



Stuttford Van Lines Country Guide for

Ireland



Country Guides: Courtesy of Overseas Moving Network International (OMNI)

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1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

Location: Europe, off the west coast of Great Britain.

Time: GMT (GMT + 1 from last Sunday in March to last Sunday in October).

Embassy of the Republic of Ireland in the UK

17 Grosvenor Place, London SW1X 7HR, UK Tel: (020) 7235 2171. Opening hours: Mon-Fri 0930-1300, 1415-1700. Passport and visa office: Montpelier House, 106 Brompton Road, London SW3 1JJ, UK Tel: (020) 7225 7700. Opening hours: Mon-Fri 1000-1200 (visa section); 0930-1630 (passport section).

Tourism Ireland in the UK

Nations House, 103 Wigmore Street, London W1U 1QS, UK Tel: (0800) 039 7000 (travel enquiries) or (020) 7518 0800 (trade enquiries). Website: www.tourismireland.com

Embassy of the Republic of Ireland in the USA

2234 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20008, USA Tel: (202) 462 3939. Website: www.irelandemb.org

Tourism Ireland in the USA

345 Park Avenue, 17th Floor, New York, NY 10154, USA Tel: (212) 418 0800 (general enquiries) or (800) 223 6470 (toll-free brochure request line) or 669 9967 (toll-free for travel trade in USA and Canada). Website: www.tourismireland.com

2 OVERVIEW

'Irish eyes finally smiling'

Long gone are the days when Ireland was one of the poorest countries in Europe and its natives fled to all corners of the globe in search of refuge. Today, it is cool to be Irish and, thanks to the likes of The Corrs, Boyzone and U2, evocative images of Ireland now pervade popular culture across the globe. The Ireland of the new millennium is a modern, progressive European nation whose 'Celtic Tiger' economy is booming, but it is not only Irish eyes that are smiling as more and more tourists discover Ireland for themselves. Dublin is undoubtedly the spiritual and cultural heart of the Emerald Isle. Crowding around the banks of the murky River Liffey, the city, like the country, is bound in rich layers of history, back to the days when Celtic tribes wandered the peat bogs, to the present that sees the city overflowing with trendy bars and nightclubs. Elsewhere, the cities of Cork, Galway and Limerick boast their own charms, but it is out in the rolling countryside that you can unearth the idyllic Ireland of the movies. Here, in the atmospheric old pubs, you can experience the legendary craic where music and song lead the course of an evening. Alternatively, ramble over the hills of Glenmalure or sail through the mist-shrouded Pater-Noster Lakes; places that seem a million miles away from the tourist maelstrom of Dublin.

Robin McKelvie



3 GENERAL INFORMATION

Area: 70,182 sq km (27,097 sq miles).

Population: 4 million (UN, 2004).

Population Density: 56.9 per sq km.

Capital: Dublin. Population: 1 million.

GEOGRAPHY: The Republic of Ireland lies in the north Atlantic Ocean and is separated from Britain by the Irish Sea to the east. The northeastern part of the island (Northern Ireland) is part of the United Kingdom. The country has a central plain surrounded by a rim of mountains and hills offering some of the most varied and unspoilt scenery in Europe – quiet sandy beaches, semi-tropical bays warmed by the Gulf Stream, and rugged cliffs make up the 5600km (3500 miles) of coastline.

Government: Republic. Head of State: President Mary McAleese since 1997. Head of Government: Prime Minister Bertie Ahern since 1997. Recent history: At the 1997 election for the Dáil (lower chamber of Parliament), once again no single party secured an overall majority. Fianna Fáil leader Bertie Ahern formed a new Government in alliance with the support of the small Progressive Democrats (a split from Fianna Fáil) and several independents. Ahern's new administration officially took office at the end of June with Mary Harney of the PD as Deputy Prime Minister (Tánaiste), the first woman ever to hold the position. Ahern's relatively successful tenure ensured that the electorate returned his Fianna Fáil-led coalition with an increased majority at the most recent poll in May 2002. Since 1949, Ireland has been a republic with a bicameral legislature: the lower house, the Dáil, has 166 members and is directly elected by universal adult suffrage every five years; the 60-strong Senate has 49 directly elected members with the balance made up of political appointees. Executive power is vested in the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) who presides over a Cabinet of Ministers. The cabinet is responsible to the Dáil for its actions.

Language: Irish (Gaelic) is the official language, spoken as a first language by about 55,000 people (mostly in the west). The majority speak English. Official documents are printed in both languages.

Religion: Roman Catholic 91.6 per cent, the remainder being Protestant, with Jewish and Islamic minorities.

Electricity: 220 volts AC, 50Hz. Three-pin plugs are in use.

Social Conventions: The Irish are gregarious people, and everywhere animated craic (talk) can be heard. Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills (better known as Oscar Wilde) once claimed: 'We are the greatest talkers since the Greeks.' Close community contact is very much part of the Irish way of life and almost everywhere there is an intimate small-town atmosphere. Pubs are often the heart of a community's social life. Visitors will find the people very friendly and welcoming no matter where one finds oneself in the country. A meal in an Irish home is usually a substantial affair and guests will eat well. Dinner is the main meal of the day and is now eaten in the evening. Even in cities there is less formal wear than in most European countries and casual dress is widely acceptable as in keeping with a largely agricultural community. Women, however, often dress up for smart restaurants and social functions. Handshaking is usual, and modes of address will often



be informal. Smoking is banned in all public enclosed/working spaces, including pubs, bars and restaurants.

Passport/Visa

	<i>Passport Required?</i>	<i>Visa Required?</i>	<i>Return Ticket Required?</i>
British	1	No	No
Australian	Yes	No	No
Canadian	Yes	No	No
USA	Yes	No	No
OtherEU	2	No	No
Japanese	Yes	No	No

PASSPORTS: Passport valid for at least three months beyond length of stay required by all except:(a) 1. persons born in the UK travelling direct from the UK (applicable to British passport holders only).Note: Whilst UK citizens do not require a passport or visa to enter Ireland, most carriers by air or sea now require some form of identification with photograph, usually a passport or driving license with photo. Visitors should check what form of ID is required with the individual airline, ferry company or travel agent before travelling. (b) 2. EU/EEA nationals (EU + Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway) and Swiss nationals holding a valid national ID card. Note: EU and EEA nationals are only required to produce evidence of their EU/EEA nationality and identity in order to be admitted to any EU/EEA Member State. This evidence can take the form of a valid national passport or national identity card. Either is acceptable. Possession of a return ticket, any length of validity on their document, sufficient funds for the length of their proposed visit should not be imposed.

VISAS: Required by all except the following for stays of up to 90 days: (a) nationals of countries referred to in the chart above; (b) nationals of Andorra, Antigua & Barbuda, Argentina, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, British Overseas Territories, Brunei, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Dominica, El Salvador, Fiji, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Hong Kong (SAR), Iceland, Israel, Kiribati, Korea (Rep), Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Macau (SAR), Malawi, Malaysia, The Maldives, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Nauru, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, St Kitts & Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent & the Grenadines, San Marino, Seychelles, Singapore, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Swaziland, Switzerland, Tonga, Trinidad & Tobago, Tuvalu, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Vatican City, Venezuela and Western Samoa; (c) transit passengers continuing their journey within 24 hours by the same or first connecting flight provided holding valid onward or return documentation and not leaving the airport. However, the following nationals do always require a transit visa: Afghanistan, Albania, Bulgaria, Cuba, Congo (Dem Rep), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Moldova, Nigeria, Romania, Serbia & Montenegro, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe.

Types of visa and cost: Single-entry: €60. Multiple-entry: €100. Transit: €25. Nationals of some countries receive visas free of charge. Enquire at Consulate/Consular Section of Embassy for further details (see Passport/Visa Information).

Application to: Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy); see Passport/Visa Information for details.



Application requirements: (a) Valid passport. (b) One completed application form. (c) Fee. (d) Letters of reference to substantiate purpose of visit or confirmation of hotel booking containing dates of proposed stay. (e) Three passport-size photos. (f) Evidence that applicant is obliged to return to country of residence, eg letter from current employer stating when applicant is due to return to work. (g) Evidence of sufficient funds or letter of reference from resident in Ireland claiming full financial responsibility for applicant, with proof they have sufficient funds to do so (eg bank statement). Student: (a)-(g) and, (h) Letter of acceptance from place of study (must be full-time and at least 15 hours' study time per week). (i) Proof of paid fees and sufficient funds for duration of course. (j) Copies of educational qualifications. Business: (a)-(g) and, (h) Letter of invitation from company in Ireland/conference host.

Working days required: Six to eight weeks.

Passport/Visa Information: Embassy of the Republic of Ireland in the UK17 Grosvenor Place, London SW1X 7HR, UK Tel: (020) 7235 2171. Opening hours: Mon-Fri 0930-1300, 1415 - 1700. Passport and visa office: Montpelier House, 106 Brompton Road, London SW3 1JJ, UK Tel: (020) 7225 7700. Opening hours: Mon-Fri 1000-1200 (visa section); 0930-1630 (passport section). Embassy of the Republic of Ireland in the USA2234 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20008, USA Tel: (202) 462 3939. Website: www.irelandemb.org

4 MONEY

Single European currency (Euro): The Euro is now the official currency of 12 EU member states (including Ireland). The first Euro coins and notes were introduced in January 2002; the Irish Punt was completely replaced by the Euro on 9 February 2002. Euro (€) = 100 cents. Notes are in denominations of €500, 200, 100, 50, 20, 10 and 5. Coins are in denominations of €2 and 1, and 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1 cents.

Currency exchange: Available in banks, airports and in bureaux de change. ATMs are widely available, catering for Cirrus and Maestro symbols.

Credit & debit cards: American Express, MasterCard and Visa are all widely accepted. Check with your credit and debit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available.

Traveller's cheques: Accepted throughout Ireland. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take traveller's cheques in Euros, Pounds Sterling or US Dollars.

Currency restrictions: There are no restrictions on the import or export of either local or foreign currency, although declarations of more than €6350 are advised.

Exchange rate indicators

DateAt time of publishing£1.00=€1.46\$1.00=€0.82

Banking hours: Mon-Fri 0930-1630. In Dublin, banks stay open Thurs until 1700; there are also late opening nights in other parts of the country, but the day will vary.



5 DUTY FREE

The following goods may be imported by persons over 17 years of age without incurring customs **duty if obtained duty- and/or tax-free outside the EU**: 200 cigarettes or 100 cigarillos or 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco; 1l of spirits and distilled beverages (more than 22 per cent) or 2l of other alcoholic beverages with an alcoholic strength not exceeding 22 per cent, including sparkling or fortified wine, plus 2l of table wine; 50g of perfume and 250ml of eau de toilette; other dutiable goods to the value of £175, or £90 if under 15 years old.

Prohibited items: Firearms, ammunition, explosives, offensive weapons, indecent/obscene material, plants or bulbs, live or dead animals, bird or poultry, endangered species, meat and meat products and hay or straw (even if used as packing).

Abolition of duty free goods within the EU: On June 30 1999, the sale of duty free alcohol and tobacco at airports and at sea was abolished in all of the original 15 EU member states. Of the 10 new member states that joined the EU on May 1 2004, these rules already apply to Cyprus and Malta. There are transitional rules in place for visitors returning to one of the original 15 EU countries from one of the other new EU countries. But for the original 15, plus Cyprus and Malta, there are now no limits imposed on importing tobacco and alcohol products from one EU country to another (with the exceptions of Denmark, Finland and Sweden, where limits are imposed). Travellers should note that they may be required to prove at customs that the goods purchased are for personal use only.

6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Below are listed Public Holidays for the January 2006-June 2007 period. Jan 1 2006 New Year's Day. Mar 17 St Patrick's Day. Apr 14 Good Friday. Apr 17 Easter Monday. May 1 Bank Holiday. Jun 5 Bank Holiday. Aug 6 Summer Bank Holiday. Oct 30 Halloween Bank Holiday. Dec 25 Christmas Day. Dec 26 St Stephen's Day. Jan 1 2007 New Year's Day. Mar 17 St Patrick's Day. Apr 6 Good Friday. Apr 9 Easter Monday. May 7 Bank Holiday. Jun 6 Bank Holiday.

7 HEALTH

	Special Precautions	Certificate Required
Yellow Fever	No	No
Cholera	No	No
Typhoid and Polio	No	N/A
Malaria	No	N/A

Health care: European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland: If you or any of your dependants are suddenly taken ill or have an accident during a visit to an EEA country or Switzerland, free or reduced-cost necessary treatment is available in most cases on production of a valid European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). Each country has different rules about state medical provision. In some, treatment is free. In many countries you will have to pay part or all of the cost, and then claim a full or partial refund. The EHIC gives access to state-provided medical treatment only and



the scheme gives no entitlement to medical repatriation costs, nor does it cover ongoing illnesses of a non-urgent nature, so comprehensive travel insurance is advised. Note that the EHIC replaces the Form E111, which will no longer be valid after 31 December 2005. Some restrictions apply, depending on your nationality. If you need a doctor or a dentist, contact the local Health Board, which will arrange for you to see a public health service doctor or dentist. Make it clear to the practitioner that you wish to be treated under the EU's social security arrangements. You may be asked to complete a simple statement. Emergency treatment and medicines are free if you go to a General Medical Services (GMS) doctor and the prescription is on GMS paper. If you require hospital treatment, a doctor will arrange for you to be admitted to a health service hospital, where treatment in public wards is normally free. If you can't contact a doctor before admission, explain to the hospital authorities that you wish to be treated under the EU arrangements. If you need emergency medication on discharge from a public hospital, you must go to a Health Board doctor for the prescription, otherwise you may have to pay a charge. More information can be obtained from www.irlgov.ie/healthboards.htm.

Travel - International

AIR: The national airline is Aer Lingus (EI) (website: www.aerlingus.com). Aer Lingus provides a service from Los Angeles and New York's JFK to Shannon and Dublin. Delta Air Lines operates a service from New York's JFK Airport to Shannon and Dublin. Services to London are frequent and moderately priced. There is a wide range of promotional air fares to Ireland from main cities in the UK, and an ever-increasing number of airlines connect regional UK airports with Ireland.

Approximate flight times: From Dublin to London is one hour 20 minutes, to New York is seven hours 30 minutes.

Main airports: Dublin Airport (DUB) (website: www.dublin-airport.com) is 10km (6 miles) north of the city. To/from the airport: Taxis into the city centre cost approximately €15; passengers may be charged extra for large luggage. An aircoach service runs to and from the airport, 24 hours per day. Citylink runs a service from Galway to Dublin Airport (travel time - 3 hours). Dublin Bus offers many routes throughout Dublin to the airport, including an AirLink Express bus from Heuston and Connolly railway stations. Facilities: Duty free shop, car hire, bank, bureau de change, bars, restaurants, tourist information centre and chemist. Shannon Airport (SNN) (website: www.shannonairport.com) is 24km (15 miles) north of Limerick City (travel time 25 minutes). To/from the airport: Bus services are available to and from both Limerick and Clare, approximately every hour. A daily express coach travels between Limerick and Shannon, plus to Ennis bus station. Citylink operates a service from Galway to Shannon Airport (travel time - one hour and 15 minutes). Taxi services are available, 24 hours, to Limerick City. Facilities: Outgoing duty free shop, bank, bureau de change, bar, restaurant and tourist information centre. Cork Airport (ORK) (website: www.corkairport.com) is 8km (5 miles) southwest of the city. To/from the airport: Buses travel between the city centre and airport (travel time 15 minutes), a single journey costs €3.70 and a return costs €6. Facilities: Outgoing duty free shop, car hire, bar and restaurant. Knock International Airport (NOC) (website: www.knockairport.com) is 11km (7 miles) north of Claremorris (Co Mayo) and receives scheduled international flights from the UK only: Ryanair from London Stansted, Bmibaby from Birmingham and Manchester, Loganair from Dublin, Easyjet from London Gatwick and British Airways from London Gatwick via Dublin. At other times of the year, chartered flights operate between Knock and a number of European destinations, such as Salzburg, Majorca, Crete and Lisbon. To/from the airport: Taxi services are available to Claremorris, where onward rail and bus connections are available to the rest of the country. Facilities: Duty free shop, bar, restaurant and car hire (pre-booking advised).



Departure tax: €10 at Knock International Airport only, payable by everyone over 12 years.

SEA: Main ports: Baltimore, Dublin (website: www.dublinport.ie), Galway, Kinsale and Wexford. In addition to conventional ferry crossings, many ferry companies now offer high-speed services as well as upgraded, state-of-the-art craft on many Irish sea routes. Fares will vary by season and promotional offers are available. Routes from Britain and France include: From England: LiverpoolDublin (travel time eight hours); FleetwoodLarne (Northern Ireland, travel time eight hours). From the Isle of Man: DouglasDublin (travel time two hours 45 minutes, summer only, or four hours 45 minutes on conventional ferries); DouglasBelfast (Northern Ireland, travel time two hours 45 minutes). From Scotland: CairnryanLarne (Northern Ireland, travel time one hour on fast ferries and one hour 45 minutes on conventional ferries); TroonBelfast (Northern Ireland, travel time two hours 35 minutes); StranraerBelfast (travel time one hour 45 minutes on fast ferries and three hours 15 minutes on conventional ferries). From Wales: Holyhead (Isle of Anglesey)Dublin (travel time one hour 50 minutes on fast ferries and minimum three hours 15 minutes on conventional ferries); Holyhead (Isle of Anglesey)Dun Laoghaire (travel time one hour 40 minutes on fast ferries); FishguardRosslare (travel time one hour 40 minutes on fast ferries and three hours 30 minutes on conventional ferries); SwanseaCork (seasonal, travel time 10 hours); PembrokeRosslare (travel time three hours 45 minutes). From France: Irish Ferries operate at least four direct ferry crossings a day between France and Ireland. The routes are CherbourgRosslare (travel time 19 hours); RoscoffRosslare (travel time 18 hours); Roscoff-Cork (travel time - 13 hours 30 minutes). For information on routes, fares and reservations, contact one of the following: Brittany Ferries (tel: (08703) 665 333; website: www.brittany-ferries.com); Irish Ferries (tel: (08705) 171 717 (UK office) or (1) 855 222 (Dublin office); website: www.irishferries.com); Isle of Man Steam Packet (tel: (01624) 661 661; website: www.steam-packet.com); P&O Irish Sea (tel: (0870) 242 4777; website: www.poirishsea.com); Stena Line (tel: (08705) 707 070; website: www.stenaline.co.uk); and Swansea-Cork Ferries (tel: (01792) 456 116). Most ferry companies now also offer an online booking facility on their website.

RAIL: Rail links serve Ireland from all the above ferry ports, as well as from Northern Ireland. Rail passes: The Inter-Rail pass offers unlimited second-class train travel in up to 29 European countries (includes Morocco and Turkey) split into eight zones (A-H). Three different tickets are available: a ticket covering one zone (two to six countries, 16 days' validity), a ticket covering two zones (six to 10 countries, 22 days' validity) and an All Zone Pass (29 countries, one month's validity). Ferry services between Italy and Greece are included. Passengers must be resident in Europe for at least six months before the pass is used. Travel is not allowed in the passenger's country of residence. Travellers under 26 years receive a reduction of about 30 per cent. Children's tickets are reduced by about 50 per cent. Supplements are required for some high-speed services, seat reservations and couchettes. Discounts are offered on Eurostar and some ferry routes. Available from Inter Rail (website: www.interrailnet.com). The Eurailpass offers unlimited first-class train travel in 17 European countries. Saver tickets are valid for 15 days, 21 days, one month, two months or three months. The Eurailpass Saver ticket offers discounts for two or more people travelling together. The Eurailpass Youth ticket is available to those aged under 26 and offers unlimited second-class train travel. The Eurailpass Flexi allows either 10 or 15 travel days within a two-month period. The Eurail Selectpass is valid in three, four or five bordering countries and allows five, six, eight or 10 travel days (or 15 for five countries) in a two-month period. The Eurail Regional Pass allows four to 10 travel days in a two month period in one of nine regions (usually two or more countries). Children receive a 50 per cent reduction. The passes cannot be sold to residents of Europe, Turkey, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia or the Russian Federation. Available from the Eurail Group (website: www.eurail.com). The EuroDomino pass enables holders anything from three to eight days' extensive travel within a one-month period on the entire rail network of their chosen country. It is valid in 28 European countries and



North Africa, including the ferry service from Brindisi (Italy) to Igoumenitsa (Greece). To purchase a EuroDomino pass you must have been resident in Europe for at least six months and a passport number is required at time of booking. It is not permitted to purchase a pass for travel within your own country of residence. To qualify for the youth rates, you must be under 26 years on the first date of validity of the pass. Children aged four-11 years inclusive pay half the adult fares rounded up to the nearest pound. Children under four years travel for free. Seat reservations, couchette and sleeper charges are not included in the cost of the pass and are payable at the normal rate. Passholder fares are payable on some services. Reservation/Supplement charges are payable on all trains within Spain. Available from Rail Europe (Website: www.raileurope.co.uk/railpasses/eurodomino.htm).

Travel - Internal

AIR: Aer Lingus (as well as several other carriers) operates services throughout the country. Charter flights are also available. The Aran Islands are served by Aer Arann (website: www.aerarann.ie) via a 15-minute flight from Connemara Regional Airport (located 27km/17 miles west of Galway city).

Domestic airports: Galway (GWY) is approximately 8km (5 miles) from the city centre. To/from the airport: Bus and taxi services are available into Galway centre. Sligo (SXL) (website: www.sligoairport.com) is 8km (5 miles) from Sligo. To/from the airport: Taxis need prior booking. Bus and taxi services are available into Sligo. Carrickfinn (CFN) is in Co Donegal. Kerry (Farranfore) (KIR) (website: www.kerryairport.ie) in Co Kerry is 19km (12 miles) from both Killarney and Tralee. To/from the airport: Taxi services are available to both these towns and to the nearby railway station. Car hire is also available. As well as the airports listed above (and in Travel International), there are various small licensed airstrips which receive passenger services; enquire at Tourism Ireland for details of operators and routes (see Top Things To Do).

SEA: Ferry services run to the various west coast islands; enquiries should be made locally.

RAIL: Rail services in the Republic are owned by Iarnród Eireann (Irish Rail) (website: www.irishrail.ie) and express trains run between the main cities. There are two classes of accommodation, with restaurant and buffet cars on some trains. Children under five travel free. Children aged five to 15 pay half fare. A range of rail-only and combined rail and bus tickets are available for unlimited travel within the Republic of Ireland. The Britrail and Eurorail card systems are valid in Ireland (see Travel - International).

ROAD: The network links all parts of Ireland. Traffic drives on the left. Ireland changed all road signs from imperial to metric measurements on 20 January 2005. Bus: Internal bus services are run by Bus Eireann (Irish Bus) (website: www.buseireann.ie) which has a nationwide network of buses serving all the major cities and most towns and villages outside the Dublin area. Bus services in remote areas are infrequent. An 'Expressway' coach network complements rail services. The central bus station is in Store Street, Dublin. A variety of special passes are available, including the Irish Rambler, which offers unlimited travel for three, eight or 15 days. Irish Explorer offers unlimited intercity and suburban rail services, as well as the Bus Eireann Expressway and local and city services. The Emerald Card offers services in Northern Ireland as well as in the Republic of Ireland. Several independent bus companies, which are often cheaper, faster and more frequent than Bus Eireann, operate regular, scheduled services to and from Dublin. Further information can be found in local papers. Coach tours: Many companies offer coach tours, varying in length and itinerary. Full-day and half-day guided tours are organised from the larger towns and cities. These run from May to October. Full details are available from Bus Eireann and CIE Tours International. Taxi: Service is available in major cities. Taxis are



metered in Cork, Dublin, Galway and Limerick. In other areas it is advised to agree on a fare beforehand. Cruising taxis are infrequent. Places to get taxis are at hotels, rail and bus stations or taxi stands. Car hire: Available from all air- and seaports as well as major hotels. All international hire companies are represented in Ireland, as well as local operators. Age requirements vary from a minimum of 21 to a maximum of 70 years. A full licence from the driver's home country is required, and the driver will normally be required to have had at least two years' experience. It is advisable to book hire cars in advance, especially in the peak season, and a child seat should be ordered in advance also. Advise the car hire company if the car will be driven into Northern Ireland. The 'Guide to Touring Ireland by Car' is available from the Tourism Ireland (see Top Things To Do). Bicycle hire: Ask for a Tourist Board leaflet. Regulations: Speed limits: 50 k/h (30mph) in towns and cities, 80 k/h (50mph) on local roads (this is displayed on white signs) and 100 k/h (60mph) on national roads (this is displayed on green signs). Seatbelts should be worn at all times and it is illegal to drive while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Documentation: EU nationals taking cars into the Republic require: motor registration book (or owner's authority in writing); full EU driving licence or International Driving Permit; nationality coding stickers; and insurance cover valid for the Republic. A Green Card is strongly recommended, as without it, insurance cover is limited to the minimum legal requirement in Ireland the Green Card tops this up to the cover provided by the visitor's domestic policy.

URBAN: Extensive bus services operate in Dublin. There is a fast suburban rail service (DART, Dublin Area Rapid Transport), travelling from Malahide in the north to Greystones in the south. Buses in the city are run by DublinBus; they operate from 0600-2330 during weekdays with a limited night bus service on Thursday, Friday and Saturday departing the city every 20 minutes, 0030-0430. Dublin also has its own tram system, LUAS, which is a high-speed service with convenient stop locations throughout the city. Taxis can be hailed or hired at a taxi rank: the three main taxi ranks in the city are O'Connell Street, Dame Street and St Stephens Street.

TRAVEL TIMES: The following chart gives approximate travel times (in hours and minutes) from Dublin to other major cities/towns in Ireland. Air Road Rail Cork 0.403.002.40 Limerick-3.302.10 Shannon Airport 0.353.00 Kilkenny-2.001.45

8 ACCOMMODATION

EDITOR'S CHOICE: CABIN CRUISING: There are five main waterways in Ireland made up of connecting canals, lakes, rivers and inlets. Barges can be hired, usually on a weekly basis, with two, six, eight or 10 berths (beds). Previous experience of operating a barge is not essential as full training is provided, so a license is not required. The cost of hiring a barge varies depending on the season.

HOTELS: There are over 800 hotels inspected, approved and graded by Fáilte Ireland (Tourism Ireland in Ireland) and prices are fixed by Fáilte Ireland. Fáilte Ireland registers and grades hotels from 5-star (highest) to 1-star (lowest).

GUEST HOUSES: Guest houses are smaller, more intimate establishments often under family management. There are over 490 guest houses registered and inspected by Fáilte Ireland. These range from converted country houses to purpose-built accommodation. Meals range from bed & breakfast to full board. The minimum number of bedrooms is five and the availability of meals is not a requirement. Fáilte Ireland registers and grades guest houses from 4-star (very high standard) to 1-star (clean and comfortable). Hot and cold running water in all bedrooms. Adequate bathroom and toilet facilities. Ungraded premises are hotels and guest houses not sufficiently long in operation, so are left ungraded.



FARMHOUSES/TOWN & COUNTRY HOMES: There are hundreds of town or country homes and farmhouses offering bed & breakfast on a daily or weekly basis with other meals often provided. This informal type of accommodation gives visitors the opportunity to share in the life of an Irish family in an urban or country setting. They may live in a Georgian residence, a modern bungalow or a traditional cottage. A farmhouse holiday again gives scope for meeting people and is especially suitable for children. Visitors can forget about city life and enjoy the everyday life of the farm. Either way it will be a relaxing and friendly holiday. All homes and farmhouses that have been inspected and approved by Fáilte Ireland are listed in the official guide, available from the Tourist Board. In addition to this, the Town and Country Homes Association and Fáilte Tuaithe (pronounced Foil-tya Too-ha), the Irish Farmhouse Association, produce their own annual guides to their members' houses. These are also available from Tourism Ireland in Britain and from tourist information offices throughout Ireland.

SELF-CATERING: There are self-catering establishments scattered throughout Ireland, listed by Fáilte Ireland. Self-catering holidays are available for those who like to come and go as they please without any restrictions. There is self-catering accommodation to suit all tastes, including houses, self-contained apartments, cottages and caravans. There are even traditional-style thatched cottages which are fully equipped and located in carefully selected beauty spots.

CAMPING/CARAVANNING: Ireland's caravan and camping parks are inspected by Fáilte Ireland. Those that meet minimum requirements are identified by a special sign and listed in an official guide which shows the facilities at each park. Firms offering touring caravans, tents and camping equipment for hire are included in the listing. There are over 100 caravan and campsites. The majority are open from May to September.

YOUTH HOSTELS: A total of 24 youth hostels are operated by An Oige (Irish Youth Hostel Association). They provide simple dormitory accommodation with comfortable beds and facilities for cooking meals. Usage is confined to members of An Oige or other youth organisations affiliated to the International Youth Hostel Federation. Non-members can buy stamps at hostels entitling them to further hostel use. A Youth Hostel Accommodation Guide is available.

HOLIDAY HOSTELS: There are registered holiday hostels offering privately-owned accommodation at reasonable prices. Dormitory-style sleeping accommodation and/or private bedrooms are available, with fully-equipped kitchens. No membership is required. Some provide meals, others breakfast only.

HOLIDAY CENTRES: These centres offer a comprehensive holiday with a wide variety of amenities and facilities including self-catering units, indoor heated swimming pool and restaurant facilities. The centres are registered with Fáilte Ireland.

OTHER ACCOMMODATION: Student accommodation is available at many of Ireland's universities during the holidays. There are a number of health farms throughout Ireland, which offer spa baths, massage clinics and beauty salons as well as accommodation.

Accommodation Information: Fáilte Ireland Baggot Street Bridge, Baggot Street, Dublin 2, Ireland Tel: (1) 602 4000. Website: www.ireland.ie or www.failteireland.ie Irish Hotels Federation 13 Northbrook Road, Dublin 6, Ireland Tel: (1) 497 6459. Website: www.irelandhotels.com Distinction World (A selection of some of the finest hotels in Ireland) Website: www.distinctionworld.com Fáilte Tuaithe (Irish Farm Holidays) 2 Michael Street, Limerick, Ireland Tel: (61) 400 700. Website: www.irishfarmholidays.com Town and Country Homes Association Belleek Road, Ballyshannon, Co Donegal, Ireland Tel: (71) 982 2222. Website: www.townandcountry.ie Irish Cottage Holiday Homes Central Reservations Office, Bracken Court,



Bracken Road, Sandyford, Dublin 18, Ireland Tel: (1) 205 2777. Website: www.irishcottageholidays.com Irish Caravan and Camping Council PO Box 4443, Dublin 2, Ireland Website: www.camping-ireland.ie An Oige (Irish Youth Hostel Association) 61 Mountjoy Street, Dublin 7, Ireland Tel: (1) 830 4555. Website: www.irelandyha.org or www.anoige.ie Waterways Ireland Tel: (1) 965 0787. Website: www.waterwaysireland.org Healthfarms of Ireland Website: www.healthfarmsofireland.com.

Introduction

The 3500km (2200 miles) of Ireland's coastline embrace a remarkable diversity of scenery and conditions from long, gently sloping strands (beaches) and rocky sea cliffs and headlands to raised bogs, outstanding mountains, attractive villages and towns, prehistoric and religious sites and a laid-back approach to life that is without equal. The shape and comparatively small size of Ireland means that nowhere is very far from the sea. But beware, many of Ireland's roads are narrow, and the through routes are heavily used. Resorts and beaches in Ireland are uncrowded, and the tourism infrastructure is underpinned by a network of more than 50 tourist information offices offering help, advice, accommodation and suggestions on all aspects of travel. Most tourist offices are open Mon-Fri 0900-1800, closing on Saturday at 1300, but times vary, with offices at seaports and airports generally open longer during the summer months. In this review, the country has been divided into six arbitrary regions embracing **a number of counties within each**: Dublin and the East Coast: Counties Louth, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow. The southeast: Counties Waterford, Wexford, Tipperary and Kilkenny. The Midlands: Counties Monaghan, Cavan, Longford, Westmeath, Offaly and Laois. The southwest: Counties Cork, Kerry and Limerick. The west: Counties Clare, Galway, Roscommon and Mayo. The northwest: Counties Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal.

Dublin and the East Coast

DUBLIN: The capital city of Ireland sprawls across the Liffey valley, reaching in a great sweep from the headlands of Howth in the north to Dalkey. Dublin is a complex city of almost dual personality, divided by the Liffey into the heavily populated north and more genteel south. This is a city with a quirky sense of humour, ideal to explore on foot. The historic heart of the city lies south of the Liffey, unaltered in appearance since Georgian times, though the last decade of the 20th century saw major urban regeneration that makes the place buzz with excitement, especially around Temple Bar. This upbeat part of the city got its name from Sir William Temple, the Provost of Trinity College. Today, the area boasts fashionable pubs, good places to eat, discos and inordinate joie de vivre. Founded during the reign of Elizabeth I, Trinity College, the city's most famous landmark, was a symbol of English dominance to which, until 1873, admission was restricted to Protestants. Many of the college's students have achieved a measure of fame, notably Oscar Wilde, Bram Stoker, Samuel Beckett and Jonathan Swift. The Old Library houses a number of important manuscripts in its Treasury, among which the Book of Kells is the best known. West of Trinity College stands Dublin Castle, the seat of British rule in Ireland, and worth a visit for its beautiful state apartments. On the corner of Suffolk Street and the popular shopping area, Grafton Street, stands the statue of Molly Malone, the Dublin beauty. Merrion Square is the city's most elegant place, lined with classical Georgian houses with stunning doorways, canopies and fanlights. Oscar Wilde lived at 1 Merrion Square, Daniel O'Connell at 58, with WB Yeats only a few doors higher, at 82. St Stephen's Green is an important 24.8 acre (10 hectare) open space, popular with office workers and a delightful place to soak up the atmosphere. The National Gallery houses one of the finest collections in Europe, and includes works by Gainsborough, Reynolds and Hogarth. When the Normans invaded Dublin, in the process they forced the Vikings to the lands north of the Liffey, where they established Oxmanstown. The south continued to prosper, but the northern part of the city only became urbanised in the 18th century. Today, this



is a less well-known area of busy pedestrianised streets, shopping centres and the popular Moore Street Market. In the 18th century, O'Connell Street was known as Gardener's Mall, a fashionable area, renamed in honour of Daniel O'Connell. Worth seeking out here are the National Wax Museum at the corner of Dorset Street and Granby Row, and the James Joyce Centre in North Great George's Street. To the northwest, Phoenix Park is the largest city park in Europe, and a good place to watch the city going about its business. Dublin Zoo is in the southeast corner of the park.

Excursions: Dun Laoghaire (pronounced Dun Leery) has attractive Victorian buildings, castles and a fine seafront. The James Joyce Tower and Museum, at Sandycove, is housed in a Martello Tower built in the early 1800s. Many personal effects of James Joyce are gathered here, including a first edition of Ulysses. Three castles at Dalkey survive from the 15th and 16th centuries: Bullock Castle (not open to the public), Archbold's Castle, now the town hall, and Goat Castle, housing the Dalkey Heritage Centre. Malahide Castle, north of the city, was built in the 12th century and houses some lovely furniture and a portrait gallery with paintings by Irish and British artists. Castletown House, west of Dublin is a stunning Palladian building, among the best in Europe. It was built for the Speaker of the Irish House of Commons, William Connolly, who contrived to become the richest man in Ireland.

COUNTIES LOUTH AND MEATH: These two counties have much in common: outstanding Neolithic, Celtic and early-Christian history; extensive settlement by Normans; and a wealth of castles, monasteries, and rich farmland. They also share the River Boyne; wide, gentle and very beautiful, and famous for the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, when James II sought to regain the English throne, but was outmanoeuvred by William of Orange. Astride the Boyne, Drogheda, the harbour town of Co Louth, holds an important place in the history of medieval Ireland. It was besieged by Oliver Cromwell in 1649, who massacred or transported most of the inhabitants. Today, it is a useful centre for exploring the Boyne Valley, which fashions a meandering course between Trim and Drogheda, hallmarked by an extensive list of prehistoric sites. The prehistoric burial sites of Brú na Bóinne, west of Drogheda, number more than 40 and predate the pyramids. Among these, Newgrange is western Europe's most outstanding chambered tomb, built around 5000 years ago. Monasterboice was formerly a sixth-century monastery; in the cemetery stand three of the finest High Crosses in the country. Dundalk is an industrial, harbour township, founded in the 12th century but largely rebuilt during Georgian times. Bordering Northern Ireland, the Cooley Peninsula forms a huge upland covered by heather, megaliths and pine plantations. The best way to see the peninsula is on foot, following parts of the Táin Way, a circular walk from Carlingford and Omeath. Famed for its oysters, Carlingford looks across the lough to the Mourne Mountains. Historical links are found in King John's Castle, a small stronghold overlooking the sea, and Taaffe's Castle, one of many fortified residences in the area dating from the 16th century.

COUNTY KILDARE: Bounded by the Liffey and the Wicklow Mountains, County Kildare lies between the built-up area around Dublin and the boglands of The Midlands. The county has an enviable reputation, founded on the luxuriant turf of the Curragh, for the breeding and exercising of thoroughbred horses. Kildare Town is built around St Brigid's Cathedral, which contains a number of Renaissance tombs and a splendid timber roof shaped like the hull of a ship. Close by is the round tower, the only one in Ireland to have an external staircase. Peatland World, at Lullymore, 25km (15 miles) north of Kildare, tells all there is to know about peat. The National Stud at Tully, just outside Kildare Town, was started by Colonel Hall-Walker (to become Lord Wavertree), and its importance in the racing world is immense; open for guided tours, it includes a Horse Museum. Naas (pronounced Nace) is a small industrial town on the edge of the Wicklow Mountains. Once the seat of the kings of the Province of Leinster, Naas was the heart of the ancient Irish kingdom of Ui Dunlainge. Today, it is a good shopping centre, and very much a



hunting and horseracing locality. On the banks of the huge Poulaphouca Reservoir, 20km (12.5 miles) southeast of Naas, Russborough House is a stunningly elegant Palladian mansion begun in 1741, built in Wicklow granite. On show here are works of art by European masters like Murillo, Poussin, Reynolds and Rubens.

COUNTY WICKLOW: The beauty of Wicklow is renowned far and wide. This land of mountains, forests, waterfalls and lakes takes its name from the tiny county town and the adjacent mountain range. Wicklow lies sandwiched between the heavily urban areas of Dublin and Wexford, and has the Irish Sea to the east. For centuries, the county was a stronghold of Celtic Christianity, with a focal point around Glendalough. At the northern end of the county, Bray is a lively seaside resort with an air of Victorian charm, now rather faded and heavily reliant on daytrippers from Dublin. A fine beach, backed by amusement arcades and the National Sea-Life Centre, continues to make Bray popular. Killruddery House Gardens, offer splendid formal gardens, lakes and canals. Glencormac Gardens, southwest of Bray, were created by James Jameson of the famous distilling family. The fine 18th-century house at Powerscourt, west of Bray, is hugely popular, as are its formal gardens. A pleasant footpath leads to the Powerscourt Waterfall, the highest falls in Ireland, formed by the Dargle River which drops over cliffs 122m (400ft) high. The county town of Wicklow is a delightfully sleepy place bordering a shingle bay. The main attraction in the town is the Wicklow Historic Gaol, which recounts the grim events and unsavoury personalities of Irish history. The luxurious displays of Mount Usher Gardens were set up in the 1860s by a Dublin linen manufacturer, Edward Walpole, and are a plant-lover's paradise. Glendalough, the glen of the two lakes, is a place of holiness among the hills and a place of pilgrimage, where St Kevin founded a monastery in AD 570. The tall round tower is a familiar landmark, variously used as a look-out post, a grain store and a belfry. The cathedral is now in ruins, but is no less evocative for that. Down towards the river is St Kevin's Church, a modest building with a chimney-shaped belfry. The little village of Avoca achieved fame as Ballykissangel in the television drama of that name.

The Southeast

COUNTY WEXFORD: Lying in the southeast corner of Ireland, Co Wexford has an enviable sunshine record, beautiful countryside and a string of delightful harbour towns and sandy beaches. The climate is milder than elsewhere and produces a number of stunning gardens, open to the public by arrangement. Built close to the mouth of the River Slaney, Wexford is a busy commercial and fishing town named by Vikings. Shops, pubs and an atmospheric charm make Wexford an appealing place to visit; that and its internationally renowned week-long Opera Festival, held in October. The Irish National Heritage Park at Ferrycarrig, northwest of Wexford comprises 17 sites linking Ireland's history from prehistoric times to medieval. The mudflats of the Slaney Estuary (known as 'slobs') make up the Wexford Wildfowl Reserve, at its best between October and April when wildfowl are here. Kilmore Quay is an attractive fishing village with fine sandy beaches, thatched cottages, pubs and a maritime museum. A short distance offshore, the uninhabited Saltee Islands, one of Ireland's most important bird sanctuaries, are worth visiting. More easily accessed from Waterford, there is a beautiful drive down from Arthurstown to Hook Head Peninsula, which boasts many lovely sandy beaches and clifftops that are ideal for walking, cycling and horse riding. Surrounded by farmland and stretched out along the River Slaney, Enniscorthy's moment of fame arrived in 1798 in the form of the Battle of Vinegar Hill, when the United Irishmen made their last stand against the British. The thriving market town, by far the most attractive in Co Wexford, was established by the Normans it is still dominated by the Norman castle and the much later St Aidan's Cathedral. The castle houses the Wexford County Museum. Well inland for an old port, New Ross, perched along the River Barrow, was the original family base of the American Kennedy family and remains devoted to the US President. The John Fitzgerald Kennedy Park and Arboretum, south of New Ross, is dedicated to



his memory and was opened in 1968 and is a popular place for easy walks. Kilmokea Gardens are arguably the most beautiful gardens in the southeast of Ireland, and not to be missed.

COUNTY WATERFORD: Bordered by the sea and divided by two upland ranges the Comeragh and the Monavullagh Waterford has both rugged beauty and an attractive coastline of fishing villages, holidays resorts and beaches. Tightly compressed into a curve of the River Suir, Waterford was founded by Vikings in order to control shipping entering the rivers Suir and Barrow. Above the quayside, Reginald's Tower and Museum, built in 1003, is a forceful reminder of a turbulent past Waterford was one of the few places to successfully oppose Cromwell's forces. Organised tours of Waterford Crystal Glass Factory illustrate the comprehensive story of crystal manufacture. Dunmore East, southeast of Waterford, is a charming village close to safe bathing beaches and attractive coves, including Lady Cove, a neat sandy bay popular with local people and tourists. Tramore, south of Waterford is one of Ireland's main holiday resorts. It has a racecourse, plenty of pubs, a large amusement park, miniature railway, boating lake and a 4.8km- (3 mile-) sandy beach caressed by the Gulf Stream. The small harbour town of Dungarvan is found where the River Colligan flushes into Dungarvan Harbour. It provides a good base from which to explore the clifftops of Helvick Head. Nearby, Ardmore is renowned for its long, fine beach set against high cliffs and its place in Irish history as an important ecclesiastical site based on a seventh-century monastic settlement founded by St Declan.

COUNTY CARLOW: The second-smallest of Ireland's counties, Carlow, sandwiched between the rivers Barrow and Slaney, is mostly flat acres of rich farmland that edge along the base of hill country to the south, east and west. This is an unspoilt part of Ireland, a place of sleepy villages and lush countryside. Carlow Town used to be an Anglo-Norman stronghold, but these days it is largely concerned with the manufacture of sugar beet. It was the southernmost outpost of the area controlled by the English Crown and, as a result, heavily fortified. Carlow County Museum is in the town hall on Centaur Street.

COUNTY KILKENNY: This is a busy agricultural county, a place of lush, well-tended countryside, neat, attractive villages, homely cottages and dramatic castles along the river valleys of the Nore and the Barrow. Fishing, horseracing, riding and golf are the main activities in this manicured landscape. Kilkenny is named after St Canice, who established a monastery here. Kilkenny Castle continues to dominate the town, a blend of Gothic, Classical and Tudor styles. Built on a hilltop site in the sixth century, St Canice's Cathedral dates mostly from the 13th century. Dunmore Cave, north of Kilkenny is one of the most famous in Ireland, notably for its great beauty. In the past, people took refuge here from the Vikings, not always successfully. Kells Priory, south of Kilkenny, the site of an Augustinian priory, is little known in Ireland, but is one of the most beautiful and finest ruins in the country. Jerpoint Abbey, south of Thomastown is a remarkable Cistercian ruin, famed for the carvings on its tombs. It dates from 1158, but was embraced by Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries.

COUNTY TIPPERARY: The lack of a coastline does not affect the beauty of this county in any way, as a walk to the top of Slievenamon (the mountain of the fairies), north of Clonmel, will reveal. Northwards, amid farmlands, rises the limestone Rock of Cashel, to the south are the Comeragh Mountains. The countryside of Tipperary is dotted with Norman castles and churches, and Stone and Iron Age sites. The town of Clonmel sits on the banks of the River Suir, and dates from the 10th century, but there is considerable evidence all around of occupation from prehistoric times. Today, Clonmel is the most important town in the county. The County Museum in Parnell Street has a diverse collection of artefacts, including Roman coins and prehistoric items. The Comeragh and Knockmealdown mountain ranges are vast uplands of forest and bog, but easy to explore either by car or on foot. Ballymacarbry on the River Nier is also a good base for walking. Carrick-on-Suir, a thriving market town east of Clonmel is today best known for Sean



Kelly the cyclist who had noted success in the Tour de France. Ormond Castle, just outside the town, is a fortified Elizabethan mansion and well worth visiting.

The Midlands

COUNTY MONAGHAN: This county lies between Fermanagh to the west and Armagh to the east, and has a delightful landscape of low, rolling hills. Lakes abound too, making this a popular place with coarse fishermen. The central part of the county is hilly but intensively farmed. Monaghan is a market town, built on a monastic site, with some excellent architecture. The Monaghan County Museum on Market Street contains the Clogher Cross among its treasures, a sample of early Christian metalwork. Castleblaney lies at the head of Lough Muckno, the county's largest lake and a source of excellent coarse fishing. Carrickmacross, south of Ballybay, is famed for its handmade lace. To the north stands Mannan Castle, a 12th-century motte and bailey.

COUNTY CAVAN: Known to anglers as a place of lakes and rivers and the very best in coarse fishing. Non-anglers scarcely know it at all for Cavan is an undiscovered county, peaceful and unspoilt, an attractive countryside dotted with woodlands and folded into wild glens that rise to the summit of Cuilcagh at 665m (2182ft), which it shares with Co Fermanagh. Cavan, the county town, is uninspiring, but nearby Clough Oughter, a circular tower castle, tells of a time when this was the stronghold of the O'Reillys, the princes of Breffni. A short way out of Cavan, is a group of standing stones, Finn MacCool's Fingers, said to be the place where the princes were crowned. West of the town, Lough Oughter is the name given to a collection of lakes, part of the River Erne system, and a major coarse fishing area.

COUNTY LONGFORD: Like Co Cavan, Longford holds great appeal for anglers. It sits in the middle of Ireland, and lies in the catchment of the River Shannon. Lakes abound, notably Lough Gowna in the north and Lough Kinale in the east. Today, Co Longford is primarily given to farming. Perched on the River Camlin, Longford Town grew up around a fortress of the O'Farrells. The towers of the Cathedral of St Mel dominate the town. A few miles west, Cloondara is worth a visit: an attractive village on the Royal Canal. During the summer months, Irish music is performed in the teach cheoil (Irish music house). Ballymahon is famed for Oliver Goldsmith, author of *She Stoops to Conquer* and the classic poem *The Deserted Village*. He was born at Pallas, a few miles to the east.

COUNTY WESTMEATH: This county has an air of quiet beauty, being a place of lakes and wooded countryside, and a huge slice of untamed bogland, producing a unique habitat for flora and fauna. Old-fashioned pubs and ruins dot the landscape, and make Westmeath a fascinating place to explore. The former garrison town of Mullingar is now an important centre for angling and one of the most agreeable market towns in Ireland, with an atmosphere that is lacking in other towns in The Midlands. Hunting, shooting and fishing are the main pursuits here. In Crookedwood village, at the foot of Lough Derravaragh, stands St Munna's Church, the stuff of fairytales, complete with 15th-century tower and battlements and a lakeside setting. At Castlepollard are the beautiful grounds of Tullynally Castle, the family seat of the earls of Longford.

COUNTIES OFFALY AND LAIOS: Sharing almost the same identity of remote, unspoilt boglands unaffected by mass tourism the counties of Offaly and Laios lie at the heart of The Midlands. Co Offaly is bordered to the west by the River Shannon, which offers cruising tours, as does the Grand Canal that runs through the middle of the county. Co Laios (pronounced Leash) is a place of attractive villages with fine houses. Co Offaly shares with Co Laios the beautiful glens of the Slieve Bloom Mountains which, in spite of a low elevation and a distinctly boggy feel about



them, nevertheless convey a sense of grandeur and remoteness. One of Ireland's most holy places, Clonmacnoise, was founded in AD 548 by St Ciaran at a strategic crossing point of the Shannon. During medieval times, it developed into a great seat of learning, acknowledged by kings. Using a former trackbed built for the transportation of peat, the Clonmacnoise and West Offaly Railway is the key to the natural history of bogs, as it fashions an 8.8km- (5.5 mile-) course around the Blackwater Bog. Birr is an attractive town of Georgian streets and buildings. The grounds of Birr Castle are superb, though the castle itself is not open to the public. Here, too, is the Historic Science Centre, housing a large reflecting telescope - the largest in the world in its day. There is little of interest in Portlaoise itself, though there is a defensive fort, the Rock of Dunamase, just outside the town, and a Steam Traction Museum at Stradbally. Emo Court, west of Kildare, is an elegant neo-Classical building constructed in 1792. Not far from Mountrath is Roundwood House, a lovely Palladian mansion, now a guest house.

The Southwest

COUNTY CORK: This is Ireland's largest county, combining rich agricultural land, an important sea port, glorious coastal and mountain scenery, gentle bays and romantic castles. Tourism and related activities form a major part of Cork's economy, but instead of brashness and tackiness, the county has become more discerning and produced a wide range of quality shops, pubs, hotels and restaurants. Although the county extends northwards to Limerick, its most dramatic landscapes are in the southwest, where long fingers of land probe the Atlantic Ocean, making for stunning car tours and breathtaking excursions on foot. Ferries reach out to the offshore Sherkin Island, Bear Island and Cape Clear Island. The name Corcaigh means 'swamp', a reminder that Cork is built on the marshy ground flanking the River Lee. The city is lively, buzzing with industry, academia and, invariably, the sound of impromptu music recitals, making this a delightful place to amble through the streets or sample Irish pub hospitality. The main part of the city is squashed onto an elongated island linked by elegant bridges. The English Market, at the rear of St Patrick Street, is a wacky place to wander around, not dissimilar in atmosphere to the open-air flea market on Cornmarket Street. North of St Patrick lies Paul Street, the trendy part of Cork, a place of pedestrianised streets, buskers and high-quality shops. Other places worth taking in are the tower of St Anne's Shandon, the Butter Exchange which houses the Shandon Craft Centre, Cork City Gaol, Elizabeth Fort (now a Garda station), the Cork Public Museum in Fitzgerald Park and St Fin Barre's Cathedral. Blarney Castle is renowned far and wide for the Blarney Stone, a kiss on which endows 'the gift of the gab'. While in Blarney, the Woollen Mills and Blarney House are both worth seeking out. Cobh (pronounced Cove) is Ireland's main trans-Atlantic port, grown out of a former fishing village. The town centre is dominated by St Colman's Cathedral. The history of the port and its luxury liners (which included the Titanic) is told in Cobh Heritage Centre.

Along the coast: Kinsale, an attractive seaside town at the mouth of Bandon River, has superb restaurants and fine buildings. Each October sees a gourmet festival here. Kilbrittain, Timoleague and Courtmacsherry are all unspoilt in lovely settings around the bay. Clonakilty is famed as a centre for Gaelic culture and music. Castletownhead is another charming Georgian village, while nearby Skibbereen is a small market town renowned for its opinionated local newspaper, the Skibbereen Eagle. The isolated fishing village of Baltimore lies at the far end of one of the peninsulas, the place from which to visit the islands. Bantry is ideal for exploring Bantry Bay and the Sheep's Head Peninsula. Bantry Bay House deserves a quick visit, with its glorious view and some important French tapestries.

COUNTY KERRY: The county is blessed with the finest scenery in Ireland, from the tranquil beauty of Killarney Lake to the majestic crags of MacGillycuddy's Reeks and the highest mountain in Ireland, Carruntoohill. The Iveragh Peninsula is without equal and is circled by the Ring of Kerry. The Beargha Peninsula is less well known, and relatively unexplored. Set against a



backdrop of mountains, Kenmare is a busy market town at the meeting of three rivers the Roughty, Finihy and Sheen. The town has craft shops, restaurants, pubs and Kenmare Heritage Centre. St Mary's Holy Well is reputed to have healing properties. The Ring of Kerry is a stunning, 180km- (112 mile-) scenic drive around the Iveragh Peninsula, with numerous diversions along coastal roads and out to islands like Skellig Michael. A drive through the hills via Ballaghbearna Gap and the Ballaghisheen Pass, promises rugged landscapes studded with lakes and carved by rivers. The resort town of Killarney spreads itself in the shadow of MacGillycuddy's Reeks, the finest ridge walk in Ireland. A traverse of the ridge is not for the faint-hearted, nor is the climb to the top of Carrantohill an easy stroll. The town bustles to the needs of visitors, but its best feature is undoubtedly St Mary's Cathedral, which boasts an untypically tall spire. Killarney National Park embraces three lakes all linked by a river. A good starting point is Muckross House and Gardens, a neo-Tudor building with rooms furnished in the Victorian style. Torc Waterfalls are modest, but lie in a beautiful woodland setting. A nearby stairway of over 170 steps climbs to a fine viewpoint. The Dingle Peninsula has lovely beaches and the fine town of Dingle itself, the westernmost town in Europe. It is a slim peninsula with a spectacular coastal road and numerous diversions. Not to be missed is Brandon Mountain and Brandon Bay. Ventry has a lovely white-sand strand, on which legend claims the King of the Other World landed to subjugate Ireland.

COUNTY LIMERICK: It was Edward Lear who popularised the five-line limerick of nonsense verse that is forever associated with this lovely Irish county. Today a farming region, Limerick has hundreds of castle ruins that tell of more troubled times. Astride the River Shannon and fringed by hills and mountains, the county has a long history of monastic settlement. Limerick stands on both banks of the Shannon and the Abbey River. It is Georgian in character and has a grid pattern of streets. Limerick is still undergoing a renaissance in its culture, music, drama and self-esteem. Mass tourism has yet to discover Limerick, and it remains an agreeable base for exploration. King John's Castle is a weighty Norman stronghold built on the site of a Viking settlement. The English Town and Irish Town are the more interesting areas to explore. The Hunt Museum in the old custom house is the finest museum outside Dublin, containing artefacts collected by John Hunt, a specialist in Celtic culture. Adare is picture-postcard country, a place of thatched cottages. Loch Gur, hidden in the hills, is surrounded by archaeological remains - including stone circles and dolmens - and guarded by the remains of two castles. Murroe lies among the foothills of the Slievefelim Mountains. The village is dominated by the Mansion of Glenstal, now a Benedictine monastery. The gardens are especially beautiful in spring and early summer.

The West

COUNTY CLARE: More than 2000 stone forts litter the landscape of Co Clare, a county that would be virtually unknown were it not for The Burren, a beautiful limestone district overlooking Galway Bay and formed around an ancient barony of that name. More than three-quarters of the county is fringed by water and the main activities are farming, fishing and tourism. Ennis sits on a bend in the River Fergus, a place of narrow, winding streets and the ruins of Ennis Friary. The spectacular Cliffs of Moher are one of Ireland's most dramatic sights, extending for 8km (5 miles) and rising to more than 200m (650ft) above the sea, hosting huge colonies of seabirds. The Burren Coast is for those interested in geology and outstanding landscapes. Here, limestone pavements shelter unique flora that develop in their fissures. The Burren Display Centre is at Kilfenora.

COUNTY GALWAY: If one place typifies the visitor's image of Ireland it is Co Galway, a place of contrasts from prime bogland and rich farming, to mountains, loughs and stone cottages. Long, lonely valleys, sublime hills and vast golden beaches are the hallmarks of the county, which reaches from the banks of the Shannon to the wild region in the west known as Connemara.



Galway stretches along the Corrib River, divided by it into the traditional fisherman's village of Claddagh and the medieval town of ancient streets and quaysides. This is a bustling, vibrant city and the centre of trade for this part of Ireland for centuries. Today, it is one of the fastest developing towns in Europe, with a fascinating blend of modernity and Celtic culture. The Aran Islands are great swathes of limestone defending the approach to Galway. Legend has it that they were inhabited by a tribe expelled from the mainland, and they certainly have been inhabited for centuries. Clifden lies at the western edge of the beautiful region known as Connemara, a place of bogs, lakes, mountains and moors, and a coastline etched by deep bays and inlets. Letterfrack is a tidy village laid out by Quakers, one of a number of mission settlements along the coast. Connemara National Park Visitor Centre is close by.

COUNTY ROSCOMMON: Green and fertile Roscommon has numerous lakes and rivers, its eastern boundary formed by the Shannon, largely in the shape of Lough Ree. The centre of the county is given to sheep and cattle farming, the east and west runs to bogland. There are numerous archaeological sites. Lough Key Forest Park is laid out with trails and gardens. The small town of Roscommon is dominated by the ruins of its Norman castle. Nearby are the remains of a Dominican Friary. Strokestown Park House is a fine Palladian mansion with original 18th-century furniture.

COUNTY MAYO: Land of wide sandy beaches and high mountains, Mayo is a quieter version of Connemara, rising to the sacred mountain of Croagh Patrick, an annual place of pilgrimage. Mayo is one of Ireland's loveliest counties, extending round Clew Bay to the Corraun Peninsula and Achill Island, and beyond to the windswept corners of the Mullet Peninsula. This northern part of Mayo is virtually unknown. A delightful little town, Westport contrasts remarkably with the wild countryside all around. Ideal for walkers visiting Croagh Patrick, Westport lounges along the Carrowbeg River, exuding a busy air from the elegance of its Georgian designs. The annual Westport Sea Angling Festival and the Horse Fair are great attractions. The sea angling in Clew Bay is reputedly the finest in Europe. Achill Island, linked by a bridge, is best explored on foot, from the high cliffs at Achill Head, to the lovely beaches at Keem Strand and Trawmore Strand. The Atlantic Drive is the finest way to view the island by car and begins from the village of Mulrany. Along the north Mayo coast is the archaeological site known as the Céide Fields, supported by an imaginative visitor centre that explains the 5000 years of settlement in this part of Ireland. In the southeast of the county, the small town of Knock has an internationally recognised Marian shrine. Approximately 1.5 million pilgrims visit the shrine annually.

The Northwest

COUNTY SLIGO: This county owes a good deal of its fame to WB Yeats, the Nobel Prize winner, who used to visit here with his artist brother, Jack. Crannogs (lake dwellings) were once a common feature here, and their remains can still be found. The town of Sligo grew in prosperity, trading on beer, spirits, rope and linen, and was one of the main ports sailing to the USA. This is the largest town in northwest Ireland, built around bridges spanning the River Garavogue. Sligo Abbey is a ruined Dominican priory, founded in 1252, but destroyed by Cromwell's forces; it is the town's oldest building. The Municipal Art Gallery and Sligo County Museum have a good deal about the Yeats brothers. Doorly Park and Sligo Racecourse have some lovely walks. Carrowmore is an important prehistoric site with a vast number of stone circles and dolmens. The Arigna Scenic Drive gives good views of Lough Key. Benbulbin is a distinctive mountain to the north of Sligo; the climb is steep but not especially demanding, and the view worth the effort.

COUNTY LEITRIM: The county of Leitrim is a perfect place for a peaceful holiday; with its foothold on the Atlantic coast, and forming a long and narrow county divided by hills and rivers, and the beauty of Lough Allen. The main pursuit here is angling, though walkers will find solitude



among the Manorhamilton Hills. To the south of the county, Carrick-on-Shannon was always an important crossroads and meeting place. Today, it is the centre of river cruising on the Shannon, and heavily geared up to all aquatic pursuits, with over 40 lakes where fishing is unrestricted. Costelloe Memorial Chapel claims to be the second-smallest chapel in the world.

COUNTY DONEGAL: All Ireland is represented in Donegal, from the heather moors, mountains and bogs of the Gaeltacht in the west, to the rich farmlands and towns of the east. Taking the full force of Atlantic gales, much of Donegal's beauty is fashioned by the sea. The coastal cliffs around Slieve League are stunning as is the great arc of Donegal Bay. But the county is primarily one of rocky landscapes and hauntingly beautiful moorlands. Donegal has an air of charm about it, in spite of being busy and often crowded. Donegal Castle was once the stronghold of the O'Donnells. St John's Point sticks out on a limb; Slieve League is outstanding, from the cliffs of Bunglass to the glorious sands of Silver Strand. Glencolumbkille is named after St Columba, who founded a monastery here. The Northern Peninsulas and their islands are a world apart, stretching northwards from The Rosses through Gweedore, Cloghaneely and across Lough Swilly to Inishowen. Inland, Glenveagh National Park is a region of undulating peat hills that embrace Glenveagh Castle and Gardens.

9 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

Horseriding: Equestrianism is one of Ireland's principal tourist attractions and facilities for horse riding are found all over the country. A full list of stables and riding holidays is available from Fáilte Ireland (see Contact Addresses section). The principal racecourses are at Leopardstown, Fairyhouse (Irish Grand National every year), The Curragh (Irish Sweeps Derby) and Punchestown (an international cross-country and three-day-event riding course).

Hiking: Ireland's sparsely populated countryside makes it ideal for walkers of all levels. The mild climate means that the mountains are accessible all year round. The more mountainous areas are towards the coast, which makes for dramatic seascapes, especially by the Atlantic Ocean. More adventurous walkers may want to tackle Ireland's highest peak, Carrauntoohil (1041m/3415ft) in Macgillycuddy's Reeks, in the far southwest of the country. Other notable mountains include Croagh Patrick (765m/2510ft) near Westport in Co Mayo, a holy mountain and, on the last Sunday in July, a place of pilgrimage. Its distinctive conical summit is silhouetted against the horizon for miles, acting as a beacon to pilgrims. St Patrick is supposed to have driven all the snakes out of Ireland from this mountain. The 12 Bens in Connemara offer lovely hill walking, with views over towards the jagged coastline. The beautiful scenery of the Wicklow Mountains is barely one hour's drive from Dublin. There are 28 national waymarked ways in the country, including the Kerry Way, the Beara Way and the Wicklow Way. Tailor-made tours with a local guide can be arranged through Walking Cycling Ireland (e-mail: info@irelandwalkingcycling.com; website: www.irelandwalkingcycling.com). There are many gentle walks for the less energetic.

Cycling: Although some of Ireland's coastal parts are mountainous, the sheltered valleys and the gently undulating central plain are excellent for easy cycling. Roads are well-maintained and most are very quiet. Inland, the landscape is dotted with small farms, and one is never too far away from some form of civilisation if one requires it. There is a surprisingly high number of pre-celtic monuments in lonely places; owing to old Irish superstitions, these were not cleared away when the land was farmed. The Boyne Valley alone contains over 300.

Fishing: Being blessed with miles of rivers and streams and over 5500km (3500 miles) of coastline, Ireland offers excellent fishing. There is no closed season for freshwater angling, but



March to October are the most suitable months for bream, rudd, roach, dace and perch. For coarse angling, there are new regulations regarding share certificates; further details can be obtained from Fáilte Ireland (see Contact Addresses section). Game fishing requires a licence and, generally, also a permit. The brown trout season is usually from mid-February or March until 30 September. Open salmon season is 1 January to 7 September, according to district. The best sea trout period is from June to 30 September or 12 October in some areas. Salmon licences/permits also cover sea trout. Along the Atlantic coast, sea angling is possible from piers, rocks, in the surf or during a day's boat fishing excursion (which can be organised locally).

Golf: There are 350 golf courses run by the Golfing Union of Ireland, and many people come to Ireland specifically for a golfing holiday, where the course rates are relatively cheap compared with the UK. The courses are set both by the sea and inland two-thirds are 18-hole.

Other: For those travelling in pursuit of culture or in order to discover their roots, Ireland has much to offer. There are summer schools all over the country, where it is possible to learn Gaelic and to pursue other courses in Irish culture. Courses available include archaeological walks around Celtic sites, classes in traditional Irish music, courses on literary figures such as Oscar Wilde, WB Yeats and Gerard Manley Hopkins, and on popular culture and storytelling. A list is available from Fáilte Ireland. Accommodation can be arranged with local families, and programmes of entertainment are laid on for the evening. These courses attract participants from all over the world. Genealogical centres exist widely, and will help those who come to trace their family history. Fáilte Ireland (see Contact Addresses section) publishes a free booklet called Tracing your Ancestors. They can put visitors in touch with the appropriate centre. The National Library of Ireland offers a free genealogy advisory service run by a panel of genealogists and an expert member of staff, which provides visitors with an overview of genealogical records and gives advice on specific family research. Further information is available (tel: (1) 603 0200; fax: (1) 676 6690; e-mail: info@nli.ie; website: www.nli.ie). Pilgrimages to and within Ireland are burgeoning and visits to religious sites such as the Knock Marian Shrine in Co Mayo are increasing in popularity. The national sports are Gaelic football and hurling.

Entertainment

Food & Drink: Ireland is a farming country noted for its meat, bacon, poultry and dairy produce. The surrounding sea, inland lakes and rivers offer fresh fish including salmon, trout, lobster, mussels and periwinkles. Dublin has a wide selection of restaurants and eating places to suit every pocket, as do the other major towns. Cooking courses: Ireland has recently become a must-visit destination for food lovers. Cookery courses are available throughout the country. They vary from formal teaching in schools which offer classes all year round, to smaller, informal courses run by enthusiastic chefs in rural restaurants. Things to know: Table and self-service are both common. 'Tea' is often almost a full meal with sandwiches and cakes. Pubs, of which Ireland has plenty, are sometimes called 'lounges' or 'bars' and there is often a worded sign outside the premises rather than the traditional painted boards found in Britain. Pubs and bars have counter service. The measure used in Ireland for spirits is larger than that used in Britain, for example an Irish double is equal to a triple in Britain. National specialities: Dublin Bay prawns. Oysters (served with Guinness and wholemeal bread). Irish stew (traditionally made with mutton or old sheep, now mostly made with lamb or juicy beef, this dish is usually served with potatoes, stock, onions, carrots and garlic). Crubeens (pigs' trotters). Colcannon (a mixture of potatoes and cabbage cooked together). Soda bread. Soufflé made with carrageen (a variety of seaweed). The two most internationally distinctive alcoholic products are whiskey (spelt with an 'e') and stout. Irish whiskey has a uniquely characteristic flavour and is matured in a wooden barrel for a minimum of seven years. Certainly as popular as whiskey is stout which is bottled or served from the tap. National drinks: Whiskey: popular brands are: Jamesons, John Powers Gold Label,



Hewitts, Midleton, Old Bushmills, Paddy, Reserve and Tullamore Dew. Irish coffee is popular (a glass of strong black coffee, brown sugar and whiskey with cream). Guinness, one of the most famous, popular and distinctive drinks in the world, is found everywhere. One of the most popular lighter ales is Smithwick's or Harp Lager, also available everywhere. Liqueurs such as Bailey's and Irish Mist are both made from a base of Irish whiskey. Licensing hours: Mon-Wed 1030-2330, Thurs-Sat 1030-0030 and Sun 1030-2300. Legal drinking age: 18, although some bars will insist that patrons are over 21 and carry ID. Children under 18 years must leave establishments by 2100. Tipping: The customary tip in Ireland is 10 to 12 per cent. Many hotels and restaurants add this in the form of a service charge indicated on the menu or bill. It is not customary to tip in bars unless you have table service when a small tip is advised. Tipping porters, taxi drivers, hairdressers etc is customary but not obligatory.

Nightlife: Most towns in Ireland have clubs, bars and pubs with live music. It is quite common to find pubs holding seisun, playing traditional Irish music with traditional instruments. The dancehalls and discos of previous eras have now been replaced with clubs similar to those found throughout the UK and Western Europe. Special events and themed nights often take place at special attractions such as the medieval banquet at Bunratty Castle. There is still a good choice of theatres and cinemas.

Shopping: Special purchases include hand-woven tweed, hand-crocheted woollens and cottons, sheepskin goods, gold and silver jewellery, Aran knitwear, linen, pottery, Irish crystal and basketry. Ideal gifts include: a copy of Ulysses from an Irish bookshop, a bottle of Jameson or Bushmills whiskey from the distillery or Irish Salmon. Shopping hours: Mon-Sat 0900-1730/1800. Many towns have a late night opening on Thursday or Friday until 2000/2100 and smaller towns may have one early closing day a week. On Sunday, main shopping centres and some of the larger department stores open from 1200 - 1700/1800. Many smaller supermarkets in towns and villages also open.

Note: Under the 'Retail Export Scheme', it is possible to claim VAT back on goods bought in Ireland on leaving the EU. For further information, contact the VAT Administration Branch, Stamping Building, Dublin Castle, Dublin 2 (tel: (1) 674 8858; website: www.revenue.ie).

Business

GDP: US\$159.88 billion. Main imports: Data processing equipment, other machinery and equipment, chemicals, petroleum and petroleum products, textiles and clothing. Main exports: Machinery and equipment, computers, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, live animals and animal products. Main trade partners: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, UK and USA.

Economy: Ireland's recent economic history is characterised by what is now the cliché of the 'Celtic Tiger'. Fuelled by EU membership and effective investment promotion policies, the Irish economy has been transformed over a period of two decades from a European backwater into the fastest-growing economy in the EU. Hitherto Ireland had not been industrialised to the same degree as the rest of Europe, and only recently has agriculture been overtaken as the largest single contributor to the national product. It remains a key sector, and the Government is seeking to consolidate its role within the economy by modernisation and expansion of food-processing industries. Beef and dairy dominate the sector, but there is also large-scale production of potatoes, barley and wheat. Ireland's recent industrial development has been achieved by a deliberate policy of promoting export-led and advanced technology businesses, partly by offering attractive packages for foreign investors. Textiles, chemicals and electronics have performed particularly strongly. Most of Ireland's economic development in the 1990s, however, was in the service sector. Banking and finance have grown to the extent that Dublin now supports a sizeable

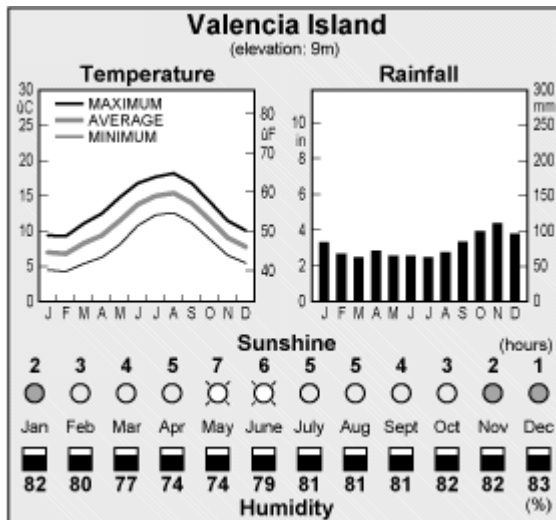


international financial centre, while tourism has become a substantial foreign exchange earner. The statistics of Ireland's remarkable development show an average GDP growth of between 7 and 10 per cent since the mid-1990s, while inflation and unemployment were kept consistently below five per cent. However, there has been a slowdown of late with GDP growth in 2004 being 1.4 per cent. The Irish are famously enthusiastic about Europe and there is little of the scepticism so prevalent in Britain. Ireland joined EMU with the majority of EU members in the first wave at the beginning of 1999, despite some concern about the consequences of Britain's non-membership. Trade with the UK, which provides 30 per cent of total imports and takes 20 per cent of Ireland's exports, remains important but the proportion is declining gradually as other EU countries assume greater significance.

Business Etiquette: Businesspeople should wear formal clothes for meetings. Local businesspeople are very friendly and an informal business approach is most successful. However, it is advisable to make prior appointments and to allow enough time to complete business matters. Avoid business visits in the first week of May, during July, August and at Christmas or New Year.

Commercial Information: Fáilte Ireland Bord Fáilte, Baggot Street Bridge, Dublin 2, Ireland Tel: (1) 602 4000. Website: www.conference-ireland.ie Chambers of Commerce of Ireland 17 Merrion Square, Dublin 2, Ireland Tel: (1) 661 2888. Website: www.chambers.ie

10 CLIMATE



The temperate climate is due to mild southwesterly winds and the Gulf Stream. Summers are warm, while temperatures during winter are much cooler. Spring and autumn are very mild. Rain falls all year.

Required clothing: Lightweights during summer with warmer mediumweights for the winter. Rainwear is advisable throughout the year.



11 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

History: The history of Ireland is, by any standard, a troubled and often tragic one. The most enduring features of it are, firstly, an unswerving commitment to Catholicism on the part of the majority of the population, the origins of which can be traced back to the pioneering monastic orders of the fifth and sixth centuries. Secondly, there is the frequent uncertainty and instability governing Anglo-Irish relations: Ireland was never so fully conquered that it absorbed the culture and way of life of its larger neighbour. There followed after the monastic age a long struggle against the Viking invaders who sought to use Ireland as a base for trade with continental Europe. The Vikings built heavily fortified ports, thereby laying the foundations of some of Ireland's major cities, including Dublin, Limerick and Waterford. It was a war between the Irish chieftains and the Vikings which first led to the involvement of the English. Richard of Clare, Earl of Pembroke (nicknamed Strongbow), was invited by one of the chieftains to support his claims, but instead Strongbow conquered almost the entire country with only a tiny force of archers and mounted knights in 1169-70. A stream of Norman families moved across the Irish Sea, effectively colonising the country and coming into conflict with the Irish tribal system. Repeated and largely unsuccessful efforts from the 14th century onwards were made to bring the island under control. The turbulent and increasingly polarised political life of Ireland took a new and bitter twist after the English Civil War, when the Irish rose in favour of the deposed monarchy in 1649. The victorious Oliver Cromwell led an army across the Irish Sea and the rebellion was ruthlessly put down. Over the next few years, all Catholic land was expropriated and given to a new wave of Protestant immigrants. The subsequent Act of Union, passed in 1801, incorporated the whole of Ireland, along with England, Scotland and Wales, into the United Kingdom. However, the grossly inadequate response of the Government to the potato famine of 1845/6, which decimated the Irish population through death and emigration, highlighted its lack of interest in the welfare of the Irish people. Various independence movements pursued an almost continuous struggle against the Government until Home Rule was granted in 1920 (the Easter Rising of 1916, centred on the Main Post Office in Dublin, was a particular landmark). The terms of independence stipulated that Ireland be partitioned into two parts. The reason was that in the northern provinces, where most Protestants had settled three centuries earlier, there was fierce opposition to the prospect of being ruled by a government drawn from the country's Catholic majority. Six of the nine counties of the historic province of Ulster therefore remained in the United Kingdom. The other 26 counties became the Irish Free State. The ensuing civil war in the south between supporters and opponents of the agreement gave rise to the country's two main political parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. In 1937, the Irish Free State was given full sovereignty within the Commonwealth, a new constitution having been adopted, and remaining links with Britain dissolved. In 1949, the 26 counties became a republic and formal ties with the Commonwealth were ended. In 1973, at the same time as Denmark and the UK, Ireland became a member of (as it then was) the EEC. European membership has proved to be of huge economic benefit to Ireland. Since the 1970s, Ireland has been governed alternately by Fianna Fáil and a coalition of Fine Gael and the smaller Labour Party. Ireland's spectacular economic growth in the last 20 years has been accompanied by a new element of graft in Irish politics. The career of Charles Haughey ('The Boss'), who was Taoiseach (Prime Minister) on several occasions during the 1980s and early 1990s, was typical of this trend. At the 1997 election for the Dáil (lower chamber of Parliament), once again no single party secured an overall majority. Fianna Fáil leader Bertie Ahern formed a new government in alliance with the support of the small Progressive Democrats (a split from Fianna Fáil) and several independents. Ahern's new administration officially took office at the end of June with Mary Harney of the PD as Deputy Prime Minister (Tánaiste), the first woman ever to hold the position. Ahern's relatively successful tenure ensured that the electorate returned his Fianna Fáil-led coalition with an increased majority at the most recent poll in May 2002. Under Ahern's government, Ireland has continued its phenomenal economic growth



(see Business Profile section). The political agenda has been dominated by two sets of issues. The first is the challenge to the orthodox morality of the Catholic Church, especially on the contentious issues of abortion and divorce. Successive governments have consigned both matters to referendum, occasioning bitter national debates. Abortion remains illegal for the time being, but divorce was finally legalised after a referendum in November 1995 delivered a vote in favour. Equally contentious is the other main issue: the future of Northern Ireland. Dublin was largely excluded from any official role until the Anglo-Irish agreement of 1985 which allowed Dublin consultative status over the future political development of the north. From this starting point, the Irish government has made a continuous and vital contribution, much of it behind the scenes, to the peace process in the province. Dublin's agreement to drop its formal territorial claim over Northern Ireland, previously enshrined in two articles of the Irish Constitution, was critical in reassuring Northern Unionists who wish to retain the province's links with Great Britain. Some in Dublin believe that the lowering of barriers between countries, which is a key objective of European Union, will eventually bring about conditions where there is little difference between North and South (ironically, the republic is now more prosperous than the North). Yet many in the North remain deeply suspicious of Dublin's role, and are disinclined to accept anything which may bring North and South closer together. Ireland is generally a keen member of the European Union, from which it has derived huge economic benefits. However, in the fast-developing areas of defence and security policy, there is a growing problem of a clash with Ireland's long-held and cherished neutrality.

Government: Since 1949, Ireland has been a republic with a bicameral legislature: the lower house, the Dáil, has 166 members and is directly elected by universal adult suffrage every five years; the 60-strong Senate has 49 directly elected members with the balance made up of political appointees. Executive power is vested in the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) who presides over a Cabinet of Ministers. The cabinet is responsible to the Dáil for its actions.

Travel Advice

Most visits to Ireland are trouble-free but you should be aware of the global risk of indiscriminate international terrorist attacks, which could be against civilian targets, including places frequented by foreigners. This advice is based on information provided by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the UK. It is correct at time of publishing. As the situation can change rapidly, visitors are advised to contact the following organisations for the latest travel advice. British Foreign and Commonwealth Office Tel: (0845) 850 2829. Website: www.fco.gov.uk US Department of State Website: <http://travel.state.gov/travel>

Top Things To See

Artists and writers have thrived in Ireland, and their legacy is apparent everywhere. Founded during the reign of Elizabeth I, Trinity College is Dublin's most famous landmark, and was a symbol of English dominance to which, until 1873, admission was restricted to Protestants. Many of the college's students have achieved a measure of fame, notably Oscar Wilde, Bram Stoker, Samuel Beckett and Jonathan Swift. The Old Library houses a number of important manuscripts in its Treasury, among which the Book of Kells is the best known. Merrion Square is the city's most elegant place, lined with classical Georgian houses with stunning doorways, canopies and fanlights. Oscar Wilde lived at 1 Merrion Square, Daniel O'Connell at 58, with WB Yeats only a few doors higher, at 82. For those wanting an insight into the life of an author, head for the James Joyce Centre in North Great George's Street. A short excursion from Dublin, the James Joyce Tower and Museum, at Sandycove, encloses many personal effects of James Joyce, including a first edition of Ulysses. Further afield in the Midlands, in County Longford, Ballymahon is famed for Oliver Goldsmith, author of *She Stoops to Conquer* and the classic poem *The*



Deserted Village. He was born at **Pallas, a few miles to the east. County Sligo may be worth a visit, too:** WB Yeats, the Nobel Prize winner, used to visit here with his artist brother, Jack. Ireland is a country of castles. West of Trinity College in Dublin stands Dublin Castle, the seat of British rule in Ireland, and worth a visit for its beautiful state apartments. Three castles at nearby Dalkey survive from the 15th and 16th centuries: Bullock Castle (not open to the public), Archbold's Castle, now the town hall, and Goat Castle, housing the Dalkey Heritage Centre. Malahide Castle, north of the city, was built in the 12th century and houses some lovely furniture and a portrait gallery with paintings by Irish and British artists. In Counties Louth and Meath, King John's Castle is a small stronghold overlooking the sea, and Taaffe's Castle is one of many fortified residences in the area dating from the 16th century. The thriving market town of Enniscorthy, by far the most attractive in County Wexford, was established by the Normans it is still dominated by the Norman castle and the much later St Aidan's Cathedral. The castle houses the Wexford County Museum. County Westmeath contains the beautiful grounds of Tullynally Castle at Castlepollard, the family seat of the earls of Longford. Wander around and take in the sights of Dublin's Phoenix Park - the largest city park in Europe, and a good place to watch the city going about its business. Dublin Zoo is in the southeast corner of the park. Explore some of Ireland's watery wonderlands: Counties Louth and Meath share the River Boyne, which is wide, gentle and very beautiful; in County Wicklow, a pleasant footpath leads to the Powerscourt Waterfall, the highest falls in Ireland, formed by the Dargle River which drops over cliffs 122m (400ft) high; in County Monaghan, Castleblaney lies at the head of Lough Muckno, the county's largest lake and a source of excellent coarse fishing; and Killarney National Park in County Kerry embraces three lakes all linked by a river. Much of Ireland's land is significant for the battles and war scenes that took place there. River Boyne, in counties Louth and Meath, is famous for the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, when James II sought to regain the English throne, but was outmanoeuvred by William of Orange. Astride the Boyne, Drogheda, the harbour town of County Louth, holds an important place in the history of medieval Ireland. It was besieged by Oliver Cromwell in 1649, who massacred or transported most of the inhabitants. In County Wexford, Enniscorthy's moment of fame arrived in 1798 in the form of the Battle of Vinegar Hill, when the United Irishmen made their last stand against the British. See some sights of great antiquity. The prehistoric burial sites of Brú na Bóinne, west of Drogheda in Counties Louth and Meath, number more than 40 and predate the pyramids. Among these, Newgrange is western Europe's most outstanding chambered tomb, built around 5000 years ago. In County Kildare, Naas (pronounced Nace) is a small industrial town on the edge of the Wicklow Mountains. Once the seat of the kings of the Province of Leinster, Naas was the heart of the ancient Irish kingdom of Ui Dunlainge. Cavan, in County Cavan, has nearby Clough Oughter, a circular tower castle, which tells of a time when this was the stronghold of the O'Reillys, the princes of Breffni. A short way out of Cavan, is a group of standing stones, Finn MacCool's Fingers, said to be the place where the princes were crowned. More than 2000 stone forts litter the landscape of County Clare, a county that would be virtually unknown were it not for The Burren, a beautiful limestone district overlooking Galway Bay and formed around an ancient barony of that name. Along the north Mayo coast is the archaeological site known as the Céide Fields, supported by an imaginative visitor centre that explains the 5000 years of settlement in this part of Ireland. Carrowmore in County Sligo is an important prehistoric site with a vast number of stone circles and dolmens. Whether you seek religious or mystical monuments, the enchanting Emerald Isle has it in hordes. Monasterboice in Counties Louth and Meath was formerly a sixth-century monastery, and in the cemetery stand three of the finest High Crosses in the country. For centuries, County Wicklow was a stronghold of Celtic Christianity, with a focal point around Glendalough. Glendalough, the glen of the two lakes, is a place of holiness among the hills and a place of pilgrimage, where St Kevin founded a monastery in AD 570. The tall round tower is a familiar landmark, variously used as a look-out post, a grain store and a belfry. The cathedral is now in ruins, but is no less evocative for that. Down towards the river is St Kevin's Church, a modest building with a chimney-shaped belfry. Kells Priory, south of Kilkenny, the site of an Augustinian priory, is little



known in Ireland, but is one of the most beautiful and finest ruins in the country. Jerpoint Abbey, south of Thomastown, is a remarkable Cistercian ruin, famed for the carvings on its tombs. It dates from 1158, but was embraced by Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. In County Westmeath, in Crookedwood village, stands St Munna's Church, the stuff of fairytales, complete with 15th-century tower and battlements and a lakeside setting. One of Ireland's most holy places, Clonmacnoise, in Counties Offaly and Laios, was founded in AD 548 by St Ciaran at a strategic crossing point of the Shannon. During medieval times, it developed into a great seat of learning, acknowledged by kings. County Mayo's topography rises to the sacred mountain of Croagh Patrick, an annual place of pilgrimage. In County Mayo, the small town of Knock has an internationally recognised Marian shrine. Approximately 1.5 million pilgrims visit the shrine annually. Costelloe Memorial Chapel in County Leitrim has a strange claim to fame: it claims to be the second-smallest chapel in the world. Gaze out at some gorgeous, white sandy beaches: Dunmore East, in County Waterford, is a charming village close to safe bathing beaches and attractive coves, including Ladies Cove, a neat sandy bay popular with local people and tourists, whilst Tramore is one of Ireland's main holiday resorts and has a 4.8km- (3 mile-) sandy beach caressed by the Gulf Stream, whilst Ardmore is renowned for its long, fine beach set against high cliffs and its place in Irish history as an important ecclesiastical site based on a seventh-century monastic settlement founded by St Declan; County Cork has a very attractive coastline, from Kinsale, a pretty seaside town at the mouth of Bandon River, to Kilbrittain, Timoleague and Courtmacsherry, all unspoilt in lovely settings, to Bantry, ideal for exploring Bantry Bay and the Sheep's Head Peninsula; the Dingle Peninsula in County Kerry has some lovely beaches and the fine town of Dingle itself, the westernmost town in Europe; not to be missed is Brandon Mountain and Brandon Bay; Ventry has a lovely white-sand strand, on which legend claims the King of the Other World landed to subjugate Ireland; St John's Point sticks out on a limb in County Donegal; and Slieve League is outstanding, from the cliffs of Bunglass to the glorious sands of Silver Strand. Gaze at what are arguably the most beautiful gardens in the southeast of Ireland, and not to be missed: Kilmokea Gardens in County Wexford. Explore Dunmore Cave in County Kilkenny, one of the most famous caves in Ireland, notable for its great beauty. In the past, people took refuge here from the Vikings, not always successfully. Ireland isn't just rolling green hills and beaches in widescreen it also has its fair share of dramatic mountains. County Tipperary's Slievenamon is called the mountain of the fairies. Northwards, amid farmlands, rises the limestone Rock of Cashel, and to the south are the Comeragh Mountains, amidst countryside dotted with Norman castles and churches, and Stone and Iron Age sites. The Comeragh and Knockmealdown mountain ranges are vast uplands of forest and bog, but easy to explore either by car or on foot. County Offaly shares with County Laios the beautiful glens of the Slieve Bloom Mountains which, in spite of a low elevation and a distinctly boggy feel about them, nevertheless convey a sense of grandeur and remoteness. And County Kerry has the highest mountain of them all: Carrantohill. Spend a day absorbing the delights of Cork. Remember that the name Corcaigh means 'swamp', a reminder that Cork is built on the marshy ground flanking the River Lee. The city is lively, buzzing with industry, academia and, invariably, the sound of impromptu music recitals. The main part of the city is squashed onto an elongated island linked by elegant bridges. Paul Street is the trendy part of Cork. Other places worth taking in are the tower of St Anne's Shandon, the Butter Exchange, which houses the Shandon Craft Centre, Cork City Gaol, Elizabeth Fort (now a Garda station), the Cork Public Museum in Fitzgerald Park and St Fin Barre's Cathedral. Cork was designated the European Capital of Culture in 2005.

Tourist Information: Tourism Ireland in the UK Nations House, 103 Wigmore Street, London W1U 1QS, UK Tel: (0800) 039 7000 (travel enquiries) or (020) 7518 0800 (trade enquiries). Website: www.tourismireland.com Tourism Ireland in the USA 345 Park Avenue, 17th Floor, New York, NY 10154, USA Tel: (212) 418 0800 (general enquiries) or (800) 223 6470 (toll-free brochure request line) or 669 9967 (toll-free for travel trade in USA and Canada). Website: www.tourismireland.com



Top Things To Do

Equestrianism is one of Ireland's principal tourist attractions and facilities for horse riding are found all over the country. The principal racecourses are at Leopardstown, Fairyhouse (Irish Grand National every year), The Curragh (Irish Sweeps Derby) and Punchestown (an international cross-country and three-day-event riding course). Ireland's sparsely populated countryside makes it ideal for walkers of all levels. The mild climate means that the mountains are accessible all year round. The more mountainous areas are towards the coast, which makes for dramatic seascapes, especially by the Atlantic Ocean. More adventurous walkers may want to tackle Ireland's highest peak, Carrauntoohil (1041m/3415ft) in Macgillycuddy's Reeks, in the far southwest of the country. Across the shadow of MacGillycuddy's Reeks is the finest ridge walk in Ireland. Other notable mountains include Croagh Patrick (765m/2510ft) near Westport in County Mayo, a holy mountain and, on the last Sunday in July, a place of pilgrimage. Its distinctive conical summit is silhouetted against the horizon for miles, acting as a beacon to pilgrims. St Patrick is supposed to have driven all the snakes out of Ireland from this mountain. The 12 Bens in Connemara offer lovely hill walking, with views over towards the jagged coastline. The beautiful scenery of the Wicklow Mountains is barely one hour's drive from Dublin. There are 28 national waymarked ways in the country, including the North Kerry Way, the Beara Way and the Wicklow Way. Tailor-made **tours with a local guide can be arranged through Walking Cycling Ireland (website: www.irelandwalkingcycling.com)**. There are many gentle walks for the less energetic. Public transport is increasing its capacity to carry bikes and accommodation is being upgraded so that bikes are stored securely. Although some of Ireland's coastal parts are mountainous, the sheltered valleys and the gently undulating central plain are excellent for easy cycling. Roads are well-maintained and most are very quiet. Inland, the landscape is dotted with small farms, and one is never too far away from some form of civilisation if one requires it. There are a surprisingly high number of pre-Celtic monuments in lonely places; owing to old Irish superstitions, these were not cleared away when the land was farmed. The Boyne Valley alone contains over 300. Being blessed with miles of rivers and streams and over 5500km (3500 miles) of coastline, Ireland offers excellent fishing. Carrick-on-Shannon is the centre of river cruising on the Shannon, and heavily geared up to all aquatic pursuits, with over 40 lakes where fishing is unrestricted. There is no closed season for freshwater angling, but March to October are the most suitable months for bream, rudd, roach, dace and perch. For coarse angling, there are new regulations regarding share certificates. County Cavan is known to anglers as a place of lakes and rivers and the very best in coarse fishing. County Longford holds great appeal for all anglers, sitting in the middle of Ireland, lying in the catchments of the River Shannon. Lakes abound, notably Lough Gowna in the north and Lough Kinale in the east. Westport even holds an annual Westport Sea Angling Festival. The sea angling in Clew Bay, meanwhile, is reputedly the finest in Europe. Game fishing requires a licence and, generally, also a permit. The brown trout season is usually from mid-February or March until 30 September. Open salmon season is 1 January to 7 September, according to district. The best sea trout period is from June to 30 September or 12 October in some areas. Salmon licences/permits also cover sea trout. Along the Atlantic coast, sea angling is possible from piers, rocks, in the surf or during a day's boat fishing excursion (which can be organised locally). Dolphins can be seen off the coast of Shannon. This area of the Atlantic is home to around 100 wild dolphins. Drink a pint of Guinness, one of the most famous, popular and distinctive drinks in the world, whilst indulging in some craic (see Entertainment). Dublin is the ideal city to do this, with a palpable buzz of excitement, especially around Temple Bar. Indeed, the whole city boasts fashionable pubs, good places to eat, discos and inordinate joie de vivre. Taste some succulent oysters in the place where they are famed Carlingford, which looks across the lough to the Mourne Mountains. Kiss the Blarney Stone at Blarney Castle in County Cork and get the 'gift of the gab'. The Ring of Kerry is a stunning, 180km (112-mile) scenic drive around the Iveragh Peninsula, with numerous diversions along



coastal roads and out to islands like Skellig Michael. A drive through the hills, via Ballaghbearna Gap and the Ballaghisheen Pass, promises rugged landscapes studded with lakes and carved by rivers. The Atlantic Drive is also a wonderful drive, beginning from the village of Mulrany. The Arigna Scenic Drive is highly regarded for its fine views of Lough Key. Go birdwatching in the uninhabited Saltee Islands, one of Ireland's most important bird sanctuaries, off County Wexford. In this county are also the mudflats of the Slaney Estuary (known as 'slobs'), which make up the Wexford Wildfowl Reserve, at its best between October and April when wildfowl are here. Although now celebrated in various places around the world, there is still nothing better than partaking in the revels of St Patrick's Week (website: www.stpatricksdays.ie) in Ireland itself. Usually held in March, Ireland observes its patron Saint, who brought Christianity to the pagan Celts almost 1500 years ago, with a flurry of raucous activities, from fireworks, exhibitions, funfairs and treasure hunts in Dublin, the capital city, plus a spectacular 3km-long St Patrick's Day Festival Parade, to food markets and street theatre in Cork.

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Overview II

The most enduring features of the history of Ireland are, firstly, an unswerving commitment to Catholicism, the origins of which can be traced back to the pioneering monastic orders of the fifth and sixth centuries. Secondly, the frequent instability governing Anglo-Irish relations: Ireland was never so fully conquered that it absorbed the culture and way of life of its larger neighbour. After the monastic age, Viking invaders built heavily fortified ports, laying the foundations of some major Irish cities. War between Irish chieftains and Vikings first led to the involvement of the English. Richard of Clare, Earl of Pembroke (nicknamed Strongbow), was invited by one of the chieftains to support his claims, but instead conquered almost the entire country in 1169-70. Many Norman families moved across the Irish Sea, effectively colonising the country. The turbulent and increasingly polarised political life of Ireland took a new and bitter twist after the English Civil War, when the Irish rose in favour of the deposed monarchy in 1649. The victorious Oliver Cromwell ruthlessly put down the rebellion. All Catholic land was expropriated and given to a new wave of Protestant immigrants. The subsequent Act of Union, passed in 1801, incorporated the whole of Ireland, along with England, Scotland and Wales, into the UK. However, the grossly inadequate response of the Government to the potato famine of 1845/6, which decimated the Irish population through death and emigration, highlighted its lack of interest in the welfare of the Irish people. Various independence movements struggled until Home Rule was granted in 1920. The terms of independence partitioned Ireland into two parts because, in the northern provinces, mostly Protestants settlements fiercely opposed being ruled by a Government drawn from a Catholic majority. Six of the nine counties of the historic province of Ulster therefore remained in the UK; the other 26 counties became the Irish Free State, given full sovereignty within the Commonwealth in 1937, and remaining links with Britain dissolved. In 1973, Ireland became a member of (as it then was) the EEC and adopted the Euro in 2002. European membership has proved to be of huge economic benefit. But this might not be the only reason behind the good cheer of the Irish. Besides a fantastic capital city, Dublin, bound in rich layers of history and now overflowing with trendy bars and nightclubs, are mountains, heather moors, coastline, valleys, waterfalls and lakes, dotted with prehistoric and religious sites and a wealth of dramatic castles. Yet certain issues still dominate the political agenda. The first concerns the orthodox morality of the Catholic Church; abortion contentiously remains illegal,



despite divorce being legalised after a referendum in 1995. Equally contentious is the future of Northern Ireland. Ironically, for now, the Republic is more prosperous than the North, and the Irish are happy to forget any troubles with some good, hearty craic.

Communications

Telephone: IDD is available. Country code: 353 followed by the area code, omitting the initial zero.

Mobile telephone: Roaming agreements exist with a wide range of international mobile phone carriers. Coverage is good.

Internet: Internet is readily available; Internet cafes exist in nearly every town.

Post: Post office hours: Mon-Fri 0900-1730/1800, Sat 0900-1300. Sub-post offices close at 1300 one day a week. The Central Post Office is in O'Connell Street, Dublin.

MEDIA: The national public broadcaster Radio Telefis Eireann (RTE) dominates the radio and TV sector. It provides a comprehensive service in both English and Irish. The Irish print and broadcast media operate freely within the confines of the law. Broadcasting is regulated by a commission appointed by the Department of Communications. The Competition Authority safeguards against unfair competition in the press sector. Cross-media ownership is permitted within certain limits - press groups may own up to 25 per cent of local radio and TV stations. Press: There are several daily newspapers published in Dublin including Evening Herald, the Irish Independent (website: www.unison.ie/irish_independent) and The Irish Times (website: www.ireland.com); and two in Cork (Evening Echo and Irish Examiner (website: www.irishexaminer.com)). British dailies and Sunday papers are available. TV: RTE is a public broadcaster and operates three networks, including an Irish-language station TG4. Radio: Radio RTE is a public broadcaster and operates four networks, including the flagship station Radio 1, a pop music station; Raidio na Gaeltachta operates an Irish-language station; and Lyric FM is a classical and cultural station. Today FM is the national commercial network.