. The bird was uncovered during a dig at an ancient fort at Garryduff in 1945. A thin sheet of beaten gold decorated with spiral designs, it dates from around 1000AD. Elsewhere, discover how the beginning of human settlement in County Cork dates back 7,000 years. Exhibitions explore the social and political histories of the city. Check out memorabilia about Irish revolutionary leader Michael Collins that sits alongside Roy Keane's football jersey. After your visit, wander the paths in the tranquil grounds of Fitzgerald's Park.

6 MINGLE WITH CORK GAOL'S GHOSTS

Fancy a bit of spine-tingling excitement? Then step into the 19th century and unlock the drama inside Cork Gaol's prison walls. On an atmospheric night-time tour, listen carefully for the eerie shuffle of the inmates' feet. In the furnished cells, you can even read the original prisoners' writing on the walls. The Irish nationalist, Countess Markievicz, who had a role in the 1916 Easter Rising, spent four months in prison here.

7 TAKE A PEW AT TRISKEL

Tony Sheehan, director of Triskel Christchurch, describes it as a "vital place for the artistic community and public". The arts centre, which opened in 2011 in a former church, is abuzz with music, drama, poetry and readings, but still retains its spiritual side as testified by the stained glass, organ, pulpit and crypt.

The hub of the centre is Plugd Records selling vinyl LPs and what Tony calls their "partners in crime", Gulpd Records. Don't miss the rich moist Beamish chocolate cake made by Vourneen Fayer. With its after-taste of the famous Cork stout, it's a mouthwatering treat.

8 DISCOVER A PAINTING WITH MANY FACES AT THE CRAWFORD ART GALLERY

Head for the Gibson room on the first floor of the Crawford Art Gallery and seek out the Red Rose, a portrait with a chequered life. This is Lady Hazel Lavery, an artist whose face appeared on Irish banknotes in the 20th century, and the portrait is painted by her husband Sir John Lavery. Strangely, it began life as a portrait of



Crawford Art Gallery

Mrs William Burrell, before being transformed into Sarah Bernhardt and later Viscountess Curzon. Only after this did it take on the permanent form of the esteemed Lady Lavery.

In 2012 the gallery received a massive boost by adding 39 major paintings to its permanent collection. The paintings, donated by Allied Irish Bank, include the work of Irish artists such as Jack B. Yeats, Seán Keating, Paul Henry and Roderic O'Connor. The gesture filled gaps in the gallery's collection of 2,900 paintings; its chairman said it represented a "coming-of-age" for the Crawford as a National Cultural Institution.

9 ENJOY A NIGHT AT THE OPERA

Not for nothing do the people in charge of the Cork Opera House call it "The House of Fun". Naturally, opera buffs love it, but don't be put off if The Magic Flute or La Traviata isn't your cup of tea. There's lots more going on. How about ballet, concerts, musicals, theatre, choral singing, stand-up comedy, puppet shows or other family productions?

Built in 1965 – on the site of the original theatrical house – the newly renovated Opera House attracts culture lovers of all ages. While waiting for the big show, street performers take up their positions on the piazza to amuse you, and you can watch them over a caffeine boost at one of the pavement cafés.

You'll also discover a diverse programme of theatre and musicals in the delightful Victorian Everyman Palace at the Crane Lane Theatre, which is based in a converted gentleman's club. Or head to the Cork Arts Theatre, which supports contemporary and emerging playwrights.

Night-time buzz in Cork city

10 EXPERIENCE FOOT-TAPPING TRADITIONAL MUSIC WITH ALL THAT JAZZ

Savvy locals regard Sin É as one of the best pubs for fiddlers. On an average night, up to 10 musicians could be performing. If you arrive on a quiet night (you may just be too early), try the Corner House next door. Old street songs and favourites such as The Boys of Fairhill are usually part of the repertoire.

Many other pubs hold live music with local bands featuring rock, blues or jazz – the latter being the solid foundation of the world-renowned Cork Jazz Festival, which is held in late October every year. Venues and gigs are as varied as they are many, with fans returning year after year for a dose of this saxophone-led magic.

Cork's pubs are typically Irish: one of the key focal points of social and cultural life. Some, such as the Long Valley, date from the mid-19th century. Its booths are built from wood salvaged from wrecked ocean liners. Take a seat, order a tea, coffee, or a pint of the local Beamish or Murphy's stout ("magic in a glass" they call it here), plus a hearty sandwich with thickly-cut bread and home-cooked meat. Delicious.

Other bars, such as the Roundy, sell beer from Cork's Franciscan Well microbrewery. And if you want to sample some of Cork's finest craft beers, then crack open a Howling Gale Ale from Mitchelstown. Or for a real thirst-quencher, don't miss the Stonewell Nohoval Irish craft cider, fermented with natural yeasts. Sláinte (cheers) from Cork!

FIVE FOR FREE

Cork wears its attractions on its sleeve, with lots to do that won't cost you a cent

1 WRAP YOURSELF IN CLOISTERED STILLNESS

Take a walk through the grounds of University College Cork (UCC), and you'll come across some intriguing ancient Ogham stones on open display. Dating from the 5th century AD, the stones are inscribed with the earliest written source of the Irish language. With their inscriptions and notches, the stones commemorate the name of a person and are found mostly in the southwest. The group on display in UCC is the largest public collection anywhere on the island of Ireland. Sunday morning is the best time to visit.

TOURS

Cork City Tours operates open-top, double-decker buses, which run regularly during the day. The route is through the main streets, along the quays and past city centre landmarks. The combined ticket is valid for two consecutive days and is interchangeable. The company also runs a Cork Outer Limits Tour to sites beyond the city centre, including Blackrock village with its medieval castle and dome.

Sightseeing and historic walking tours leave

2 GRAB A SLICE OF FREE ART

Free tours of the Crawford Art Gallery are open to all visitors on Saturday at 2.30pm and Thursday at 6.30pm. Take advantage of this amazing opportunity to get an insight into some of Ireland's notable creative masterpieces.

Another of Cork's fabulous artistic institutions, the Lewis Glucksman Gallery holds free guided tours from the main information desk. In 2007, the gallery was named as one of the 1001 buildings you must see before you die. So even if you don't head there for the artwork, there's plenty to get those architectural buffs' heads craning.

3 DRINK IN THE ECHO OF THE ECHO CALLER

Cork wouldn't be the quietest of cities, but in between the hustle and bustle, keep an ear out for the ear-splitting call of the Echo Boys, sellers of the Evening Echo, one of Cork's oldest newspapers. Before you see them you'll hear their unmistakable long clarion call reverberating around the streets. And, sure, while you're there, you can pick up a copy and start studying the comings and goings of the locals.

4 SEE HOW THE OLD CITY LOOKED

Cork Vision Centre is a leading cultural visitor attraction, which is based in the renovated St Peter's Church. This history of this restored building stretches back to 1270, when King Henry III granted patronage of the church to the Bishop of Cork. Deconsecrated in 1949, the church was dilapidated until 1988 when the council took it under its wing. The revitalised structure has won several national and international awards, and the focal point for many visitors is a detailed scale timber model of Cork city.

5 TAKE A WALK ON THE WILD CITY SIDE

Walk to the elegant South Gate Bridge, the best spot to view wildlife in the city. Survey the tidal River Lee and on an average day you may see dolphins, swans, seals and seagulls. Frequently a solitary heron dominates the birdlife in the area. But this isn't just any ordinary bridge amongst the many that span the River Lee; it's likely that a bridge has existed on or near this site since the very first arrival of the Vikings in Cork back in the 9th and 10th centuries.

from the tourist information office in Grand Parade. Check with the tourist board for departure times and themes, as they vary. Most tours last 90 minutes.

The Cork Fabulous Tasting Trail is led by Alice Coyle on Saturday mornings and lasts three hours. Stops are made at a number of outdoor and indoor markets, cafés, restaurants and pubs – so go easy with your breakfast.



Medieval Cork



Strolling on the banks of the River Lee



Midleton Distillery, County Cork

Cork



MY CITY:

KAY HARTE

“The magic of Cork is that it’s so easy to explore on foot. I especially love Saturday mornings when I drop into the Crawford Art Gallery, keeping an eye out for Cork sculptors and painters past and present. Then I’ll head for Fitzgerald’s Park, a beautiful open green space with great works by artists Seamus Murphy, Edward Delaney and Oisín Kelly. After this I cross the road to University College Cork and into the [Lewis] Glucksman Gallery for a look around. I never leave the campus without visiting the Honan Chapel as the Harry Clarke stained glass windows and the mosaic floor are superb. My next port of call is the English Market where I’ll pick up something for dinner. I like to look at the Poetry Wall upstairs, as well as the artworks of Billy Foley.”

Kay Harte
runs the **Farmgate Café**
in the **English Market**

OUT AND ABOUT

Cork is the biggest county in Ireland, so make sure to allow plenty of time to see its breathtaking attractions

TITANIC’S LAST PORT OF CALL

Listen to the Queenstown Story at the Cobh Heritage Centre. The town was Ireland’s most important emigration departure point and the last port of call for the Titanic before it set off across the Atlantic. It was also the final resting place for victims of the Lusitania sinking; a memorial on the quay commemorates their passing. An exhibition at the Heritage Centre shows the last atmospheric photos of Titanic, taken by the Jesuit priest Father Frank Browne. Hourly trains run from Cork to Cobh, and the journey takes about 20 minutes.

COMET CHASING

Play the comet chaser and explore the cosmos at Blackrock Castle Observatory, home to Ireland’s first interactive theatre astronomy exhibition. Originally built as a 16th century watchtower to guard the entrance to Cork against pirates, the castle has reinvented itself as a place to learn about the Universe – and it’s not just for kids.

THE BLARNEY STONE

It might be touristy but kissing the Blarney Stone at Blarney Castle is an experience to remember. The stone is said to have the power of conferring eloquence on those who kiss it. While evidence may be dubious about acquiring the “gift of the gab”, it’s still a fun thing to do. Enjoy a walk around the grounds and the pleasant gardens attached to the 15th century tower house castle. Coaches leave regularly each day from Cork bus station for Blarney and the journey takes 30 minutes.



Bantry House



Gardens on Garnish Island, Glengarriff

FOTA WILDLIFE

Get up close to an exotic collection of animals at the 70-acre Fota Wildlife Park located on its own island. Home to monkeys, zebras, giraffes, gibbons and kangaroos, it’s also an important breeding centre for cheetahs and wallabies. There are children’s play areas dotted throughout the park, as well as two cafés and a gift store. Fota is easily accessed from Cork city by train; journey time is 15 minutes.

THE ULTIMATE FOODIE TOWN

If any Irish town is known for the quality of its food, then it’s got to be chic Kinsale. The Fishy Fishy Café is one of the top restaurants here, offering everything from gourmet seafood to a humble bag of fish and chips. There’s a regular bus service from Cork to Kinsale (journey time is about 50 minutes).

WHISKEY SECRETS

Learn how Jameson has become one of the leading Irish whiskeys and discover the secrets of triple distillation at the Jameson Experience in Midleton. Expert guides will lead you around the distillery, and the tour lasts about an hour. Midleton is 30 minutes east of Cork city, and you can catch either a train or a bus.

PICTURESQUE TOWNS AND VILLAGES

Venture further afield with a car and explore delightful West Cork towns such as Baltimore, Bantry, Clonakilty, Glengarriff and Skibbereen. Each has their own personality, great cafés and seafood restaurants and stunning surrounding scenery, but they are a long way from Cork city. Are they worth it? Definitely... Just make sure you leave plenty of time to enjoy your visit.

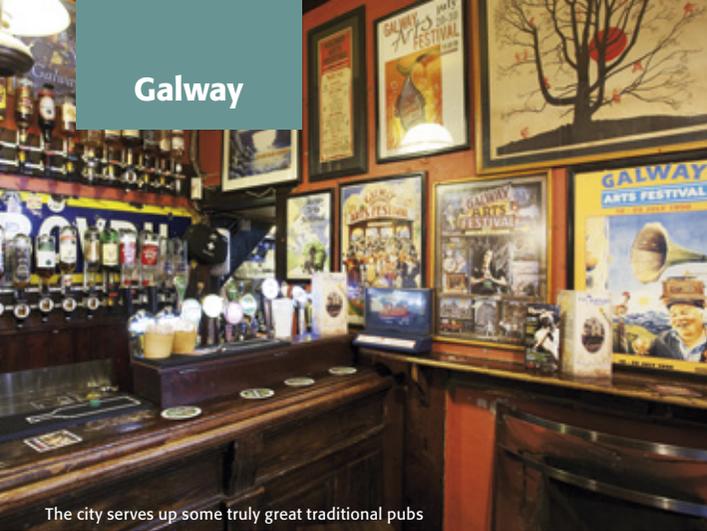


Shopping in Kinsale



Blarney Castle

Galway



The city serves up some truly great traditional pubs



Shopping in Galway city



Galway Arts Festival



Nimmo's restaurant



The Galway Races

YOU CAN SENSE THE COLOURFUL CHARGE OF HISTORY IN THE SALTY GALWAY AIR THAT BREEZES THROUGH THE WINDING LANES LINED WITH TRADITIONAL SHOPS AND RELAXED PAVEMENT CAFÉS

GALWAY

Galway has always owned a certain bohemian flair. It personifies the west of Ireland psyche – laid back and friendly. The city has a reputation for artistic creativity and an infectious up-tempo vibe that is played out in a thrilling annual festival calendar, taking in everything from music to oysters.

The city's flamboyant arts scene attracts visitors from all over the world with a whirlwind of activity that takes in the much-trumpeted Galway Arts Festival and the small, critically acclaimed Galway Theatre Festival. And if it's social glamour you're after, then don a fancy hat at the summer Galway Races at Ballybrit, when 250,000 happy punters converge at the racecourse for equestrian high-jinks that last a whole week.

Of course, it's not just festivals that give Galway its pulsating personality. History saturates the city streets and traces of old Galway, including the walls and the distinctive Spanish Arch, root the city in its seafaring past.

Unlike some Irish cities, Galway was not conquered by the Vikings but instead was

invaded by the Anglo-Normans. The medieval city grew up inside the stone walls, and developed as a thriving port for wine, spices and fish. It became known as the "City of the Tribes" (and still is today) because of the influence of just 14 wealthy merchant families who ruled it as an independent city-state and turned it into a prosperous town.

That prosperity is still in evidence: old stone houses have been converted into restaurants and boutiques. Apartments and hotels occupy the sites where derelict warehouses once stood. Buskers, jugglers, puppeteers, living statues and sign-holders all jostle for space – no wonder people call it the San Francisco of Ireland.

Beneath the surface, though, beats a heart that is deeply traditional, deeply Irish: heavy-knit Aran jumpers crowd the shops; Claddagh rings twinkle in the windows of jewellers; traditional music sets pubs alight; and the Irish language is spoken with ease. Simply put, if you want to immerse yourself in Irish culture and language, Galway's the place to do it.

Galway



Shop Street, Galway



Fun in the waves



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

THE EXPLORER: TEN

ESSENTIAL THINGS TO DO

enough so you won't lose your bearings. Take it easy, amble along, listen to the street entertainment, and stop off for a pint or two along the way, the living is most definitely easy.

2 FEEL THE MAGNETISM OF A FOLKSY HERO

"We call it our little mermaid," says Breandán Ó hEaghra, curator at the Galway City Museum. He's referring to the statue of poet Patrick Joseph Conroy (also known as Pádraic Ó Conaire and Sean-Phádraic), one of the city's most famous literary sons. His limestone statue – a seated figure dressed in the worn clothes of a countryman with notebook in hand – has pride of place in the foyer of Galway City Museum. Conroy wrote short stories and is recognised as one of the first Modernist writers of fiction in Irish. After returning from London in 1914, he spent the rest of his life roaming around Ireland, living off a small income from stories and rural sketches. You can't miss his image on the covers of books and maps about the city, so keep your eyes peeled.

3 EXPERIENCE A MUSICAL MEDIEVAL CHURCH

Packed with curious corners and ancient tombs, Ireland's largest medieval parish church, St Nicholas' Collegiate Church, was built in 1320. Although he is best known for his Santa Claus role, St Nick is the patron saint of sailors and was commonly found in medieval seaports such as Galway.

Today, the church is known not just for its sacred music. On summer nights, Irish traditional Tunes in the Church features the rector on his concert flute. Call in and you may hear him playing Toss the Feathers or The Moving Cloud.

Tour the building and look for the Crusader's Tomb with an inscription in Norman-French, or a holy water stoup built into the church wall. Christopher Columbus is reputed to have prayed here in 1477 before setting off on his voyage of discovery to the New World. Maybe St Nick watched over him...

4 EXPLORE THE HOUSE OF JAMES JOYCE'S WIFE AND MUSE

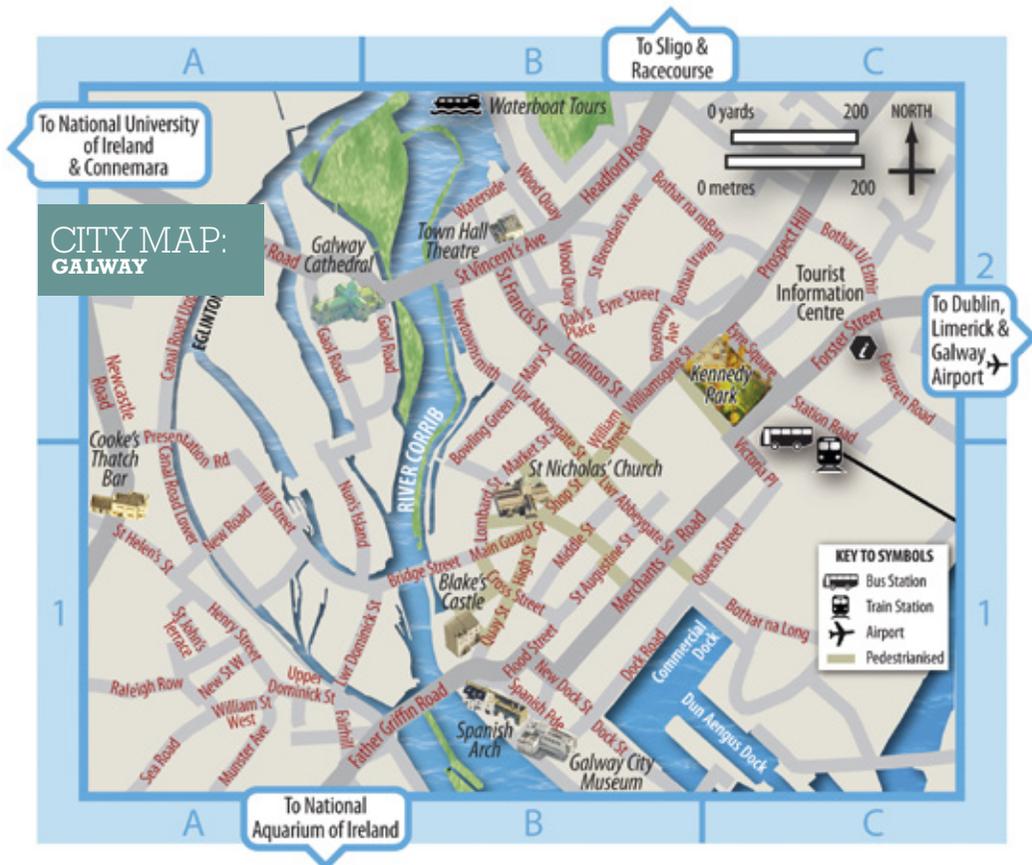
Hidden away in the narrow Bowling Green is what looks like an unremarkable house. Now a museum, it was the tiny family home of Nora Barnacle, James Joyce's wife and muse. >

With a youthful population and a bohemian spirit, Galway's charms are best enjoyed by strolling the city lanes and soaking up the atmosphere. But there's plenty to keep sightseers amused, too

1 UNLEASH YOUR INNER BUSKER

As you walk through a sea of people in the hubbub of Galway's shopping streets, you should bear something in mind: joining in the spontaneous applause of the crowd surrounding the buskers is not enough, these guys positively encourage audience participation. But don't panic, an extra guitar, tin whistle or accordion is usually to hand. "It's difficult to get a space sometimes, you have to fight for your corner, but I love Galway," says David Mannion who busks with a didgeridoo. "There's so much culture here and the people are very kind."

One thing's for sure: there's an unfailing energy in the warren of streets overflowing with shops, restaurants and pubs. With its cobbled lanes and easygoing ambience, Galway is an ideal place for aimless wandering while you listen to the street performers, plus it's compact



Galway



The Latin Quarter mural in Galway

Joyce visited her house in 1909 and 1912, and today The Nora Barnacle House gives a wonderful glimpse into how an ordinary family lived early in the 20th century. The couple had their first date on 16 June 1904, which has since become immortalised in Joyce's most famous work *Ulysses*, and is now universally known as Bloomsday.

5 SHOP FOR SOME TRADITIONAL CELTIC JEWELLERY

Call in and watch Jonathan Margetts tinkering with rings in Thomas Dillon's shop on Quay Street. He's an expert on the history of the Claddagh Ring, Ireland's most famous traditional piece of jewellery. The ring started life in the fishing village of Claddagh, a community of Irish-speaking families who still elect their own "King".

The design consists of two hands holding a heart that wears a crown. The heart represents love, the crown loyalty and the hands symbolise friendship. The rings were originally made in Thomas Dillon's, which dates from 1750. Today, it sells gold and sterling silver reproductions of this much sought-after fashion accessory and symbol of romance.

6 BROWSE AROUND THE FUNKY SATURDAY MARKET

Work up an appetite by making your way to the city's Saturday outdoor market. It's fun and funky and locals love it so much they get up at the crack of dawn for the best fresh food. More than 70 stall holders set out their wares behind St Nicholas' Church. And in the thick of the action, it feels like the whole world is here: market gardeners,

herbalists, fish sellers, cheesemongers and artisan bakers. But it's not just food, you'll also find hat sellers, woodcarvers, candle makers, jigsaw puzzles, and a host of handcrafted knitwear and clothing stalls.

7 SNIFF OUT THE VARIOUS DELIGHTS OF KIRWAN'S LANE

One of the most attractive sides to Galway is its narrow lanes with quirky shops. Tucked off the main thoroughfare, elegant cafés, craft shops and perfumeries provide a sensory delight in the charmingly restored Kirwan's Lane. If you're up for cupcakes, then take a restful break at Goya's. The owner Emer Murray lays the cream on thick on the chocolate gâteau. "The lane is small, but it's a wonderful experience for tourists," she says, "and there's a synergy between all the traders."

Step into the Perfumerie, run by Margaret Mangan, and you'll be bowled over by the aroma of jasmine, mimosa or roast chestnut from a range of candles, soaps and diffusers.

"Our vision is dramatic simplicity," explains Margaret. "Kirwan's Lane is inspirational – it's where we connect with the past and it's the only place to be in Galway."

8 BET ON A HORSE, MEET AN AUTHOR OR JOIN IN SOME "JOYFUL ABANDONMENT"

Whatever time of the year you come to Galway, you can be sure of a party or festival. In the summer, the city welcomes tourists from all around the world for the Galway Races, an extravaganza at the end of July. They're held at the Galway Racecourse at Ballybrit, just under five kilometres east of the city.

Around the same time, the streets fill with revellers enjoying the Galway Arts Festival with its mix of drama, music and dance led by the flamboyant street theatre company Macnas, whose name incidentally means "joyful abandonment".

In April, the Cúirt International Festival of Literature attracts big-name contemporary authors. It's a great way to see around some of the city's buildings such as the Mechanics Institute (normally closed to the public) or the fabulously glamorous Hotel Meyrick, which is host to some of the festival's events.

You'll find a host of talks and fringe shows



Afternoon tea in a Galway pub

ONE OF THE MOST ATTRACTIVE SIDES TO GALWAY IS ITS NARROW LANES WITH QUIRKY SHOPS. KIRWAN'S LANE IS A PARTICULAR SENSORY DELIGHT WITH ELEGANT CAFÉS, CRAFT SHOPS AND PERFUMERIES

ranging from poetry slams to pop-up readings, too. The Galway Early Music Festival in May celebrates the culture of Europe through medieval, Renaissance and Baroque music, dance and costume; while at the end of September each year, the Galway International Oyster and Seafood Festival – the world's longest-running festival of its kind – brings a splash of everything from jive, jazz and cookery to the city. No wonder it's a favourite.

9 EAT TILL YOU DROP

They've won awards for the best chips in Ireland, and few would dispute that McDonagh's, a long-time Galway institution, reigns supreme. Serve yourself and sit at a communal table (a great way to meet locals and get the lowdown about what's going on); or choose the more upscale seafood restaurant with table service. Either way – it's an appetising winner.

Walk around the streets and the aromas of food will envelop you. No visit is complete without calling into the family-owned Griffin's Bakery (going strong since 1876 and now in its fifth generation) for their unbeatable breads including bracks, rye, soda, gluten-free, multigrain and even one with an Irish whiskey kick.

Get to know your way around the city

Next stop is the locally adored Sheridan's for cheese and their sweet Galway honey (most people use it to boost the immune system or beat hay fever). And don't forget the irresistible McCambridge's food emporium, a deli and café combination that will knock your culinary socks off.

10 KICK YOUR HEELS IN THE AIR AT MONROE'S TAVERN

Take your partners for the Siege of Ennis or the Walls of Limerick traditional Irish dances. Tuesday night is set-dancing night at Monroe's Tavern, a whitewashed pub in Galway's West End. "It's a great shindig," says the barmaid Catriona Gormally, "and once the tourists have watched for 30 minutes, there's no stopping them getting up to dance, too."

Galway's pubs are more than just places for dancing and drinking: poetry, music, drama and food are all served up. Rub shoulders in Neachtain's bar with musicians, poets, artists and a hotchpot of dreamers, hippies, shooters of the breeze, and alternative lifestyleers. Part of Galway's identity for generations, Neachtain's is a mirror of the city itself. Its walls are decorated with the poster history of the arts festival that feels like it's been running since time began. It has everything you could ever ask for in a pub: turf fires, snugs and friendly service.

Up the street, live music is on tap twice a day – late afternoon and in the evening – in Taaffes in the Latin Quarter. And even if all you want is a quiet pint, you'll find an abundance of pubs tucked into cosy corners all across the city and in the side roads off Shop Street.

Galway

FIVE FOR FREE

Feel the buzz of history and enjoy some of Galway's most scenic sights without spending a cent...

1 COUNT THE FLAGS IN EYRE SQUARE

Fluttering flags, each one representing one of the Tribes of Galway, fly in Eyre Square. The natural heart of the city and Galway's first public park, in 1963 it was the location of a speech by John F. Kennedy when he was presented with the freedom of the city during his visit to Ireland. The revamped square has been landscaped with a sweeping walkway that has revitalised the city. Erected in 1984, the Quincentennial Fountain celebrates the 500th anniversary of Galway becoming a city.

TOURS

Lally Tours operate open-top sightseeing, hop-on hop-off double-decker bus tours with 15 stops at city landmarks. Buses leave every 90 minutes from the tourist office in Galway's Forster Street.

You can join a historical guided walking tour around narrow streets that will take in the medieval parts of the city or the Claddagh and the Tudor Gothic-style quadrangle at University College Galway.

2 GET UP CLOSE TO 15TH CENTURY GALWAY

Step inside the 15th century Lynch's Castle and survey a full-scale reproduction of a 1651 map showing the symmetrical, yet simple, layout of the city's streets. Although referred to as a castle, it was in fact the town house of the premier Tribe of Galway. It is now a bank where wall panels in the foyer tell the building's history. It's the city's only complete secular medieval building.

3 FEED THE SWANS IN THE CORRIB

At the mouth of the River Corrib in front of Claddagh Hall, take a bag of old bread to feed the swans swimming by. Then enjoy the lights of Galway Cathedral reflected in the canal at night. Go down to the Corrib, watch the moon rising over the Spanish Arch, and sit by the Claddagh while you contemplate a city that doesn't like to rush things.

4 WALLOW IN THE PAST WITH THE RED EARL

Experience where justice was dispensed, taxes collected and banquets held at the stunning Hall of the Red Earl

in Druid Lane. Linked to the foundation of the town in the 13th century, the ruins were opened in 2010. They are the earliest surviving settlement within Galway's ancient walls, and are inside glass panelling with a raised viewing walkway, so you stand squarely in the middle of history. Display cabinets hold clay pipes, a gold cufflink and a human skull.

5 SEEK OUT POETIC INSPIRATION

C'mon, you're in Galway: the scenic west of Ireland, nerve centre of bards, singers and storytellers. If you can't find poetic inspiration here, you're not looking hard enough. Why not take a walk around and seek out the public works of Seamus Heaney, Louis MacNeice and Walter Macken. Or make your way to Wolfe Tone Bridge where one of the city's contemporary poets, Moya Cannon's meditation is inscribed:

I follow the light down the canal path, across the road and on to the Claddagh. In a blast of morning light, which has turned canal, river and estuary to mercury, even the cars on the Long Walk are transfigured.

The Galway Tour Guides Association, with 20 guides, organises trips around County Galway and County Clare. Tours are held in English, French, German, Italian and Japanese.

At the tourist office you can equip yourself with a medieval audio walking tour of Galway. With your map and headphones, just like the rest of the city, you're welcome to complete it at your own pace.



Browsing the cobblestone streets

Galway Cathedral



Performing artists



John F. Kennedy Memorial Park



The glassy tranquility of Lough Corrib

Galway



MY CITY:

VINNY BROWNE

“The poet Louis MacNeice once called Galway ‘the strangest town in Ireland’. This is true in the most positive sense because Galway – Gaelic, cosmopolitan, arty, surrounded by abounding waters and throbbing with festivals – is indeed a rare bird even by Irish standards. Begin your day with a walk on the prom in Salthill and head towards town for lunch in Quay Street or Dominick Street. Then grab a takeaway coffee and feel the energy of a youthful population mostly born elsewhere – they know how to enjoy themselves. In the evening, there’s never a shortage of cultural options, including arts festivals, the renowned Druid Theatre or literary events. Stroll across Grattan Bridge, over the Claddagh to some of the late night venues in the West End. Bliss.”

Vinny Browne
Manager of Charlie Byrnes
Bookshop, Galway

OUT AND ABOUT

If you’ve made it to Galway, you just have to spend a few days exploring the surrounding areas, including Connemara, the Aran Islands and the Burren. Walkers, golfers, anglers, wildflower-lovers and anyone with a passion for the outdoors will have a great time on the west coast

KICK THE WALL

The booming breakers of the ocean are a short distance away from Galway city centre. Follow the shoreline path out to Salthill to “kick the wall”, a popular and long-established tradition. Legend has it that kicking the pier-end wall adds years to your life.

ARAN ISLANDS

Jump on a boat and sail to the Aran Islands. If you don’t have a car, the best way to reach the islands is to take a shuttle bus from Galway city to Rossaveal, 37km to the west, then board one of the daily boat services for the 45-minute trip, which will drop you on the main island of Inis Mór. From there you can walk or take a bus across the island to the spectacular ruins of the fort of Dún Aonghasa. Watch out for the highest waves in Ireland, which pound the seashore here. If you don’t feel like a boat trip, you can fly to the islands with Aer Arann – it’s a seven-minute flight from Inverin (a 45-minute drive from Galway city) to Inis Mór.

LOUGH CORRIB

Lough Corrib is the second largest lough on the island of Ireland. Join a scenic cruise and sit out on the spacious sun deck to float through an inland water journey on the Corrib Princess. Sailings leave from Woodquay in Galway city.



Kinvara Harbour



The Burren's unique limestone plateau

KINVARA

Head south to the pretty coastal town of Kinvara – it’s the home of the renowned Galway Hooker sailing boats. In summer, the Hookers race against each other in a grand regatta. The town is packed with lively cafés, pubs and shops. Browse the crafts at Murphy Store, a 200-year-old building at the harbour, linger over coffee and gaze at the boats.

HEAD FOR THE BURREN

Search for the small gentian, a dazzling blue wildflower that delights visitors to the Burren, just up the coast in County Clare during spring or early summer. The best way to be sure of spotting it is to join Heart of Burren Walks tour by Tony Kirby. Kirby will also point out some of the 700 other species of flowers, including

several native orchids, found on the limestone pavement. The Burren is 45 minutes south of Galway by car, or you can take a bus from Galway to Ballyvaughan, the nearest village.

CLIFFS OF MOHER

Experience a virtual reality adventure at the state-of-the-art, underground Cliffs of Moher Visitor Centre in County Clare. The Atlantic Edge gives you a bird’s-eye view of cliff-edge life above and below sea level. Of course, there’s nothing like seeing the real thing, and afterwards you can admire the cliffs themselves from spectacular viewing platforms. Or go further and explore the new coastal pathways. Many guided coach tours leave daily from Galway during high season. Expect a journey time of approximately 75 minutes.



The Aran Islands



Breathtaking views at the Cliffs of Moher

Limerick



The Milk Market



Adare Village



King John's Castle



Limerick City Gallery of Art

A DEFINITE LIMERICK MUST-SEE IS THE 800-YEAR-OLD KING JOHN'S CASTLE, ONE OF THE MOST INTACT MEDIEVAL CASTLES IN IRELAND

LIMERICK

There are few better places to start your visit to Limerick than the beautifully restored Milk Market on Cornmarket Row. Walk around the farmhouse cheese and chutney stalls on a Saturday morning, listen to the banter and you'll soon feel the pulse of this exuberant city. Limerick – the gateway to the Shannon Region – is a place in its prime. Historic areas have been revitalised and centuries-old buildings given a confident look that makes them glisten in the sunlight. And whether you come to appreciate some of the best Irish art, watch a sporting event or enjoy a concert, there's plenty to draw you in and keep you hooked.

Viking traders founded Limerick in the 9th century, establishing a settlement on an island in the River Shannon. Trading is still big business today, as you'll discover on a stroll through the pedestrianised Cruises Street. Deep-rooted connections with the past are reflected in shops with traditional fronts housing antique dealers, saddlers and bakers. Looking for Celtic silver or a blackthorn shillelagh (a traditional walking stick)?

Then look no further than the quirky alleyway of Fox's Bow with craft, leather and jewellery stores – it's one place you're bound to find something unique to take home.

A definite Limerick must-see is King John's Castle, which celebrated its 800th birthday in 2012 and is one of the most intact medieval castles in Ireland. As you'll soon discover, culture and history loom large in Limerick: the Limerick City and the Hunt are both world-renowned museums, while you can delve into the schooldays of one of Limerick's most illustrious writers Frank McCourt (author of *Angela's Ashes*) at Leamy House.

More than anything, Limerick is synonymous with sport, and with rugby in particular. The expansion of Thomond Park Stadium has boosted the city's status. Strike up conversation with a garrulous supporter in one of the convivial pubs and he or she will delight in telling you about memorable Munster victories. In 2011, Limerick was even crowned European City of Sport, a deserved accolade for a place that promotes sporting excellence.

Limerick



The Hunt Museum



The Whitehouse Bar



THE EXPLORER: FIVE

ESSENTIAL THINGS TO DO

gallery opened a €1.7 million extension and is well worth a visit. No cultural trawl is complete without visiting the impressive Hunt Museum with its outstanding displays – one of the finest collections of Celtic and medieval treasures outside Dublin.

3 SIT AT A SCHOOL DESK WITH LIMERICK'S MOST FAMOUS WRITER

Explore the life of the Pulitzer Prize-winning author Frank McCourt in Leamy House, his old school. Although born in Brooklyn, McCourt was educated in Limerick and wrote the bestselling *Angela's Ashes* about his childhood there. The reconstructions include maps, blackboards and inkwells; while a mannequin sits at a desk studying French grammar. After your visit, join the *Angela's Ashes* walking tour, which takes in a staggering 42 places from the book.

4 READ POETRY AT THE WHITE HOUSE OR SAY PRAYERS AT ST MARY'S

The Irish President himself no less, Michael D Higgins – a Limerick man by birth – has recited his poetry in the White House, the city's oldest pub and haunt of poets, writers and wits; if you're lucky you may even hear a "Limerick" (a short, witty poem) being delivered. Visitors are welcome to read their own poetry, and for added value, free finger food is served. The manager Glenn McLoughlin calls Limerick "a big village", and says the poetry is a great outlet for people. "They inspire each other and tourists love to watch and join in," he says. For something completely different walk across to St Mary's Church of Ireland Cathedral, the city's oldest building in daily use. It was founded in 1168 by King Donal Mór O'Brien on the site of his palace.

5 WATCH THE "TRY OF ALL TRIES" AT THOMOND PARK

Munster rugby supporters have long memories. They never forget how they beat the mighty All Blacks 12-0 in October 1978. And just in case you missed it first-time round, a TV screen in the museum shows footage from the "match of all matches". Tours of the hallowed ground are also available. And the stadium is not just for sports fans: pop concerts attract internationally acclaimed performers, too.

Expect the unexpected in Limerick – from deep-fried eggs at a Victorian market to quirky pubs that play host to literary presidents, it's all there for the taking

1 SNACK YOUR WAY AROUND THE MILK MARKET

Saturday morning is the best time to capture the fusion of flavour, music and banter in an old stone building that was once a corn market. With its grand new canopy, the Milk Market is now a buzz of activity with traders from all over Munster. Pick up lip-smacking spelt breads, and a mouth-watering selection of organic sausages, jams, pastries and local chocolates.

2 DISCOVER GREAT ART BY JACK B YEATS

Make your way into the Limerick City Gallery to find a superb collection of Irish paintings. A good starting point is to look for *Chairopanes*, Irish artist Jack B Yeats's portrayal of a fairground amusement. The paint is applied in thick layers and the work captures the energy and excitement of the funfair. In 2012, the

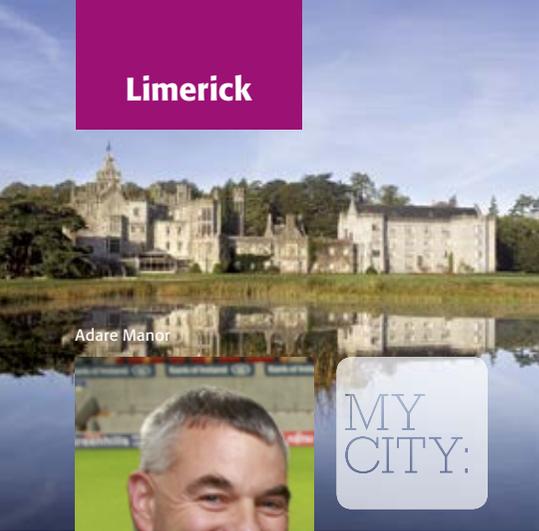
THE QUIRKY ALLEYWAY OF FOX'S BOW HAS A RANGE OF CRAFT, LEATHER AND JEWELLERY STORES – JUST THE PLACE TO FIND SOMETHING UNIQUE TO TAKE HOME

CITY MAP: LIMERICK



The Hunt Museum

The Whitehouse Bar



Adare Manor



MY CITY:

DAVID MAHEDY

OUT AND ABOUT

Historic sites abound close to the city and reward a day trip by car with lovely villages to stop in along the way and medieval entertainment aplenty...

A VILLAGE OF PRETTY COTTAGES

Southwest of Limerick, Adare is one of Ireland's prettiest villages. Its thatched stone-built cottages have colourful front gardens and the village is noted for its antique and gift shops as well as tea rooms. If you want to stay here in style, make sure to try the esteemed neo-Gothic Adare Manor, one of the areas most luxurious places to stay. Adare is a 20-minute drive from the city. You can alternatively take either the Killarney or Tralee buses from Limerick Bus Station which will drop you in the village.

DOLPHIN WATCHING AT LOOP HEAD

Take a trip to Loop Head, bring your binoculars and spend an hour in the company of dolphins. It's a great way to watch these wonderful creatures diving, falling and crisscrossing through the waves.

MEDIEVAL ESCAPADES

Fancy a goblet of mead? Sign up for a candlelit medieval banquet at Bunratty Castle. Embrace the spirit of this 15th century castle as you indulge in a four-course feast to the accompaniment of some of Ireland's best singers and musicians.

LOUGH DERG CRUISES

Sit back and relax on a pleasure cruise of Lough Derg on the Spirit of Killaloe. James Whelan runs a luxury 50-seater boat and the hour-long cruise comes with an informative commentary. You can board the boat at Killaloe, a 30-minute drive or



Dolphins at Loop Head



Foynes Flying Boat Museum

bus journey from Limerick city. The lough is the second largest in Ireland, and its shores are dotted with towns and villages.

STONE CIRCLES AT LOUGH GUR

Catch the spirit of the past in a walk around Lough Gur. Set in a peaceful valley surrounded by hills, 19km from Limerick, Lough Gur, with its horseshoe-shaped lake, is deeply atmospheric. It is one of western Europe's most complete Stone Age and Bronze Age sites with stone circles, tombs, lakeside huts and dwellings.

THE BALLYHOURA MOUNTAINS

Located around north Cork and east Limerick, the Ballyhoura Mountains are prime hiking and walking territory. But if you're not in the mood

for donning walking boots, then there's a great variety of alternative outdoor pursuits in this prime natural wonderland. Mountain biking, horse riding and adventure activities all attract energetic crowds to explore and enjoy the region. There's also a good variety of cultural and heritage sites, including the Grange Stone Circle from around 2000BC, the 13th century Kilmallock Friary and Liscarroll Castle.

CATCH THE SPIRIT OF THE PAST IN A WALK AROUND THE DEEPLY ATMOSPHERIC LOUGH GUR IN A PEACEFUL VALLEY SURROUNDED BY HILLS

"Limerick is steeped in history, art and music, and in recent times, is the epicentre of what's great in sport in Ireland. From the 1690 Siege of Limerick to modern day sieges in Thomond Park, this vibrant city is an example of how to merge the past with the ultra-modern technological world. Sports events take on a life of their own, and match days are unique, as the entire population switches on to support the occasion. Thomond Park, Munster Championships in the Gaelic Grounds, golf at Adare Manor, horse racing at Greenmount – every code is catered for. Your challenge is to seek out what lies beneath the surface of a proud and ancient city that is both unique to witness and an adventure to discover."

David Mahedy is sports coach at Limerick University



Cruise control



Bunratty Castle



CRAFTS AND CULTURE, CRAIC (FUN) AND CUPCAKES SIT SIDE-BY-SIDE IN A CITY THAT'S FAMOUS FOR KNOWING HOW TO THROW A GOOD PARTY

DERRY~ LONDONDERRY

Wrapped in historic walls and hilly cobbled streets, Derry~Londonderry (to give it its full title) is a place that has never felt so good about itself. Located in the northwest of Ireland on the River Foyle and oozing character, you can see the imprint of the past around every corner. The city's history is told in expressive visual terms: 400-year-old walls in a remarkably well-preserved state, magnificent stained glass, a gleaming Peace Bridge, and political wall murals that create a compelling open-air gallery.

Derry~Londonderry thrives on a strong sense of community spirit. Crafts and culture, craic (fun) and cupcakes sit side-by-side in a city that's famous for knowing how to throw a good party. Over the last decade, the city has reinvented itself, spruced up its old buildings and monuments, and opened new galleries as well as art and outdoor venues, such as the striking Ebrington Square.

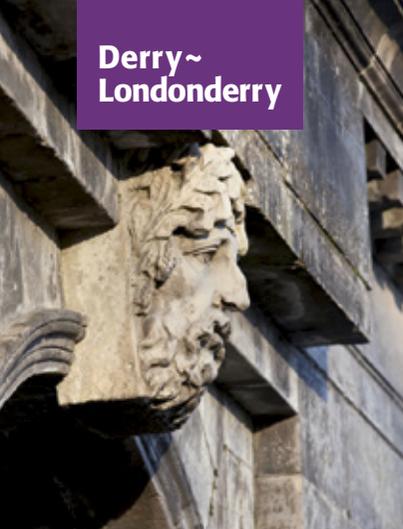
And Derry~Londonderry's credentials have not gone unnoticed by the wider world... 2013 saw the city take on the inaugural UK City of Culture title, which included the hosting of

the prestigious Turner Prize contemporary art exhibition. Ireland's acclaimed traditional music festival, Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, also came to the city in 2013. But the festival fun isn't all in the past— Derry~Londonderry's calendar is packed with activities, from the enormous Banks of the Foyle Halloween Festival – when the entire city dresses up – to the hugely enjoyable St Patrick's Spring Carnival on 17 March.

Café society thrives with the über-cool Sandinos, Café Del Mondo and Fiorentini's – all places that any city worth its sprinkling of cinnamon would be proud to boast. Why not grab a macchiato in Claude's Café and get to the bottom of the local expression on mugs and T-shirts: "Say nothing till ye see Claude."

As well as all having a huge array of attractions, Derry~Londonderry is an ideal base from which to explore amazing surrounding sights. The famed geological wonderland of the Giant's Causeway is just an hour's drive away on the Antrim coast. Looking for adventure? Derry~Londonderry is the city to see.

Derry~ Londonderry



Architectural details from the city walls



The Guildhall, which dates from 1887



The Peace Bridge

THE EXPLORER: TEN

ESSENTIAL THINGS TO DO

From top sights bursting with history to the undeniable charm of the city's lesser-known but truly great gems, Derry~Londonderry's attractions will get under your skin

1 FEEL THE EXCITEMENT OF WALKING THE 17TH CENTURY WALLS

The Roaring Meg cannon may not roar any more, but one of Derry~Londonderry's highlights is taking a stroll on the broad walkway of the city walls, which were built between 1613 and 1618. Six metres thick and complete with gates, watchtowers, battlements, bastions, platforms and 24 impressive cannons, the mile-long walls are a big draw and are one of the most intact city walls in Europe. The best approach is to stroll and pause: stop to snap images as you look down on this most photogenic of cities; take a break at a strategically placed café; or simply drink in the historic atmosphere. In summer, the walls come with their own "ambassadors" in the form of local guides to help show you around and explain the history.

2 BE MOVED BY A MUSIC RECITAL AT THE ORNATE GUILDHALL

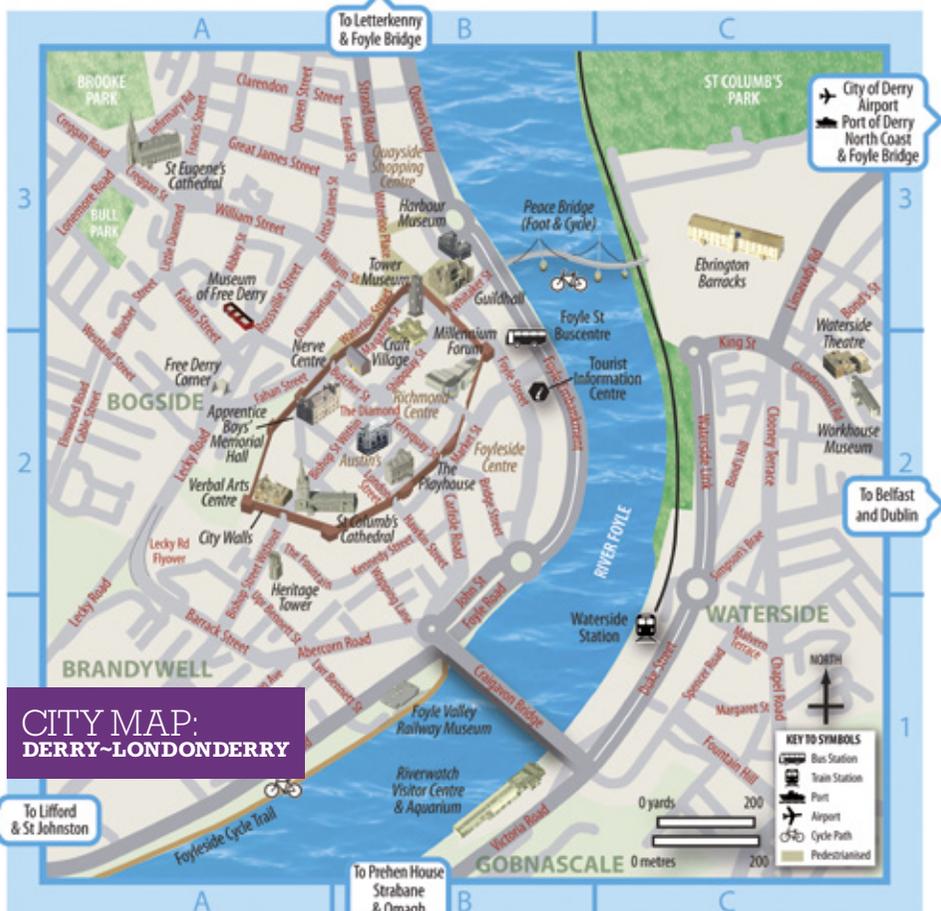
At the heart of the city, the Tudor-Gothic Guildhall dating from 1887 is definite eye candy. Elaborate ceilings, baronial wood panelling and a magnificent organ set the tone. Beautiful stained-glass windows – one showing the building of the walls; another, the shutting of the gates – have been repaired and cleaned. With its four faces, the clock is the fourth largest in Ireland. Locals enjoy a dash of humour with their heritage, and we've always loved the old city saying: "You have more faces than the Guildhall Clock", which, as you might imagine, is not to be taken as a compliment.

3 DELVE INTO THE STORY OF AN ILLICIT LOVE AFFAIR

The enigmatic Bishop Frederick Augustus Hervey (1730-1803) conducted a lifelong affair with the mistress of Frederick William II of Prussia – and the enthralling story is told in the Tower Museum. If ship wrecks, rather than love affairs, are more your thing, then don't miss the exhibition featuring the recovery of the 1588 Spanish Armada's fourth-largest ship, La Trinidad Valencera, which was wrecked off Donegal's coast. On other floors, you'll find the life and legacy of St Columba, and skilful audio-visuais chronicling the tangled and bloody history of the city from its early monastic origins up to 1969 and the outbreak of the Troubles, and the 1998 Peace Agreement.

4 CYCLE ACROSS THE PEACE BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER FOYLE

Forming a graceful arc across the River Foyle, the Peace Bridge, which opened in 2011, represents a symbolic handshake between the city's east and west banks, and is loved by walkers, cyclists and joggers. It opens the door to the new arts hub based in the former military Ebrington Barracks, which has elevated Derry~Londonderry onto a par with the most vibrant of global cities. A heritage trail links the old buildings where pop concerts, plays and other cultural events are regularly held. Back in the 1680s, the building served as a barracks and was the site of a Jacobite camp during the Siege of Derry in 1689, which lasted >



CITY MAP: DERRY~LONDONDERRY



St Columb's Church of Ireland Cathedral

105 days. Although it was too far away from the walled city for the cannon to be effective, the Jacobites fired their guns throughout the night to scare those trapped inside the walls and prevent them from sleeping.

5 LISTEN OUT FOR DANNY BOY

The Dean of St Columb's Church of Ireland Cathedral has been known to pull out all the stops on the organ to play a powerful rendition of Danny Boy. It is a tune recognised far and wide and is known as the "Londonderry Air". Reopened in 2011 after a £3.5 million restoration, the cathedral is one of the most important surviving early 17th century buildings in Ireland – it's also the oldest building still in use in the city. Browse artefacts relating to the siege, a King James Bible, the original keys to the city, and other relics from the past. Then take a pew and listen to the playing of the pipes.

6 WATCH THE SPECTACLE OF THE CITY'S BEST DIVAS AND DANCERS

The sparkingly bright Irish language centre Cultúrlann Uí Chanáin is the place to see the Colmcille Experience. Made up of some of the city's best singers and dancers, you won't easily forget a night spent here. Take time to wander around the stunning zigzag interior and you will see why it has been nominated for architectural awards. Catch up on local life in the Derry Journal with a pitstop in the friendly Caife Fáilte. Long celebrated as a city of music, Derry~Londonderry has always expressed its soul in words and song.

THE CITY IS BUZZING WITH TRENDY BARS AND STYLISH RESTAURANTS THAT HAVE A SPIRIT OF INVENTION ABOUT THEIR APPETISING MENUS

Music does not so much linger in the air as maintain a permanent soundtrack in the lives and imagination of the people here. Phil Coulter, a son of the city, composed Ireland's Call, the anthem played at all-island rugby, cricket and hockey internationals.

7 TAKE IN THE VIEW FROM IRELAND'S OLDEST DEPARTMENT STORE

For a panoramic view of the city, hop on the escalator to the rooftop restaurant of Austin's in the Diamond, Ireland's oldest department store. It's in a building that is sheer delight and a throwback to an older era. Combine a hearty lunch, such as the Maiden City Special, with a backdrop of views across the city and hills. The store has been in business in its city-centre position since 1830. In the early 20th century, the present extrovert building was erected with its copper-roofed cupola. Although it does not have as long a history as the walls, it's a favourite meeting place. The air cash transit system has sadly gone, but the friendly staff will happily still take your sterling or euros in exchange for Irish crystal, gifts and linens.

To see the way the city used to look, walk through the nearby Craft Village, which recreates life between the 16th and 19th centuries and sells Derry~Londonderry crystal, hand-woven cloth, ceramics and jewellery.



Live music at Derry Culture Office

8 GAZE AT THE BOGSIDE ARTISTS' POLITICAL MURALS

Wall murals created by the Bogside Artists – Tom Kelly, William Kelly and Kevin Hasson – illustrate the power of art as a historical document, and serve as a reminder of Derry~Londonderry's past. Symbolic of the different communities within the city, the 12 huge paintings attract endless curiosity from tourists and are known locally as "The People's Gallery". Look out for the one with the Nobel Peace Prize winner, politician John Hume from Derry~Londonderry, along with Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa.

For a different artistic perspective, the Fountain Estate, near the city walls, is home to murals linked to the Siege of Derry and the Battle of the Boyne.

9 INDULGE IN ART GALLERIES GALORE

Cutting-edge art galleries, such as the Void, showcase established Irish and international artists. But don't forget to look out for the main smaller galleries including Context, Gordon, Eden Place and Cowley Cooper. Culture vultures love Derry~Londonderry – the city is thriving and the UK City of Culture title in 2013 focused international eyes on the city's arts scene. The Verbal Arts Centre is a hotbed of literary activity, promoting the spoken and written word. Its monthly calendar is packed with events, such as storytelling recreated in the old Irish tradition of fireside tales. It also promotes the work of emerging artists and hosts



Historic architecture overlooks the city streets

the annual 2D Northern Ireland Comics Festival focusing on everything comic book related. A short distance away, the Nerve Centre is a renowned production base for animation, music and film festivals.

10 BE DAZZLED BY A STUNNING CHANDELIER

Derry~Londonderry is brimful with trendy bars and stylish restaurants that have a spirit of invention about their appetising menus. The local palate is cosmopolitan and international with restaurants, bistros and pubs serving dishes to suit every taste using the very best local ingredients.

For a special treat, call into the Custom House Restaurant. The restaurant is in a listed building dating from 1874 and was used to collect tax from ships arriving at the port. It is one of the city's top eating places – you can choose from the classy upstairs restaurant or the downstairs lounge serving snacks and bar food. The space is illuminated by an astonishing 7.5m chandelier made in Italy from thousands of octagon-shaped glass crystals and weighing 150kg with 30 colour-changing LEDs. It dominates the grand four-storey height of the entrance hall. Such is the weight of the chandelier that workmen had to strengthen the ceiling in order to accommodate it.

Other great spots to spend an evening include Browns Restaurant and Champagne Lounge, and the popular Encore Brasserie. Or try the elegant surrounds of the restaurant of Beech Hill Country House Hotel, just a few miles south of the city.

FIVE FOR FREE

From contemplating the lives of the Irish saints to gazing at starfish, some of Derry~Londonderry's most intriguing attractions don't cost a penny

1 READ THE MANUSCRIPT OF ULYSSES ON A WALL

You would usually expect to see this kind of thing in Dublin, but the complete manuscript of James Joyce's Ulysses is handwritten on to the walls of the Verbal Arts Centre by Colin Dark. You certainly won't have time to read all of it in one visit, mind you, but while there, take time to admire the beautiful marble floor, which is a collaboration between the

late Irish artist Louis le Brocqy and the Dutch ceramicist, Ron Van Der Noll.

2 VISIT THE SPOT WHERE THE CITY WAS BORN

Explore the close ties between St Colmcille – the founder of the city – and his sea journey to Scotland in 563AD, part of an ancient pilgrim trail. The city was born at St Augustine's Church on Grand Parade, where Colmcille built his first abbey in 546AD.

3 WALK THROUGH THE PEACE GARDEN

The beautiful Celtic Peace Garden is an ideal place to spend a couple of hours. Enjoy a leisurely stroll through the garden, which depicts the lives of Irish saints spanning seven centuries, and see if you can make out the shape of the island of Ireland found in representations of the Cross of Patrick, the Boat of Brendan, the Island of Columba, and the Oratory of Canice. It's the perfect place to relax

and engage in a bit of quiet contemplation after a day's sightseeing.

4 GET CLOSE TO LOBSTERS, CRABS AND STARFISH

An underwater world of fun and excitement opens up at the Riverwatch Aquarium where children of all ages can get up close with live lobsters, crabs, starfish, coalfish and blennys.

5 HIKE OUT TO AN ANCIENT FORT

If you feel in the mood for an energetic walk, then pull on your boots and head for the Crianán of Aileach fort, a 90-minute hike outside the city. Set on a beautiful hilltop in County Donegal, the stone fort is a former home of the Irish High Kings and has stunning 360 degree views of the surrounding lakes and countryside, including Lough Foyle and Lough Swilly. The site's origins are believed to date from around 1700BC, and the outline of Bronze Age ramparts can be seen below. It was restored in the 1870s by Mr Walter Bernard.

TOURS

For a general overview, try Top Tours, which run a city tour open-top bus with live commentary on history and politics. The buses leave from the Tourist Information Centre and pick up at the Guildhall.

A comprehensive walking tour is City Tours with Martin McCrossan, who has more than 20 years of experience. Others include Derry Walls Tours and the Famous Writers of Derry Tour.

The LegenDerry Train – the first road train in Northern Ireland – comes with an audiovisual system, and takes in culture and history. Or take a river tour from Blue Boat Tours or Foyle Luxury Cruises.

Try a digital tour by hiring a My Tour talk from the Tourist Information Centre, or take a "Walled City to Wireless City" tour with a handset that delivers a multimedia background to the walls.



Walled City Cultural Trail



Emigration Statue



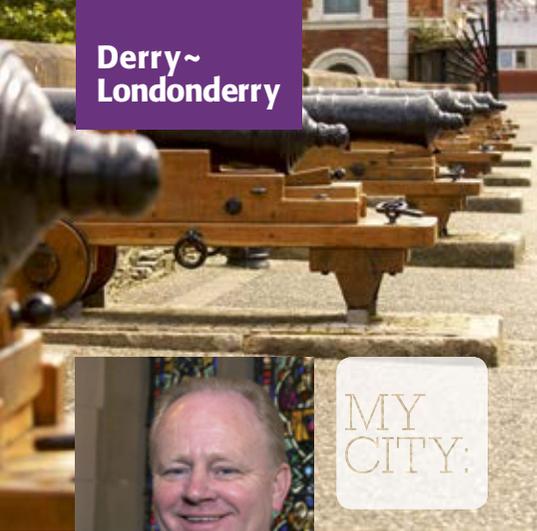
Crianán of Aileach Fort



Walled City Cultural Trail



Relax in one of the city's traditional pubs



MY
CITY:

MARTIN
MCCROSSAN

OUT AND ABOUT

The area surrounding the city of Derry~Londonderry is rich with world-class attractions. Take a few days to discover the best of them, or if you're stuck for time, opt for a day trip from the city. Here's a pick of some to get you started

THE GIANT'S CAUSEWAY

Explore the 37,000 hexagonal pillars of volcanic basalt that make up the Giant's Causeway UNESCO World Heritage Site and its fabulous Visitor Centre. The Top Tours bus company runs day trips to the Causeway from the Tourist Information Centre. Journey time from the city to the Causeway is about 75 minutes.

STUNNING BEACHES FOR MILD DAYS

If the weather is kind, then head along the coastline to the glorious blue flag (EU approved) golden sandy beaches of Benone and Portstewart. They'll make you want to dive straight into the waves.

HEAPS OF HERITAGE AT THE ULSTER-AMERICAN FOLK PARK

Discover the fascinating story of how emigrants left these shores for a whole new life at the intriguing Ulster-American Folk Park near Omagh in County Tyrone. The Park has recreated a village from two centuries ago, as well as a log-built American settlement of the same period so you can picture the scene as families packed what little belongings they had and headed off into the New World. The folk park is about an hour's drive south of the city. The Translink bus service will also drop you at the front of the centre on request.

Martin McCrossan
runs City Tours in Derry~Londonderry



Ulster American Folk Park



Royal Portrush Golf Course

EAGLES AND CASTLES AT GLENVEAGH

Once a common sight over Ireland, the Golden Eagle all but disappeared back in 1912. After careful planning, these magnificent birds were reintroduced to the remote Glenveagh National Park in County Donegal. They say the best time to see them soar is during the shorter winter days, so all you have to do is wander the forests and maybe take a tour of the castle, and if you're lucky you may just see this bird of prey in action. The National Park was once owned by the US millionaire Henry P McIlhenny and is now in the hands of the Irish government. It's a beautiful place to spend an afternoon, with excellent walking trails and a landscape that seems to go on for miles. It is just over an hour's drive to Glenveagh from the city of Derry~Londonderry.

TAKE THE TRAIN TO COLERAINE

Board a train in Derry~Londonderry to Coleraine, a 45-minute journey that hugs the coastline. The scenery is spectacular, and the trip takes you through one of Ireland's longest railway tunnels.

PLAY ONE OF THE BEST GOLF COURSES IN THE WORLD

Play golf at Royal Portrush Golf Club, host of the 2012 Irish Open, with sand hills and curving fairways in an unrivalled seaside setting. The famous championship course, the Dunluce Links, is consistently named as one of the world's best and is open to visitors, and it's the only club in Ireland to have hosted the Open Championship. The club also boasts a hidden gem: the Valley Links.

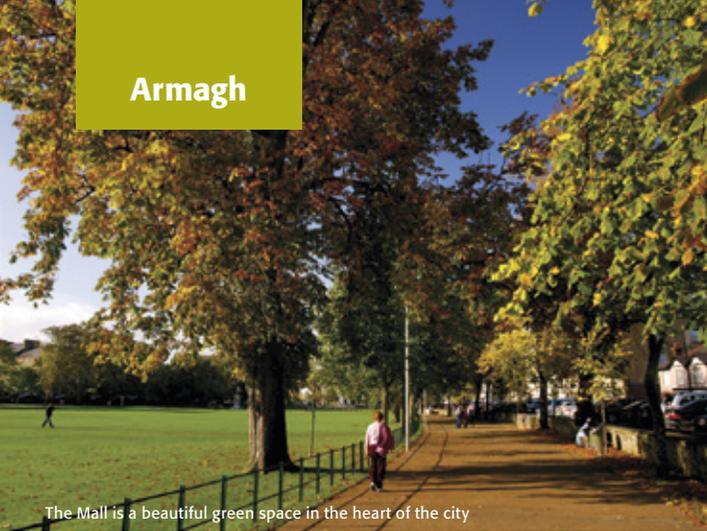


Giant's Causeway



Glenveagh National Park

Armagh



The Mall is a beautiful green space in the heart of the city



Armagh's famous orchards



Sunset over the city



Statue of Saint Patrick



Saint Patrick's Trián

A JOYFUL PEAL OF CATHEDRAL BELLS FLOATS ACROSS THE STREETS EACH DAY – AN AGE-OLD CUSTOM THAT'S PART OF THE CITY'S RICH TAPESTRY

ARMAGH

It's often said that the approach to Armagh, with its steeples, well-preserved classical heritage and dignified old houses, is similar to arriving in an Italian city. Located in the heart of Northern Ireland, about an hour's drive from Belfast, this unique place charms at every turn, with hilly streets and lanes, elaborate doorways and extravagant architecture giving it an air of intrigue. History is everywhere, woven into the very fabric of the streets where mystical gargoyles and angels sculpted in bronze loom over visitors and watch their every move.

Ireland's patron saint St Patrick called Armagh "my sweet hill", and history states he had a stone church built here in 445AD. Today, at this very spot where St Patrick's Church of Ireland now stands, you can descend into a crypt from the Middle Ages, with ancient stone heads and animal carvings. Three archbishops are buried in the crypt; a sanctuary where law-abiding citizens would safely store their valuable goods.

For over 5,000 years, Armagh has served as the ecclesiastical capital of the island, and

the seat of both the Protestant and Catholic archbishops. It's no wonder thousands of visitors flock here every year – few cities in Europe can boast such powerful religious history. A joyful peal of cathedral bells floats across the streets each day; an age-old custom that's part of the city's rich tapestry. But don't be mistaken into thinking that Armagh dwells in the past. Quirky pubs such as The Hole in the Wall and Red Ned's offer a rich cultural scene, and a massive St Patrick's Day festival keep things buzzing throughout the year.

The handsome ensemble of noble buildings in the Mall, once used as a horseracing course, makes a particularly lovely centrepiece. A tranquil slice of lush greenery in the heart of the city, in summer cricket is played here against a backdrop of classical architecture. It's this mix of elegance, history and greenery that helps you appreciate the description of the city in the 1930s by Ireland's pre-eminent travel writer Richard Hayward: "The beauty of Armagh is the beauty of an old woman who has aged gracefully."

Armagh



Armagh boasts rich sacral architecture



Saint Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral



William Kennedy Piping Festival

THE EXPLORER:
TEN

ESSENTIAL THINGS TO DO

Armagh's treasures are anything but hidden. Here's a pick of some of our favourite sights and sounds

1 DISCOVER ARTY ARMAGH

Want to connect with 18th century Armagh? Then nip into the Armagh County Museum, the oldest county museum in Ireland. Walk up to the first floor, and you'll find John Luke's distinctive painting from 1945, The Old Callan Bridge. It's the museum's most famous piece. You'll also find prehistoric artefacts, local history displays and old photos.

2 CLIMB THE HILL IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ST PATRICK

Armagh's two most distinctive landmarks are its cathedrals, which face each other from their seats on opposite hills. Locals even say the structures are "whispering" to one another, but you have to step inside to hear their stories. Walk through the doors of St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral and a peaceful world of sculpture and relics washes over you. Built in a Gothic style in the early

19th century, the cathedral is where St Patrick is reputed to have built his church in 445AD. Across a pretty valley, dominating the opposite end of Armagh, rises the pale limestone St Patrick's Catholic Cathedral, completed in 1873. Walk up the seven flights of steps and pause to look at the arcade of statues over the main doorway on the exterior.

3 DISCOVER THE CITY'S MUSICAL SIDE

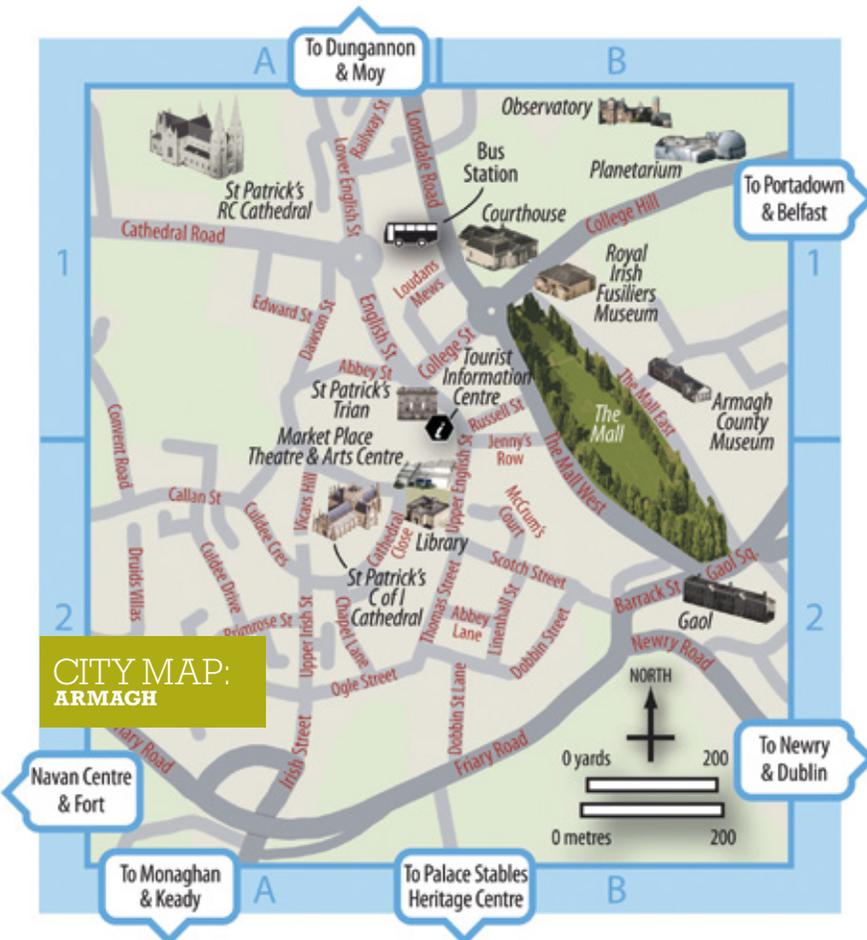
Music plays a huge part in the life of Armagh. Each August, the Charles Wood Summer School for singers and organists sets up shop in the main churches. It's a great way to watch concerts and absorb choral music in serene surroundings. Other entertaining events throughout the year include the fun-filled Bard of Armagh singing competition, while brass band and piping festivals also get in on the act. St Patrick's name, meanwhile, is celebrated in mid-March with a 10-day festival of street theatre, music and busking.

4 TOUCH A METEORITE

Displayed in all its nickel iron glory at the Armagh Planetarium is the largest meteorite in Ireland, an astonishing 4.5 billion years old and weighing 24 stone. The administrator Neil Cullen says visitors love feeling its texture: "It is smooth, metallic and very cold, and is certainly the oldest thing they will ever touch." Exhibition halls hold a spaceship and satellite models, while activities for children include building and launching rockets, flying the cosmos, or taking part in a magnetism workshop.

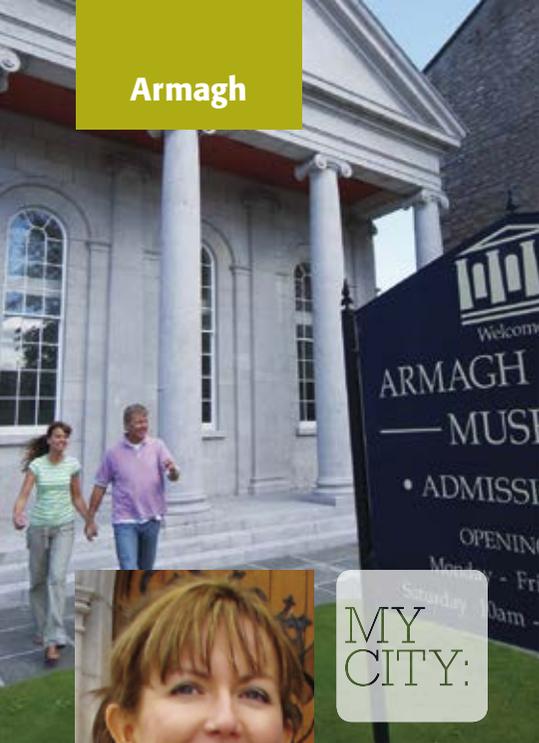
5 JOIN IN A FUN SEARCH FOR GARGOYLES AND ANGELS

They're well camouflaged, but look carefully and you'll find secret gargoyles, chimeras and angels that were created as a response to the city's sacral architecture. No fewer than 22 intricate bronze sculptures, made by a Cork artist in 2010, are dotted around the streets continuing a 4,000-year tradition and giving a fun aspect to a walking tour of the city. Gimlet-eyed visitors will spot them on doors, walls, window ledges, lampposts and drain pipes. Pick up a leaflet from the tourist office and get searching.



CITY MAP:
ARMAGH

Armagh



MY CITY:

STEPHANIE RAFFERTY

"I love watching the seasons change on the Mall from the first daffodils bursting out to the darker evenings that bring an air of romance and nostalgia. I can entertain three growing children in the city without having to spend a fortune, from launching water rockets at the Planetarium to singing with the Armagh Rhymers, a unique theatre group who perform in the County Museum. I love looking at the old Georgian buildings and thinking what life must have been like back then. I love Armagh, it lets me dream."

Stephanie Rafferty
is a teaching assistant based in the city

OUT AND ABOUT

There's so much to do around Armagh that your only problem will be how to fit it all in

DIG INTO SOME HISTORY

Dress up as a Celt and dig into the past in the Archeo Pit at the Navan Centre and Fort, the region's ancient capital, and an ideal place for a half-day visit. Excavations date evidence of activity to 700BC. The fort has associations with historical figures, and legend has it that thousands of years ago it was the site of the Palace of Queen Macha. The centre is a 10-minute drive from Armagh.

ST PATRICK'S TRAIL

Follow the signposted route to explore the wider life and landscape of Ireland's patron saint on St Patrick's Trail. Apart from the seven Patrician sites in the city, the trail also takes in other parts of County Armagh, as well as Counties Down and Antrim.

CONEY ISLAND ADVENTURES

Learn bushcraft on a trip to Coney Island. You can sign up for a survival course with a teepee as your bed. Have a go at wild food cooking, baking bread and find out about shelter, water and fire skills. If you prefer something tamer then explore the world of wildlife at the Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, where guided walks focus on birds and flowers.

CRISPY ENTERTAINMENT

Crunch a crisp at the home of one of the best loved food brands, Tayto, which have been munched in Ireland for more than 50 years. During the daily weekday tours of the Tayto Castle Factory in Tandragee, visitors are told the secrets of how the snacks are made and can meet Mr Tayto himself. Tandragee is 20 minutes east of Armagh city by car.



Barbecue at Coney Island



Armagh is known as the "Orchard County"

THE BEAUTY OF THE APPLES

Tour the apple country around Loughgall. Armagh is known as the "Orchard County" and in spring the hillsides are covered in rows of the white and pink blossom of Bramley apples, which are noted for their firmness and quality. Exported worldwide, they also now have European Union Protected Geographical Status. Every May, the county celebrates the humble apple with an Apple Blossom Festival, with orchard tours, cookery demonstrations and family entertainment.

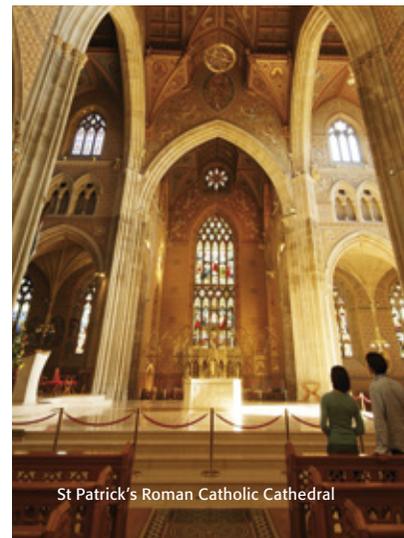
ROAD BOWLING

Watch the summer spectacle of the ancient sport of road bowling. Armagh is the home of the game and fans call the bowl a "bullet". It involves the bowler trying to move the bullet

from the start to the finish of a course in as few throws as possible. It's held on various minor roads leading off the Moy Road, Killyleagh Road and Rock Road, all on the outskirts, as well as in the village of Madden, five miles from the city.

HISTORIC COTTAGE

View a collection of both Orange Order and Hibernian regalia from all over the world at Dan Winter's Cottage and Ancestral Home in Loughgall – a 15-minute drive from Armagh city. Built in the 17th century, the cottage houses a working loom and is where the Battle of the Diamond took place in 1795 after which the Orange Order was formed. And at 94ft long, it's thought to be the longest thatched cottage on the island.



St Patrick's Roman Catholic Cathedral



Road bowling

THE CASTLE DRAWS THE CROWDS, BUT IF YOU DELVE INTO KILKENNY'S LANES, YOU'LL DISCOVER WONDERFUL BOUTIQUES, AUTHENTIC PUBS AND ANTIQUE SHOPS

KILKENNY

Kilkenny is famous for many things: its majestic creeper-clad castle; a bustling crafts industry; cobbled lanes and secret passages; 1,000 years of history; a comedy festival; and as being a dominant force in the old Irish sport of hurling. It's this magical combination of culture and entertainment that attracts so many people to this captivating heritage city, 90 minutes south of Dublin.

Known as Ireland's "medieval capital", Kilkenny may be small but it's big on architectural largesse: from the 12th century Kilkenny Castle, to the 16th century Shee Alms House and the 18th century Tholsel (Town Hall). Many buildings shine with the lovely local black polished limestone, known as Kilkenny Marble, which led to the nickname "Marble City".

The castle draws the eye and the crowds, but if you delve into the city's delightful lanes and narrow passages you'll discover wonderful boutiques, authentic pubs and antique shops. In this city, you're never far away from a pavement café or convivial restaurant. Can't decide where to go?

Hit the Blásta Trail experience, which offers small plates and grazing boards at a number of restaurants, hotels, cafés and pubs.

As a place synonymous with innovative arts, Kilkenny epitomises the booming Irish crafts industry. Whether you're looking for pottery, jewellery, crystal, leather, knitwear, hats, or just want to browse some Celtic gifts, you're in the right place.

Make sure not to miss Butter Slip, Pennyfeather or Pudding Lane. An inviting cosiness will draw you in through the arches; you might even meet a few city slickers and tap into some fun and culture. Kilkenny is certainly a place that enjoys a good laugh. Since 1994, a gathering of acclaimed comedians crack nonstop jokes for five days at a dozen different venues. It's all part of the Cat Laughs Comedy Festival held every year in early June. And if you miss the festival, there are many other ways to get the best out of your time. Soak up some history and architecture on a Pat Tynan walking tour, or sign up for a look around St Francis Abbey Brewery – the oldest in Ireland.



Kilkenny Castle



THE EXPLORER:
FIVE

as you make your own clay pot. Next door, Ray Power who set up Castle Arch Pottery in 1993, shows visitors around his workshop. If you're looking for a special piece of silver, gold, or perhaps a one-off diamond ring, then call Neill Kelly who runs JMK Goldsmiths and he'll design a bespoke piece for your loved one. Walk around the Kilkenny Design Craft Centre, and you will be left in no doubt that Ireland is in the middle of a craft renaissance.

3 PICK UP A HURLEY STICK, HIT A SLIOTAR... AND RUN

The ancient Irish game of hurling has long links with Kilkenny. Jim Croke, who knows a thing or two about the game, introduces newcomers to the subtleties of hurling on a two-hour tour. After an explanation of the rules, you'll be taken to a pitch where you'll be handed a hard leather stitched ball known as a sliotar. Jim will tell you that hurling has been compared to a "mixture of ice hockey and murder"; he'll also make sure you know that Kilkenny is the "home of hurling champions", and has won more All-Ireland titles than any other county.

ESSENTIAL THINGS TO DO

Kilkenny is famous for its festivals and craic (fun), but even if you're not visiting at festival time, you'll still be able to enjoy the city's electric atmosphere and substantial sights...

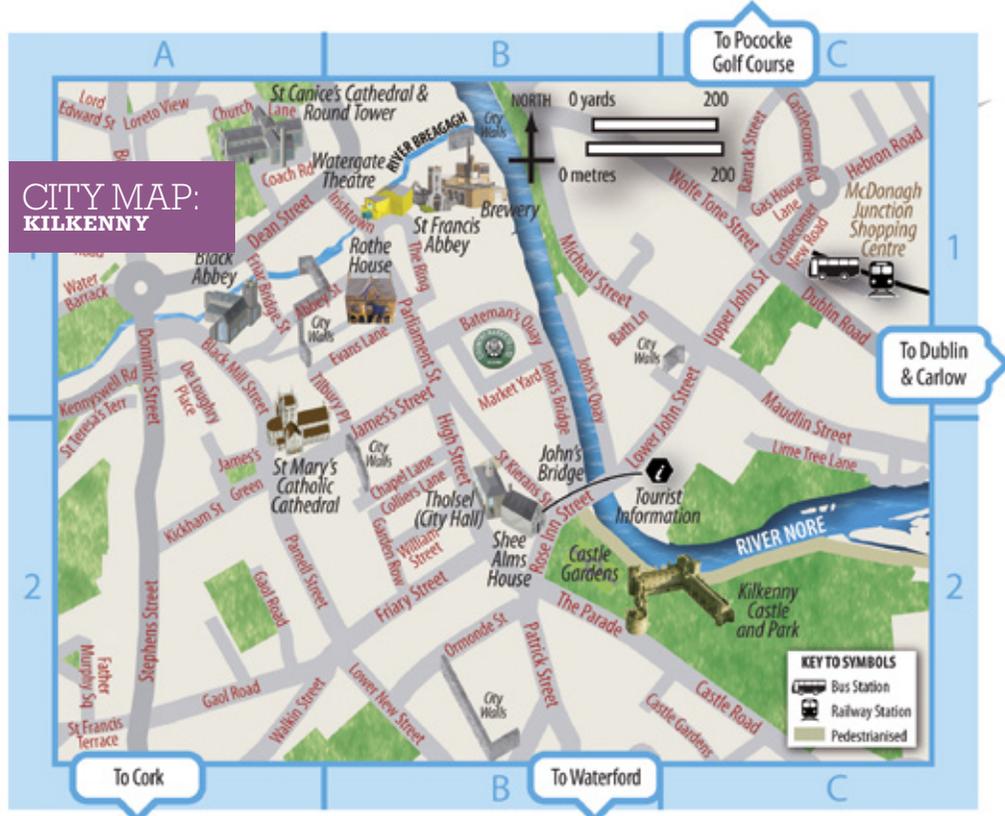
4 HEAR ABOUT THE WICKED DAME ALICE AND TRY HER WITCHES BREW

One thing's for sure: you're unlikely to leave Kilkenny without hearing about Dame Alice Kyteler, a woman who escaped a fiery death when convicted of witchcraft in 1324. The eponymously named Kyteler's Inn on Kieran Street keeps her legend alive. Its menu includes a delicious slice of Dame Alice carrot cake and cream. And while you're drinking in history, Tynan's Bridge House bar, which started life as a chemist's shop in 1703, is a must-visit. Gas lamps, silver tankards and a stained-glass window are all part of the package.

5 LIGHT A CANDLE AND BE WOWED BY A KALEIDOSCOPE OF COLOURS

Make your way to the Black Abbey and immerse yourself in candlelit quietude. Dominicans founded the abbey in 1225 and it has been restored by the people of Kilkenny many times since. You cannot fail to be moved by the Rosary window, the largest of its kind in Ireland covering an entire wall.

MANY BUILDINGS SHINE WITH THE LOCAL BLACK POLISHED LIMESTONE, KNOWN AS KILKENNY MARBLE, WHICH LED TO THE NICKNAME "MARBLE CITY"



1 SOAK UP THE MEDIEVAL DELIGHTS AT KILKENNY CASTLE

Five hundred years of history is supremely condensed into a 12-minute film in the Medieval Room of the South Tower of Kilkenny Castle – and it's free. You only pay if you want to go further into the castle, which rises above the crystal clear waters of the river. Here, you'll find cantilevered stairs made from Irish Wicklow granite, a picture gallery and an atmospheric library. The castle's lovely grounds are a magnet for locals on a sunny day – make sure to visit the fragrant rose garden.

2 ENJOY KILKENNY'S ARTS SCENE FIRST-HAND

Roll up your sleeves and let your curiosity take over with the craft workers at the Castle Yard – just across from the castle – where they'll watch

Kilkenny



MY CITY:

ITA MORRISSEY

"Kilkenny is characteristically charming, its quaint beauty is made more so by everything being within walking distance. On a Saturday afternoon, it's great to sit at one of the cafés along Kieran Street, sipping a coffee or tea and indulging in a tempting treat. Then I like to wander down to John's Bridge and walk along the canal. Another favourite place is the Castle Park, which is like a fairytale forest. After that, I pop into the Craft Gallery, which always has wonderful exhibitions. In the evening, with its open fire and friendly bar staff, nothing beats Cleere's for a drink. But if my feet are tapping then it is off to The Set for some late-night dancing. For Sunday morning recovery brunch it's got to be Billy Byrnes!"

Ita Morrissey
Is a theatre and philosophy student living in Kilkenny

OUT AND ABOUT

If you have a car, then take things slowly and you'll notice a certain enchantment about County Kilkenny. Not for nothing did the writer Frank O'Connor call the hills of the county "sensuous". Get out there and discover what it's all about for yourself with a few days touring...

MIX FOOD WITH CRAFT ON A KILKENNY TRAIL

A food or craft trail? It's an agonising choice and if time permits do both. Pick up the craft and food trail brochures produced by Trail Kilkenny, which will take you into sequestered parts of the county. You can watch glassblowing at Jerpoint, printmaking at Castlecomer or rummage for a "seconds" bargain at Nicholas Mosse's shop in Bennettsbridge. It's no wonder Kilkenny has gained fame for the quality of its crafts.

ONE OF IRELAND'S LOVELIEST GARDENS

Take a walk through one of the loveliest gardens in Ireland at Woodstock. With 50 acres of formal greenery and an arboretum, it's a relaxing place to while away an afternoon. Afterwards, Inistioge is a picture-perfect Irish village 30 minutes south of the city. Along with its creature comforts, you can sample more of Kilkenny's culinary creativity here.

VISIT A TONGUE-TWISTING TOWN

Board a boat, buy a book, or climb a mountain at the tongue-twister town of Craiguemanagh (shortened to Craig by locals). It's the unofficial book town of Ireland, and from here you can also take a boat trip on the River Barrow.



Woodstock Gardens



Cahir Castle

HEAD WITH YOUR CLUBS FOR THE MOUNT JULIET GOLF COURSE IN THOMASTOWN, WHICH WAS DESIGNED BY JACK NICKLAUS.

If you're feeling energetic, tackle Brandon Mountain, Kilkenny's highest point. Graig is 20 minutes south of Kilkenny city.

PLAY ON A CHAMPIONSHIP COURSE

Head with your clubs for the Mount Juliet golf course in Thomastown, which was designed by Jack Nicklaus. It's a championship parkland course that comes with practice greens, a driving range and golf academy. Weekdays

are quieter than weekends. There's also an excellent equestrian centre here, if you fancy going for a trek through the beautiful estate grounds, while the 5-star hotel boasts excellent accommodation, and a Michelin-star restaurant, The Lady Helen.

CYCLE THE SCENIC COUNTRYSIDE

Hire a bike and cycle one of the short routes that lace their way through the green-drenched and "reasonably flat" Kilkenny countryside. Some suggestions include Dunmore Caves or Castlecomer Discovery Park to the north; or south to Tipperary to see the castle in Cahir or the Swiss Cottage, a Butler family folly watched over by a 1,000 year-old yew tree. There's a bike rental service in the city, so you can organise your trips from there.



Inistioge



Jerpoint Abbey

Waterford



Waterford Crystal is part of the city's rich craft heritage



Reginald's Tower



The Granary Café



Bishop's Palace

STROLL WATERFORD'S WARREN OF VIBRANT MEDIEVAL LANES AND YOU'LL QUICKLY REALISE THAT THIS CITY IS UNLIKE ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD

WATERFORD

From his city centre patch, Marty Lonergan belts out his cappella Irish ballads to the delight of passers-by. His baritone voice carries through the square, echoing around the narrow old streets. "Tourists love to hear Irish songs performed outdoors, as it adds so much to the atmosphere," Marty smiles. It's a wonderful introduction to Waterford, a city on the southeast coast of the island that hangs on proudly to its medieval character.

Founded by the Vikings in the 9th century, Waterford is still a busy port that clings firm to its maritime history. Stroll the warren of vibrant medieval lanes, streets and quays, and you'll quickly realise that Waterford likes to do things its own way. Locals here keep their Viking past close to their heart. A fascinating Viking Triangle takes in the historic sites with the tag: "More than 1,000 years in 1,000 steps." Watch out, too, for the Vadrefjord Vikings, a local re-enactment group who stalk the streets.

Step into the present and you'll find food markets with award-winning artisan cheeses, bread that is unique to the city

(called the "blaa"), and porridge oats with a long pedigree. In Henry Downes's pub, you can even try an extra special whiskey called Henry No9, which isn't available anywhere else in the world.

Of course, Waterford is more famous for the glasses you drink whiskey out of than whiskey itself. Waterford Crystal has made chandeliers for Westminster Abbey, Windsor Castle and the Kennedy Center in Washington DC. There's a good reason it's one of the most sought-after crystal products in the world – timeless craftsmanship goes into each piece. Don't miss a tour of the Visitor Centre while you're here – it's an unforgettable experience.

Once you've done that, kick back with a relaxing walk around the streets and take in the city's medieval legacy with ivy-clad sections of the old walls and six surviving round towers. Bits of the wall pop up in remarkable locations – you can even find one inside Penneys shop on Barronstrand Street, where a tall portion of the Viking City Wall was discovered during an archaeological dig in 2009. Only in Waterford? You betcha.

Waterford



Chorister's Hall, Medieval Museum



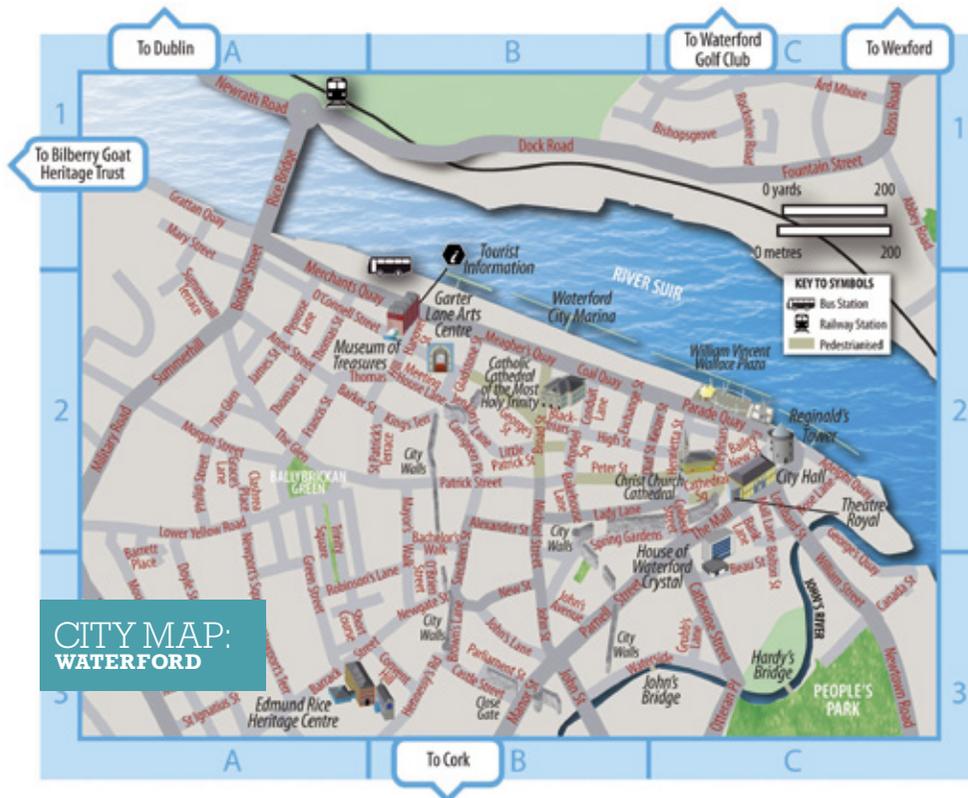
House of Waterford Crystal Visitor Centre



THE EXPLORER: FIVE

ENTER THE HOUSE OF WATERFORD CRYSTAL VISITOR CENTRE AND THE WORKERS WILL SHOW YOU THE SUBTLETIES OF THEIR TRADE AS THEY CREATE TWINKLING MASTERPIECES

ESSENTIAL THINGS TO DO



CITY MAP: WATERFORD

Home to one of the world's most prestigious crystal brands, Waterford's unique atmosphere creeps through its winding lanes, food markets and beautiful quays

1 ADMIRE GLASS EXPERTS AT WORK

"It was a long journey that started out in 1783, and now we celebrate our heritage right in the centre of the city," says David McCoy, marketing manager for Waterford Crystal. You can visit Waterford's most famous product at the House of Waterford Crystal Visitor Centre, where you get the chance to ask glassworkers how they turn out a twinkling masterpiece from a molten blob. The products are for sale in the shop with the largest display of Waterford Crystal in the world, featuring designs by John Rocha.

2 WALK THE VIKING TRIANGLE

Want to experience a walking tour with a difference? Then seek out the indefatigable Jack Burtchaell of Waterford Walking Tours, who will regale you with amusing and informative tales about his city. The tour passes the Roman

Catholic and Church of Ireland Cathedrals, both designed by the same architect, John Roberts. You also see the Bishop's Palace, Reginald's Tower, and the Choristers' Hall, which opened in 2012. For another perspective on the city, don your walking shoes and follow the Blue Plaque Trail of 40 sites celebrating famous Waterford locals and historic locations. You can pick up a map from the tourist office on The Quay.

3 SPIRAL UP REGINALD'S TOWER

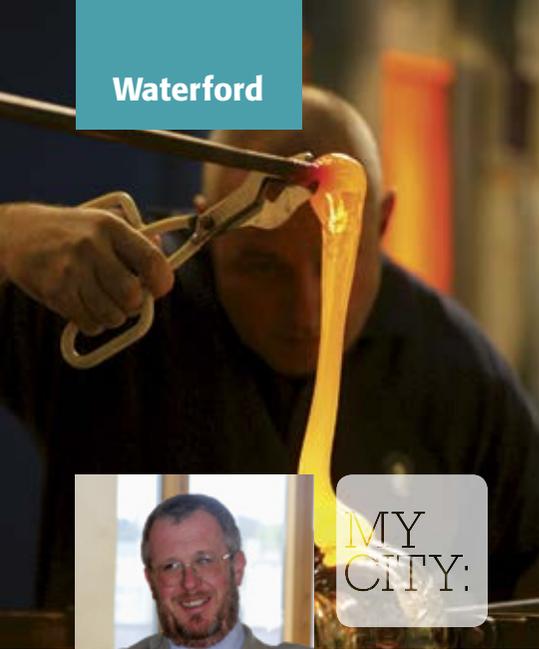
Learn how to strike your own coin after climbing the narrow stairs to the second floor of Reginald's Tower, where you can peek through the window slits. Believed to date back to the early 13th century, the tower was built as a defence against attacks by the native Irish and is Ireland's oldest urban civic building, with a circumference of three metres and a height of 24 metres. The tower is the only monument in Ireland named in honour of a Viking – possibly Ragnall or Reginald, the founder of the city in back in 914AD.

4 WATCH THE ACTION AT THE SPRAOI FESTIVAL

In early August each year, the city gears up for the mega party that is Spraoi. Billed as Ireland's biggest street carnival, there's live music, street performers and fireworks – and the good news is it's free. An electric atmosphere fills the city and hits its apex with the Spraoi Parade, with spectacular floats, drama and a real sense of theatre. Another popular event – on a somewhat smaller scale – the Waterford International Festival of Music is held in May at the beautifully restored Theatre Royal.

5 BITE INTO A BLAA, SNIFF THE CHEESE, TASTE THE PORRIDGE

Don't miss your chance to try Waterford's speciality bread, the "blaa". It's baked fresh each morning and served with bacon rashers, salad, potato crisps or anything else that takes your fancy. It is just one of Waterford's many tasty treats. Hotels and B&Bs kick-start your day with a bowl of Flahavan's porridge oats and some even add a dash of Irish liqueur to give it a zing. At the Saturday morning Food & Craft Market in Jenkins Lane, visit the delicious Knockalara Farmhouse Cheese stall, with a great selection of Irish artisan cheeses.



MY CITY:

DONAL MOORE

OUT AND ABOUT

With easy access to the sea, mountains and unforgettable landscapes, Waterford is an excellent base for touring and sightseeing the stunning surrounding area

A LAZY DAY AT ARDMORE

You can easily while away a day at Ardmore, a seaside village on the St Declan's Trail pilgrimage walking route, with cliff walks and a beautiful stretch of beach. The village has become something of a hub for foodies over the last few years, thanks to the boutique Cliff House Hotel, with its Michelin-starred restaurant. Ardmore is a 45-minute drive southwest of the city along the coast.

FAMILY FROLICS AT TRAMORE

Tramore is a family-oriented resort with long, sandy beaches and seaside frolics. Take your pick from surfing, sailing, kayaking, golf and a lively indoor aqua adventure centre called Splashworld. Tramore is 15 minutes south of Waterford by car or you can take a bus from the centre of the city.

A UNESCO GEOPARK

Discover the geological story behind the rocks, cliffs and inlets of the scenic Copper Coast European Geopark – a Unesco-supported designation that gets its name from 19th century copper mines.

The area covers 25km of exceptional coastline with small beaches, rocky headlands and lovely little coves. An information point at Bunmahon village explains the jargon.

SUPER-PRETTY FISHING VILLAGES

Picture-perfect Dunmore East at the mouth of the Waterford estuary is an unspoilt fishing port. Here you'll find a pristine beach framed by cliffs,

and a main street lined with pretty thatched cottages. Relaxed, genteel and friendly, it's popular with local holidaymakers thanks to its lively restaurants and seaside pubs. The annual Bluegrass festival is held here in August and the village is just a 20-minute drive south of Waterford. Near Dunmore is the sleepy fishing village of Passage East, which operates car ferries to Ballyhack in County Wexford.

TOURING AROUND HOOK HEAD

Venture a little further and you'll reach the southern tip of Hook Head in County Wexford. It's a stunning promontory that is tipped with one of Europe's oldest working lighthouses. The area is also rich with sightseeing opportunities, from Duncannon Fort, to Tintern Abbey, which was founded in 1200.



Lismore Castle



Dunmore East



The Copper Coast

“My favourite place in the city is undoubtedly Christ Church Cathedral. It is a wonderful 19th century space and occupies a site that has been a place of worship for over 1,000 years. As well as being a church and tourist attraction, it is also an excellent concert and exhibition venue. I moved to Waterford to work in 1997 and although it was not a city I knew well, I soon found myself at home here. I would sum it up in three words: friendly, relaxed and fun. This culminates in the annual summer street carnival Spraoi, which brings people into the city from many areas and is most definitely not to be missed.”

Donal Moore
Waterford City Archivist



LISBURN'S STRONG IDENTITY RISES THROUGH THE STREETS. ALONG THE NARROW HASLEMS LANE, A BUSKER MAY SERENADE YOU INTO LISBURN SQUARE

LISBURN

Irish linen. It's been favoured by European royalty, was chosen for the napkins on the Titanic, and was even used in Neil Armstrong's parachute! No wonder it has a reputation as one of the world's most illustrious fabrics. Linen is also integral to the story of Lisburn, a city southwest of Belfast with a distinguished history spanning more than 400 years.

Nestled into a green valley just beside a river, Lisburn enjoyed a linen heyday in the 18th century when manufacturing was at a peak. Today, production has ceased but the history lingers on, and enhances Lisburn's appeal as a place to enjoy a few unrushed days of sightseeing, shopping, and discovering its hidden gems.

Boasting a strong sense of civic pride, the city enjoys an attractive streetscape that has remained largely unchanged since the 18th century. With impressively conserved buildings, Lisburn's strollable and car-free city centre makes it a magnet for shopaholics. Leading chain stores pack the central streets, as well as Bow Street Mall and the Georgian-styled Lisburn Square. Alongside them, in

Bow Street, Railway Street, Bachelors Walk and Market Square, independently owned drapers, milliners, jewellers, florists and barbers all create a unique retail flavour.

As you wander around, Lisburn's distinctive identity rises through the streets. Along the narrow Haslems Lane a busker may serenade you into Lisburn Square, the hub of the city; while if you're here in May, you'll discover a carnival parade featuring stilt walkers, jugglers, unicyclists and acrobats from the popular Community Circus Lisburn. Seek out the city's pretty parks and uncover the story of Lisburn's greatest benefactor, Sir Richard Wallace, who donated five fountains to Lisburn. Today, two remain – one in Market Square, the other in Castle Gardens.

Since becoming a city in 2002, Lisburn has found renewed commercial success with designer shops, bustling bistros and stylish bars. Speciality coffee houses and home bakeries also line the streets. Stop off at Yellow Door Deli – the Greenbean coffee and Moyallen bacon will make you glad you came. We promise.



Downtime in Lisburn's parks



THE EXPLORER:
FIVE

SEEK OUT THE CITY'S PRETTY PARKS AND UNCOVER THE STORY OF LISBURN'S GREATEST BENEFACTOR, SIR RICHARD WALLACE, WHO DONATED FIVE FOUNTAINS TO LISBURN

ESSENTIAL THINGS TO DO

Lisburn's attractions range from the arty to the gorgeously gastro – you'll be spoiled for choice on a weekend break in the city. Here are five to get you started

1 EXPERIENCE THE CITY'S ILLUSTRIOUS LINEN HISTORY

Watch the skill and dexterity of Ireland's last two linen handloom weavers at the Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum, the city's oldest building. Based in the former Market House, it has retained its red sandstone 17th century arches and walls. You'll get a great sense of the city's linen history, with information on how the cloth was made from flax. Seeing the linen being woven is the real highlight here, as it shows the uniqueness of the fabric. In the shop, you can buy some damask linen to bring back home.

2 SWING BACK TO A SNAPSHOT OF LISBURN LIFE IN THE 1960s

Atmospheric black and white photographs taken by the town clerk Harry Duff in the 1950s and 1960s hang on the walls of the contemporary R-Space Gallery, former linen rooms in an

elegant Georgian building. Glimpse the fashion and cars from another era when Morris Minors, Sunbeam Rapiers, Ford Anglias and Austin Sevens were driven around Lisburn's quiet city streets.

3 SUCCUMB TO LISBURN'S FOODIE TEMPTATIONS

Food lovers drool over Greene's supermarket whose pedigree stretches back to 1924 when it started life as a butcher's shop. As well as country rhubarb and ginger jam, you'll find Northern Ireland honey, and the creamy yoghurt from Clondeboye cows in County Down. At the deli, try the award-winning Ballybrie Irish Soft Brie Cheese or Boilie Irish Goat's Cheese from the artisan creamery at Fivemiletown. On Tuesdays, Lisburn's lively outdoor market is the place to be. At Silverfin Fish Merchants, Gerard McNabb displays the catch, still twitching, from nearby fishing ports. "Visitors love the atmosphere," says Gerard, "and many have never seen such a wide range of fish." Try mussels and oysters from Dundrum Bay and, in summer, herring and mackerel.

4 SPEND AN EVENING ENJOYING MUSIC, DANCE OR THEATRE

Local culture, drama, dance, music and comedy all feature in the award-winning Island Arts Centre perched along the banks of the river. It's one of the island's top multi-arts venues and anchors the city's vibrant theatre, music and dance scene. Having earned a reputation for innovation and style, there are art parties and performances for kids, exhibitions, festivals, as well as top music and theatre productions.

5 FIND YOUR OWN PIECE OF ART ALONG THE RIVERSIDE

Fancy a peaceful riverbank journey? Then follow the art and sculpture trail, Xplorart, which highlights the work of local and international artists. The cycling sculpture marks the entrance of the cycle path, part of a National Network.

On Saturday mornings during spring and summer, artists display their work on the ornate railings of Castle Gardens as part of the Art on the Rails weekly sale. Cycle up to Wallace Park next, a space named after Sir Richard Wallace who left many legacies to the city including five fountains, two of which remain to this day.



Lisburn



MY CITY:

ANTHEA MCWILLIAMS

“My favourite way to Lisburn is along the River Lagan and its towpath. I like to come into the city along the leafy trails and waterways where I arrive at the Island Arts Centre. My ideal day would be to view the centre’s current exhibition before crossing the river to the Castle Gardens. Originally the site of a 16th century manor house and grounds, the gardens embrace their terraces, which are unique in Ireland (my favourite features are the Wallace fountain and Wallace Memorial). A stroll through the historic quarter will take in the grounds of Lisburn Cathedral, pausing on the hour to listen to the peal of bells. I love the tranquil moment, seconds after the bells cease, as if the city breathes in to start the next hour afresh.”

Anthea McWilliams
is an independent dance practitioner and
co-director at R-Space Gallery in Lisburn

OUT AND ABOUT

Lisburn is easily accessible without a car. There are regular train connections on the Enterprise service between Belfast and Dublin and it is a major hub for buses. To make the best of the surrounding area, hire a car and make your own way around the exceptional surrounding sights

TASTE SOME OF THE ISLAND’S BEST CRAFT BEERS AND TOUR A WORKING BREWERY

Park up for the day and test the character of up to 20 different but delicious brews at the Hilden Brewing Company, Ireland’s oldest independent brewery, in Hilden House. Irish craft beers are big news right now, and this working brewery has a restaurant and visitor centre located in converted stables. A guided tour takes 45 minutes and afterwards you can have dinner in the Tap Room Restaurant.

Evening traditional music sessions are held in the Tap Room and, on the August bank holiday weekend, the Hilden Beer Festival draws big crowds from all around the area and beyond. It’s just a short 10-minute drive to the brewery from Lisburn city centre. (But make sure you organise a designated driver if you’re planning on sampling the goods.)

EXPERIENCE IRELAND’S OLDEST HORSERACING VENUE

Enjoy a flutter at Ireland’s oldest horseracing venue, Down Royal Racecourse founded in 1685. Twelve race meetings are held each year with the big highlight being the two-day Northern Ireland Festival of Racing in November. It’s a great chance to get dressed up, join the excitement and enjoy a day out with the locals.



Tannaghmore Blacksmiths Workshop



Racing at Down Royal

DISCOVER THE THRILL OF DRUMBO PARK GREYHOUND RACING

Take a trip to Drumbo Park. If you’ve never seen greyhounds race, this will be a thoroughly exceptional experience you won’t forget in a hurry. Greyhounds are raced three times a week, and the best advice is to make a whole outing of it, by combining dinner with picking a winner.

TRENDY TOWNS

After retail therapy at Lisburn’s shops, two other great places to head to for independent boutiques are the neighbouring trendy towns of Hillsborough and Moira – both are approximately 20 minutes away by car and offer a different shopping experience.

LAGAN VALLEY REGIONAL PARK

If you’re looking to escape from it all, head out to the Lagan Valley Regional Park, which takes in 4,500 acres of countryside and 11 miles of riverbank. You can take it easy with gentle walking across level countryside, or amp up the activity with cycling, running and canoeing. Whatever you choose to do, the park is the perfect place to unwind.

IRISH CRAFT BEERS ARE BIG NEWS RIGHT NOW, AND THE HILDEN BREWING COMPANY HAS A RESTAURANT AND VISITOR CENTRE LOCATED IN CONVERTED STABLES



Vintage Fair at Castle House



Lagan Valley Regional Park



IN MID-MARCH, A WEEK-LONG PARTY KICKS OFF FOR THE ST PATRICK'S DAY CELEBRATIONS, WITH FIDDLE PLAYERS, TRADITIONAL SINGERS AND WANDERING STORYTELLERS

NEWRY

Newry in County Down may be one of Northern Ireland's newest cities, but this is a place firmly rooted in the past. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the city was a busy trading port exporting coal, linen and butter. A bustling place of merchants, markets and lively quays, the city's origins are reflected in its evocative place names such as Buttercrane Quay and Boat Street. Today, Newry is flourishing once again with reinvigorated historic buildings that add a real air of elegance. Ship Canal, which runs right through the centre and was the first of its kind in the UK and Ireland, has also been a focus for redevelopment, and now boasts a cinema and shops.

The central streets of the city have individual appeal with long-established traders offering a very friendly welcome. "Newry is known for the quality of its customer service," says Gemma Murphy of Murphy Jewellers. "And that spreads through word-of-mouth all over Ireland and much farther afield."

Of course, while Newry may be famed as retail nirvana, the city has more strings to its bow than just shops. In mid-March, a

week-long party kicks off for the St Patrick's Day celebrations. Fiddle-players, traditional singers, poets and wandering storytellers, known as seanchaí, entertain children with their tall stories. Get stuck in by slipping on your dancing shoes and join in a céilí (a traditional Irish dance). Music plays a big part in festivals in many of the smaller surrounding towns, such as Rostrevor, Warrenpoint and Kilkeel, while in the city you'll find traditional weekend music sessions in the Granary Bar at the Canal Court Hotel.

For culture of a different kind, nip inside the Town Hall, a building with an unusual topographical claim. It was built on a three-arched bridge across the Clanrye River and divides itself evenly between County Down and County Armagh. Newry's charms are more than enough to keep you entertained, but the city's convenient location between Dublin and Belfast makes it perfect for accessing both cities. Best of all? The spectacular Mountains of Mourne and the Ring of Gullion are right on your doorstep creating the perfect mix of urban fun and outdoor escapism.

Newry



Bagenal's Castle



St Patrick's Church

THE EXPLORER: FIVE

ESSENTIAL THINGS TO DO

Information Centre. Seek out the Promise Stone outside a bakery on Castle Street. This granite slab got its unusual name because deals were struck over it on market days by bakery employees who touched it for good luck.

3 ADMIRE MARBLE, MOSAICS AND MOUNTAINS

Stand on the high ground of St Patrick's Church of Ireland and enjoy a wonderful view of the surrounding hilly countryside. Founded in 1578, St Patrick's was the first Protestant church to be built in Ireland. Next, stop off at the Cathedral of St Patrick and St Colman – the main Roman Catholic place of worship, which boasts beautiful stained-glass windows and mosaics. Originally a plain building when it opened in 1829, it was made of local granite, and with its enhancements now has a commanding presence in the city.

4 ENJOY A SCENIC STROLL AND SEE THE "NEWRY NAVVY"

Chiselled and carved to perfection, the face of the Newry Navvy looks down from his plinth on Sugar Island. The bronze statue, erected in 2011, celebrates the men who built the Newry Canal in 1742. And if you're wondering what a "navvy" is, it was the name given to the canal labourers, who were originally called navigators. Wandering through the city, it's worth paying close attention – you'll be rewarded. All around are little decorative details: an elaborate iron balcony, a front-door boot scraper, and the delicate petal and lozenge fanlights on Hill Street and Trevor Hill. Along one side of St Colman's Park, the brightly painted doors of the elegant neo-Georgian three-storey granite town houses add a lovely splash of colour.

5 ENJOY CONTEMPORARY ART WITH A STUNNING CAKE

Described by manageress Edel Farrell as "a family-run business that has been part of the fabric of Newry for generations", the Shelbourne café and restaurant has been serving delicious treats to loyal locals for more than 100 years. Don't miss the exceptional spelt and honey scones with homemade gooseberry jam. On the walls hang works from local artists, as well as pieces by one of Ireland's most distinguished artists, Graham Knuttel, whose portraits of Van Morrison and Bono draw the crowds.

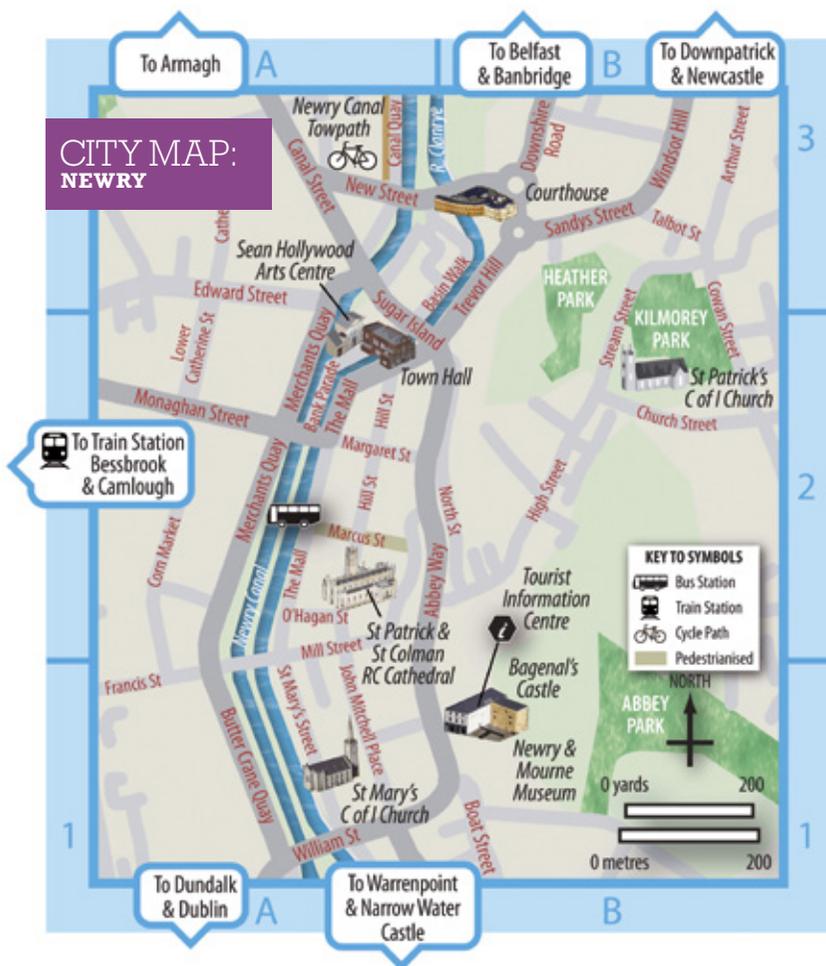
Newry's unique personality expresses itself with a range of charming attractions from quirky architecture to grand architectural statements

1 SURROUND YOURSELF WITH HISTORY ON A HERITAGE WALK

It's impossible to escape the fabric of old Newry. Stroll through the streets and you'll soon appreciate the classical elegance of 18th century Georgian town houses, a mid-19th century courthouse, and more. Along the quays, new businesses have sprung up replacing derelict warehouses, such as a sugar mill that now houses Lorsha Design textiles and gallery. Brick canal buildings with attractive orange-red terracotta façades are still in place with their original features.

2 SEEK OUT THE "PROMISE STONE" IN BAGENAL'S CASTLE

Incredible restoration work has been carried out on Bagenal's Castle, a 16th century fortified tower and 19th century warehouse. It now houses a museum, as well as the Newry Tourist



CITY MAP: NEWRY

To Armagh

To Belfast & Banbridge

To Downpatrick & Newcastle

To Train Station Bessbrook & Camlough

To Dundalk & Dublin

To Warrenpoint & Narrow Water Castle

KEY TO SYMBOLS
 Bus Station
 Train Station
 Cycle Path
 Pedestrianised

0 yards 200
 0 metres 200

Newry

MY CITY:

TERENCE
"BANJO"
BANNON

"Although Newry is now known as a city, it will always be a small town to me. There is a strong sense of community here and although the population has changed and grown since I was a boy, the character of the people has not. The best place in the region to sample this local character is Nan Rice's pub on Francis Street. It might be strange for a non-drinker like me to recommend a pub, but there is much more to Nan's than just the drink. It is a great spot for a bit of 'craic agus ceol' (fun and music). All of the day's news and a singsong come with a visit to this comfy old pub where thick stone walls, an open fire and the snugs by the windows welcome visitors. You're never on your own for long in a pub like Nan's, where new friends quickly become old ones."

Terence Bannon is an outdoor pursuits instructor who has climbed Mount Everest

OUT AND ABOUT

Newry shares part of its surrounding countryside with south Armagh and south Down and many scenic routes open up for visitors with cars. Don't miss the chance to explore the best of this fascinating area

A LEGENDARY LANDSCAPE

The Ring of Gullion is set in lush green farmland and is steeped in Celtic legend – the fields, too, are full of ancient monuments. This remarkable volcanic landscape is best explored on foot. Walk up Slieve Gullion and you will come across Calliagh Berra's lake. Local legend has it that anyone who swims in the lake comes out visibly aged – so be prepared if you're thinking of a dip. The starting point for the walk is a 20-minute drive west of Newry.

THE BEAUTY OF SLIEVE DONARD

Climb to the top of Slieve Donard, the highest point in the Mountains of Mourne and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. If it's too much of a hike at 850m (2,789 ft), then take your pick from one of the surrounding shorter walks. Paths lead into the mountains along the Trassey Track, or the Brandy Pad, an old smugglers' path linking the sea to Hilltown. Take the hour-long coastal route from Newry to Newcastle, which is an excellent base from where to access the mountains.

NATURE-FILLED FOREST PARK

If you fancy a picnic in stunning surroundings then set off for Kilbroney Forest Park, just outside Rostrevor. It's a 20-minute car journey from Newry on the main road to Kilkeel with delightful short scenic drives and walks. Badgers, squirrels and foxes all frequent the woodland and if you're sharp-eyed you may even spot a pine marten.



The golf course at Royal County Down

ON THE TRAIL OF IRELAND'S PATRON SAINT

Follow the wider Saint Patrick's Trail, a sign-posted driving route exploring the landscape of his life and legacy. It's a wonderful way to explore the local area, and several sites on the trail near Newry include The Kilnasaggart Stone, Killeavy old churches, and Kilbroney Graveyard.

ENJOY A MEDIEVAL HERITAGE TOWN

Directly across Carlingford Lough from the Mountains of Mourne is an area that's designated a European Destination of Excellence. Carlingford is one of Ireland's premier heritage towns where stone-built medieval buildings form a walking trail

between the whitewashed houses on narrow streets. You can also enjoy culinary Carlingford at a number of great cafés and restaurants, such as the 18th century Ghan House, Magee's Bistro and The Oystercatcher. The town is a 40-minute drive south of Newry along the beautiful Cooley peninsula.

A CHAMPIONSHIP LINKS

Top golfer Rory McIlroy plays at the Royal County Down when he's home, and the exceptional championship golf course is widely considered by golfers to be one of the finest in the world. McIlroy played his only Walker Cup here – and if you want to make like a champion, you can play either the Championship Links or the Annesley Links. Located in Newcastle, County Down.



Carlingford Lough



Slieve Gullion

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Suffolk Street
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Terminal 2
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■ CORK

Grand Parade
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■ GALWAY

Aras Fáilte, Forster Street
Tel: +353 (0) 91 537700

■ KILKENNY

Shee Alms House
Rose Inn Street
Tel: +353 (0) 56 7751500

■ LIMERICK

Arthur's Quay
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■ WATERFORD

The Granary, The Quay
Tel: +353 (0) 51 87582

■ BELFAST

Belfast City
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Belfast International Airport
Arrivals Hall
Tel: +44 (0) 28 9448 4677

■ ARMAGH

40 English Street
Tel: +44 (0) 28 3752 1800

■ DERRY~LONDONDERRY
44 Foyle Street
Tel: +44 (0) 28 7126 7284

■ LISBURN

15 Lisburn Square
Tel: +44 (0) 28 9266 0038

■ NEWRY

Bagenal's Castle, Castle Street
Tel: +44 (0) 28 3031 3170

✈ TRAVELLING TO IRELAND BY AIR AND SEA

For the latest information on travelling to Ireland by Air or Sea visit: ireland.com

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Tourist office, Suffolk Street, Dublin





IRELAND'S CITIES:
DUBLIN BELFAST CORK GALWAY
LIMERICK DERRY~LONDONDERRY
ARMAGH KILKENNY WATERFORD
LISBURN NEWRY

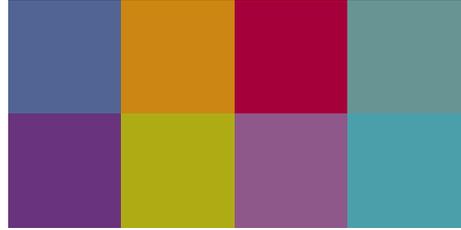


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