



FastNet Travel

Ireland 2023

Travel Guide

by

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Disclaimer

The information provided in this eBook is for informational purposes only. Readers use this information at their own risk. Due to the uncertainties wrought by Covid-19, concessions may need to be made to accommodate current and future Covid-related norms and rules in Ireland.

When planning your trip, it's advisable to visit the websites of venues & attractions mentioned here, or contact local tourist board offices to ensure that they remain open and available. It is advisable, more than ever, to partner with a trusted travel professional in planning your world travel.

Travel patterns have changed and will continue to evolve over the next decade. Easy, unscripted, and improvisational travel may be desirable; however, the trend is toward more carefully planned itineraries based on a new reality. Increasing numbers of tourists are visiting Ireland, and over the past year, over 80,000 Ukrainian refugees have arrived in Ireland, placing constraints on accommodation and other services.

As **The Ireland Expert**, I work with clients to create viable, safe, and personalized itineraries for you, your family, or your group, whenever you choose to travel. [Contact me](#) for details of my travel planning services!



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Introduction

As a professional travel counselor, I have assisted hundreds of clients in their quest for a meaningful and memorable visit to the island of Ireland. Many travelers are searching for connections with their homeplace, where ancestors lived before emigration from Ireland. Others are drawn by Ireland's rich cultural and historical offerings: castles and museums, traditional music and dance, theatre, poetry, and literature. And in recent times, there has been a growing appreciation for the country's natural resources, artisanal foods, and amenities for lovers of the outdoors.

Dreaming of your first visit to Ireland? Or looking forward to returning to dig deeper into the Celtic culture and landscapes you might have missed on a previous trip? There are countless books, websites, and references to research in advance of your visit: Moon Guides, Rick Steves and Lonely Planet to name just a few. They provide a wealth of information on accommodation, dining and activities – a good start for travelers planning a visit to Ireland.

These **Ireland Travel Tips** are not meant to be comprehensive: they offer personal insights and practical suggestions that I've found most helpful over the years. I'm always interested in learning about hidden Irish gems: places to stay, eat, and experience Ireland in new ways. Please feel free to [email me](mailto:kathleen@fastnettravel.com) with your comments or suggestions.

Happy travels!

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Discover your travel persona & style

1

There's so much to experience on the island of Ireland – both in the Republic and Ulster in the North. The Cliffs of Moher, Giant's Causeway, Blarney Stone, Killarney... must-see attractions for many first-time travelers to Ireland. But it's folly to think the whole country can be traversed in a week. Knowing yourself, your preferences and your limits is key to planning a successful Ireland Adventure.

Before embarking on a travel plan, it's helpful to get clarity on your Travel persona and style. As adults with considerable life experience, most of us have some idea of our travel preferences and desired level of comfort. We've learned to be flexible and to take advantage of serendipity. Hopefully, we've perfected our bold, confident faces and developed a modicum of technical savvy, all helpful attributes for the traveler. In addition, reflecting on our preferences - budget vs luxury, solo vs group, traveling daily vs staying in one location – helps create the most satisfying travel outcome.

As I interview clients planning an Ireland adventure, I curate a draft itinerary based upon what I describe as 'touchstones': the elements that speak most strongly to the traveler and/or their group, and address their deepest passions and interests. Together we design a plan that emphasizes depth, yielding not a frenzied, superficial dash between tourist attractions, but a thoughtful, rewarding experience.

Some sample touchstones to consider:

- Ancestry: locating a forebear's homeplace or gravestone
- Music & dance: seeking out traditional music pubs in Northern Ireland; attending a dance festival



- Food and drink: visiting artisanal food producers, craft breweries, and cheesemakers in County Cork; fine dining or vegan restaurants, the best fish & chip shops
- Crafts: visiting craftspeople throughout the West -- potters, painters, fiber artists, sculptors in Donegal, Sligo, and Fermanagh
- History & Culture: devising a trail of stone circles, dolmens, historic buildings, and museums that offer in-depth views of Ireland's past
- Literature: attending Yeats Summer School, visiting the homes of writers and poets in Dublin.



Plan your itinerary, then go rogue

We're all aware of the value of planning for major events - even for everyday forays like grocery shopping - 'is it cabbage or eggplant I need? Where'd I park the car?'

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Foreign travel takes planning up a notch, with a myriad of details to be considered and decisions made before and during the trip. Thus, the importance of having a central file or travel app, and a well-researched itinerary that includes all the known facts as they develop: where I'm staying, car rental details, places to visit, and more.

There are scores of sample itineraries to explore online and in travel guides to get a feel for itinerary planning. The thing about Ireland, as with many intriguing destinations, is that I'm always tempted to take a left turn on my way to someplace else, overstay my allotted time in a music pub, drop into a poetry reading I saw on a poster - all that. Once there's a rough plan in place, straying from it can be a liberating experience. Serendipity, even seemingly calamitous events can lead to the most enduring memories on travel.



A few tips on deviating from the Ireland Plan:

- If it's a sunny day, visit a local supermarket or Farmers' Market, buy some picnic supplies, and find a forest park such as Barna Wood in Galway, Inchydoney beach in West Cork, or any roadside beauty spot. I pack a soft-sided mini cooler and a lightweight "space blanket" for these occasions.
- Driving in torrential rain isn't advisable, so if the day seems 'dirty', ask your hotel concierge or B&B host to recommend local indoor activities or places of interest. You may learn something new about the country and yourself. See also the Museum tips below.
- Equip yourself with a hooded rain jacket and sturdy shoes...most Irish people agree that if they stayed home every time it rained, they would never go anywhere! With the exception of heavy seas and gale winds, most weather conditions in Ireland are tolerable; summer weather can even get quite hot.
- Since post-Covid travel resumed in earnest in 2022, Ireland has become one of Europe's most popular destinations. Unlike in years past, it's not advisable in 2023 to completely 'wing' accommodation in hotels or B&Bs. I'm now advising that travelers book a minimum of 2-3 nights in each location, to guarantee availability while still leaving room for serendipity.
- Regarding restaurants, theatres, Kilmainhain Gaol and other venues, travelers are often surprised that prior booking can be essential to avoid disappointment. A few hints: - book ahead if you know the dates you want for theatre events at the Abbey, the Gaiety and other popular venues; - Michelin-starred restaurants are often booked months in advance; -don't expect to walk into any Dublin restaurant on a Thursday, Friday or Saturday evening without a reservation; -a pub, chip shop or takeaway can be a good alternative to avoid starvation, as long as you've confirmed the pub actually serves food.



Pack light, pack smart

Tried and true advice for travel in Ireland: plan your wardrobe around these main principles:

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1. Top layering: whatever the time of year, pack a thermal underlayer like a sleeveless silk vest, then a lightweight shirt, a thin sweater, and a jacket.
2. Jeans are not great as they're heavy and don't dry well.
3. Theme color: choose one major color and coordinate everything to it: black, brown, taupe or navy.
4. It rains: yes, Ireland is not lush and green for no reason. Essential as noted above, is a hooded, waterproof rain jacket, and if a hiking trip is on the agenda, a baseball cap and rain pants also work. Windy conditions render an umbrella almost useless.

My free **Ireland Packing List** can be accessed [here](#).

Some Do's:

- Invest in packing cubes – the best way to organize belongings, whether in a backpack, duffle, or suitcase.
- Pack colorful accessories: scarves, a pashmina or a bright pocket hanky can dress up a simple outfit.
- Leave the diamonds at home; bring inexpensive costume jewelry.
- If on prescription meds, check that you will have an adequate supply before traveling; also pack any eyeglass prescriptions.
- Make copies of your passport, credit cards, and contact numbers; leave a copy with a trusted family member or friend.



...and Don'ts:

- Don't pack more than 2 pairs of shoes, plus flip flops & your heaviest boots for the plane.
- Don't overpack toiletries – Ireland has plenty of shampoo and soap if you run out. Leave the curling iron at home – though you'll need an electrical adapter to connect to the Irish 3-pronged plug, I don't recommend a voltage converter – too much can go wrong.
- If flying from the USA, don't forget the TSA 3-1-1 rule that your carry-on bag can only contain three 3.4oz (100 milliliter) containers of liquids, aerosols, gels, creams, and pastes, packed in a 1-quart clear plastic bag. Other countries have their own criteria.



Create a realistic budget

From hostels to castles, Ireland has accommodation choices for all budgets.

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Even traveling on a shoestring, it's possible to splurge on a night at a country house such as Cork's Longueville House, or even Adare Manor or Ashford Castle, spending the rest of the time in B&Bs or a rented cottage.

- For a special occasion, travelers can splash out on castles or 5-star hotels, chauffeur-driven touring, and fancy dining. If you're dreaming of a luxury trip to celebrate a wedding, honeymoon, anniversary or graduation, Ireland is the ideal location.
- In Ireland, restaurant dining is expensive; some travelers have their main meal at lunchtime (the traditional "carvery lunch" offers hearty meals for good value), and once or twice book a late dinner at a fine dining restaurant (reserving in advance as I've mentioned). If your B&B offers a lush Irish breakfast, then a snack will hold you over until dinner time.



- [Hostels](#) are no longer just for youth; they can be an economical choice for any age visitor, and a good source of travel lore, companionship, and advice. Some even feature private ensuite rooms suitable for families and single older travelers. I've often booked a private ensuite hostel room and it's been fine – friendly staff and respectful fellow guests. Just read reviews before booking and avoid party hostels.
- For evening meals, takeaways and meal delivery services like JustEat and Deliveroo are available in urban areas; food shops like Tesco and M&S offer complete takeaway meals that are of a much higher caliber than we get in North America. Many hotels and B&Bs have in-room coffee and tea-making facilities - create an in-room picnic before heading out to a pub music session.
- If your plan includes several days in the capital, the [Dublin Pass](#) can be a money-saver. A transport pass enables unlimited bus travel as well as travel on the Hop-on, hop-off tour bus.
- Renting a small car and packing light will stand you in good stead when you get a look at the price of fuel: eek. Petrol (gasoline) and diesel fuel are sold by the litre. Although cars are more fuel-efficient in Europe, you will still face significant fuel costs that need to be factored into your overall travel budget.



Learn a bit about Irish history and culture

Ireland and its culture have long been described, celebrated, and maligned in books, magazines, films and on TV. How to distinguish the malarkey from the Real Ireland? Some recommendations:

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Books:

- * Anything **Maeve Binchy**: presents a somewhat saccharine but realistic glimpse of modern-day Dubliners' lives
- * **How the Irish Saved Civilization**: Thomas Cahill's insightful take on the history of the island
- * **Guide to Sacred Ireland**: Cary Meehan outlines over 800 sacred sites from pre-Christian times through recent history.

Film:

- * **The Quiet Man**: What was once considered only a slightly-corny rendering of a rural Irish community has descended into schlock...don't expect to meet any Michaelleens now.
- * **The Wind that Shakes the Barley**: Cillian Murphy provides a stellar performance in this study of the 1920s civil war that followed the establishment of the Republic.
- * **Brooklyn**: Saoirse Ronan as an emigrant torn between two worlds; set in the 1950s, a tear-jerker that strikes a chord for many of us with immigrant ancestors (that would be most North Americans and Australians).
- * **Belfast**: Kenneth Branagh's brilliant depiction of life during the Troubles in Northern Ireland in 1969.

TV:

- * **Ballykissangel**: Late 90s melodrama filmed in Avoca, Co. Wicklow. Pretty close to reality in rendering angst, conflicts, and the pub as the social heartbeat of a small town.
- * **Nationwide**: Semi-weekly news show featuring human-interest stories from around the country...worth a watch when in Ireland.
- * **Father Ted**: Though it only ran from 1995-98, this show has become the Seinfeld of Ireland. Lines from its characters have been subsumed into the language of the country.



Do the pre-work: weather & more

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Being equipped for any weather is wise: [Met Éireann](#), [RTE One](#), and [BBC Northern Ireland](#) all feature up-to-date weather reports; the best advice I can offer is to watch the late news each night, then open a window in the morning and get a sense of the day!

- Storms can be nasty, so if driving you'll want to take heed of changing weather and modify your plan, or stop for awhile in a roadside café if things get dicey.
- Temperature conversions (approximate):
 - 30 C == 90 F
 - 20 C == 70 F
 - 10 C == 50 F
 - 5 C == 40 F

How much is that in Euro?

Currency conversion apps, such as the one from [Xe.com](#), are handy for on-the-fly conversion from Euros to your own currency. For a 2-3 week trip, I generally take a screenshot of the latest rate from [Oanda.com](#) to use on my phone.

Be prepared for electrical/electronic differences in Ireland

Electric current in Europe is 230V, as opposed to the 110V common in North America. This means that, unless your hairdryer, curling iron, or toothbrush is rated for 220V or more, these items should be left at home. My setup for phone and iPad charging is: plug adapter to fit the UK/Irish 3-pronged wall plugs, lightweight power strip with 3-4 outlets (more than that



is probably asking for power overload). Converters that purport to modify voltage are unreliable and can cause your appliance to explode. Pack a pre-charged power bank to charge your phone on the fly.

Be your own Advance Team

I always have my first night's accommodation booked before leaving for Ireland, even if the rest of the trip is in 'wing-it' mode. And since the advent of online menus and reservation systems, it's possible (even recommended in the summer season) to make at least one reservation for lunch in a fancy restaurant, a lesson in Falconry in Kerry, Irish baking at [Ballymaloe Cookery School](#), or a play at Dublin's [Abbey Theatre](#). On weekends, restaurant booking is essential in Dublin, Cork and Galway. And be aware: posh Dublin restaurants are requiring a credit card guarantee, 2-hour table limit, and/or 10-minute hold on your table before giving it away. No-shows can be charged up to €50. Is this Manhattan?



Get there

The changing face of air travel has rendered many airlines and routes obsolete in recent years, certainly since the pandemic took hold. **7** Budget airlines come and go, rules and fees change constantly, and delays and cancellations can make air travel a frustrating experience.

- From North America, most major airline hubs fly into Dublin or Shannon, with seasonal flights to Cork, Knock, and Belfast.
- UK routes to London, Manchester, Edinburgh or Glasgow then connect with Dublin or Cork, as do ferry services between Ireland and France, Wales and Liverpool.



- Icelandair has routes from North America to Dublin via Reykjavik, with the possibility of a 1-2 night layover in Iceland – this is a fun diversion for many visitors.
- Also check flights to Paris or Munich that connect to Dublin and Cork.
- If time and budget permit, a Transatlantic cruise on one of the Cunard Queens can lend an aura of romance to your Ireland adventure.

For North American visitors, there is no advance visa requirement to visit Ireland. At Irish airport immigration stations and ports, entry is permitted for up to 90 days.

- U.S. passports must be valid for the duration of your stay in Ireland. But just in case, it's better if your passport is valid at least a month longer.
- At departure, the placement of U.S. Customs and Immigration staff at Dublin and Shannon airports enables travelers to bypass inspection upon landing back in the U.S. Carefully check your terminal numbers – not all return transatlantic flights will land at international terminals.
- Ever-changing rules govern customs, immigration, and visa issues for travel to Ireland. The [Customs and Border site](#) addresses these rules and explains the labyrinthine VAT regulations and how to claim tax back for some purchases on departure.



Pace your journey

"When God made time, He made plenty of it"

This old Irish expression rings true when planning a holiday in Ireland, or indeed to any destination. As mentioned before, it's not advisable to cram too many activities into each day's agenda; it only leaves you

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or your group exhausted and cranky. Takeaways from the trip should be (mostly) pleasant memories of people and places you took the time to engage with and enjoy.

- A good rule of thumb when planning is to focus on 1-2 major activities or landmarks per day, and perhaps one food venue or pub to explore.
- 2 days of long drives can be offset by a rest day, particularly appreciated by the designated driver. My itineraries always include a day, or at least a block of time, for rest and reflection, comprising a spa appointment at a hotel like [Inchydoney](#) in West Cork, a rainy day spent drinking tea, reading, and chatting in a country pub, or a walk in a forest like [Barna Woods](#) in Galway or [Glendalough](#) in the Wicklow mountains.
- Sometimes the best travel recollections are of misfortune that turned into delight, such as getting a flat tire and being invited to tea by a friendly local Samaritan.
- Flexibility is key, particularly considering Ireland's changeable weather. I recommend spending at least 2 or 3 nights in one location, allowing a change of plan based on conditions of the weather, serendipity, and the stamina of the travelers. The day the cliffs of Slieve League are shrouded in fog is not an ideal day to visit.



Drive defensively

The Irish car rental business is notorious for its bandito culture and extortionate insurance rates; driving is frenetic, and travel on country boreens (tiny roads) potentially harrowing, but many travelers still choose the freedom of a car rental. Be aware that after age 70, there will be a surcharge for each day of your rental.

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Buses and trains are slower and don't offer the versatility of car hire travel. However, if you're not determined to see every corner of the country, public transport can be combined with a hub-and-spoke itinerary, day tours with a private driver, or the occasional taxi (no Uber in Ireland), for a lower-stress, more eco-friendly vacation.

Driving in Ireland is on the left side of the road with the steering wheel on the right. Be alert to the craziness and speed that reigns on Irish highways. An impatient and sometimes reckless driver will exceed the already high speed limits and pass you with no regard for the massive truck heading directly at him. Nerves of steel, calming music, muzzled passengers, staying in the left lane, and driving a bit under the speed limit are my main defenses for the madness. Easy to tell - driving isn't my favorite pastime in Ireland 😊.

Some pointers:

- Toll roads: Have some 1- or 2-Euro coins handy for the toll roads around Dublin, Limerick, and other urban centers. NB: Dublin's M50 is a no-cash road that expects you to have a transponder; check with your car rental agency on how to handle tolls on this road.
- Minimum age to rent a car is 21, max 75 – surcharges may apply.
- Splurge and rent an automatic-transmission vehicle; urban driving doesn't lend itself well to manual machinations. When picking up your car, take photos of the entire vehicle and make note of any dings or scratches on the rental agency's paperwork.
- Assiduously avoid driving in central Dublin.
- **No driver mobile phone use** is allowed while driving – no text messaging, no phone calls by the driver; passengers can use phones.
- A rented GPS can be helpful.
- Parking in car parks usually requires 'Pay & Display' payment; after parking, find a kiosk, purchase a parking receipt and display it on your dashboard.



- Speed cameras are in use throughout the country; rental car drivers are responsible for all speeding and parking tickets.
- When approaching a village or farm, you will encounter roundabouts and other 'traffic-calming' measures; speed limits can drop quickly, so be vigilant. When rounding corners on country roads, slow down lest you encounter a big truck full of hay or a herd of sheep. Ten or more animals and their drover have right of way.
- Speed conversions:
100 km/hr = 60 mph / 70 km = 42 mph / 40 km = 24 mph



Stay in magical places

The unique qualities of Ireland's landscape are manifested in its quirky and unusual accommodation options. Even first-time visitors can choose an out-of-the-way classic cottage, a castle stay or rental, or a glamping experience, to set a romantic or adventurous tone for your Ireland sojourn. Research on these types of properties can yield the best memories of Ireland and its gracious citizens.

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- [The Library](#), Inch Island Donegal
- [Lighthouses](#) in the Republic and Northern Ireland
- [Yurt Glamping](#) on Cape Clear Island, Cork
- [Thatched Cottages](#), Donegal
- [Martello Tower](#), Dublin
- Castle hotels: [Ashford Castle](#), [Adare Manor](#), [Glin Castle](#), [Castle Leslie](#)



Keep in touch with your world

WiFi is available virtually everywhere in Ireland, with spotty coverage to be expected in some rural areas. In restaurants and hotels, just ask for the WiFi password to get online. Remember that most public networks aren't secure enough to pay a credit card bill. A [VPN](#) is handy for any phone-based transactions on travel.

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As in most of Europe, the Irish stay in touch using **WhatsApp** or **Viber** messaging apps, keeping costs down by connecting via WiFi. Facetime or Skype can keep you linked (but not too closely!) with family and friends at home.

- Check with your local provider about international mobile phone rates.
- If your phone is unlocked, you can purchase a SIM card on arrival at the airport, or from a local Tesco, Centra, or Carphone Warehouse.
- I find it economical to have an inexpensive pay-as-you-go phone which I top up online in 20 Euro increments.
- Keep your mobile data off when not in use, or put your phone in airplane mode to avoid a big surprise on arrival home.
- Charging a laptop, iPad, or phone on the road in Ireland will require an adapter and perhaps a portable power bank for extra charging power. I pack a solar-powered charger, a lipstick-sized extra charger, and a multi-plug power strip and adapter to charge several devices at once.



Roam or plant

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My travel strategy in Ireland depends on how exhausted I'm willing to feel at the end of the trip. First-timers often express a mad desire to drive the entire perimeter of the country in a week. Relying on maps, they have no perception of traffic, road conditions, tempting stops they'll want to make, and other factors that can turn their breakneck-speed trip into a grim ordeal. And a tired driver on a dark, unfamiliar road is not a desirable prospect.

Even if it's your first or only Ireland trip, do yourself a favor and rein in your expectations of mileage to be covered. A good rule of thumb is to cover 40 miles of road per hour, for a max of 3 driving hours per day.

A few strategies that have proven successful:

- Ideal minimum stay: 8 nights, not counting the transatlantic overnight flight
- Choose 2 hubs, for example Kilkenny and Kenmare, from which to strike out on exploratory day trips
- Book an apartment or hotel suite in one city for 4-5 days: Cork, Galway, and Sligo are good bases. Also Kilkenny, Castlebar, Derry.
- Rent a cottage near a mid-sized town like Kenmare, Kinsale, Dingle, Skibbereen, Adare or Bray. Get to know the local area and residents by exploring walking trails, Farmers' Markets, shops and pubs.
- Plan your trip around events or festivals such as [Taste of West Cork](#), Dublin's [Bloom in the Park](#), or the [Galway Races](#). Find out what's happening at [Ireland.com](#).
- Dublin doesn't NEED to be on your itinerary – though a lovely city, it's a typical busy European capital that could be saved for another trip.



Create memorable moments

13 Traveling in Ireland is a journey of discovery: this can include visiting iconic locations, such as the Cliffs of Moher or the Aran Islands; seeking out the land ancestors may have walked, or trusting serendipity to lead you to vistas that make your heart sing. Plan to linger in places that speak to your deepest feelings of connection to nature and the land, creating lifelong memories. Take more pictures than you think you need – friendly locals won't mind taking photos of you or your group.

Quintessentially Irish:

- The Winter Solstice at [Newgrange](#)
- The [Causeway Coast](#) and Glens of Antrim
- [Night Kayaking](#), Lough Hyne, Co. Cork
- [Mizen Head Lighthouse](#), West Cork
- [Horseback riding](#) on a beach
- [Seaweed baths](#), Sligo
- Falconry at [Adare Manor](#) or [Falconry Kerry](#)



Visit a castle or two

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Castles and fortifications have dotted Ireland's landscape for millennia, from Celtic chieftains to Vikings to Normans to the English, all have left their mark on the history and culture of the country. Some that have not yet become hotels:

- [Trim Castle](#), Meath
- [Rock of Cashel](#), Tipperary
- [Cahir Castle](#), Tipperary
- [King John's Castle](#), Limerick
- [Ross Castle](#), Kerry
- [Dunquire Castle](#), Galway
- [Bunratty Castle & Folk Park](#), Clare



Get out on the water

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Boat trips on the ocean, lakes, and rivers lend a new dimension to your Ireland holiday. Learn about the seafaring history of this island country, take an evening dinner cruise on a serene river, or experience the magic of night kayaking in a saltwater lake.

- The [New Ross Galley](#) dinner cruise
- O'Brien's [Doolin/Aran Island](#) ferry
- [River Shannon](#) cruising
- Tour to Cape Clear Island and the [Fastnet Lighthouse](#)
- [Killary Fjord](#) cruise
- [Atlantic Sea Kayaking](#) Moonlight tours
- [Dingle Dolphin](#) cruise or [Star Wars/Skellig Rocks](#) tour



Experience pub culture

Major cities such as Dublin, Cork, and Belfast offer enticing features, but the true heartbeat of Ireland lies 'beyond the Pale', in its charming villages and small towns.

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Travelers to these smaller hubs will find both traditional and modern pub life alive and well; most are welcoming to visitors, even single travelers; some feature trad music sessions, some are quiet places catering to locals. Some are drink-only, others serve food from basic pub grub to gourmet meals. An afternoon or evening spent in a small-town pub or on a sunlit terrace can yield new insights into the reality of Ireland and its inhabitants.

Some favorites:

- Dick Mack's Pub & Brewery, Dingle
- Matt Molloy's, Westport
- Crowley's, Kenmare
- The Local, Dungarvan
- Tigh Neachtain, Galway
- Sin é, Cork City
- Jim Edwards, Kinsale



Attend a live performance

Whether a traditional music session in a pub, a classic play in a Dublin theatre, or a street busker playing for tips, Ireland is awash in opportunities for taking in a live performance.

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- [What's on in Ireland](#): Calendar of Events
- [The Abbey Theatre](#), Dublin
- [The Everyman](#), Cork
- [Town Hall Theatre](#), Galway
- [The Grand Social](#) music venue, Dublin
- [Crane Lane](#), Cork
- [Pure Cork](#), live music listings
- [The Session](#): traditional music events



Explore a museum

Five major museums worth visiting:

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- National Museum of Ireland: [Archeology Wing – Treasury](#)
- [Kilmainham Gaol](#) Museum - Essential to book ahead
- [The Ulster Museum](#), Belfast & Botanical Gardens
- [Museum of Country Life](#), Castlebar Co. Mayo
- [Crawford Gallery](#), Cork City

Three quirky museums I like:

- [Cork Butter Museum](#)
- [Allihies Copper Mining Museum](#)
- [14 Henrietta Street](#), Dublin



Sample artisanal products

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Irish produce, meat, and dairy foods have always been high-quality. In recent years the range of Irish artisan food and drink producers has burgeoned, and standards for fresh and unique food items have risen to new heights. Some not-to-be-missed taste sensations to be found in restaurants and markets:

- [Clonakilty Black Pudding](#)
- [Waterford Blaa](#) breads
- [West Cork Farmhouse](#) cheeses
- [Boxty](#)
- [Champ](#)
- [Colcannon](#)
- [Sea vegetables](#)
- [Cockles & Mussels](#)
- Smoked fish – the [Burren Smokehouse](#)
- [Irish whiskeys](#)
- [Craft beers](#)
- [Jams and Preserves](#)
- Patés & charcuterie from [On the Pig's Back](#), Cork English Market

Market Day

I've found local Farmers' Markets in Ireland to be wonderful places to explore, both for discovering local produce, and for interacting with other customers and the producers: cheesemakers, distillers, Polish mushroom growers, and more.

[Midleton market](#), East Cork | [Best Food & Farmers' Markets in Ireland](#)



Learn some local lingo

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Some common Irish food words have different meanings to North Americans:

Ireland	North America
chips	French fries
crisps	chips
grilled	broiled
bangers	sausages
boxty	potato cakes
champ	potatoes mashed with green onions
crubeens	pigs' feet cooked with vegetables or breaded & fried
bacon & cabbage	ham & cabbage: boiled 'bacon' in Ireland is a thicker meaty cut like smoked shoulder; there's no "corned beef & cabbage". You might see 'spiced beef'
poteen	po-cheen': moonshine, homemade brew
biscuits	cookies
mash	mashed potatoes, can contain cabbage or other vegetables
cooker	stove

Irish figures of speech that may be confusing to visitors:

Away with ye	I don't believe you	Fierce	very; 'twas fierce cold
Babby	A little child	Gas	funny
Bang on	perfectly correct	Gobsmacked	very surprised
Biro	ballpoint pen	Hole in the wall	ATM
Boyo	a bit of a lad	Jackeen	a Culchie's name for a Dubliner
Cop on	get a life/don't be stupid	Knackered	very tired



Culchie	a Dubliner's name for a country person	Minerals	soft drinks
Cute hoors	usually politicians - it implies deviousness and crookedness. (almost always the term 'hoor' is masculine.) In Ireland, 'cute' means 'crafty'	Pint of plain Press Provo	a pint of Guinness or, in Cork, Murphy's cupboard or closet member of the Provisional IRA
Deadly	very cool	Queue up	Line up
Desperate	terrible	Off licence	liquor store
Eejit	idiot	Rashers	slices of bacon
Ensuite	room with bath	Ri-Ra, Knees-up	Fun event, excitement
Fag	cigarette	Slagging	having someone on, making fun of them
Fair play to ya!	well done!	Spot on	see 'bang on'
Feck(in)	darn – used liberally; sounds just like the other F word. F word is also used liberally.	Turf Accountant	bookie



Hike or walk outside

Even on a 'soft', drizzly day, the woodlands and gardens of Ireland exude an inviting, timeless charm. The tradition of formal Anglo-Irish aristocratic gardens is still in evidence, particularly in eastern counties, but there are simpler, wilder garden havens to be found throughout the country.

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The famous cliff walks of the [Cliffs of Moher](#) (entry fee), [Kerry Cliffs](#), [Slieve League](#) in Donegal, and [Howth Cliffs](#) are not to be missed – another good reason to shape up and get those steps in before heading to Ireland.

On an Ireland road trip, long rides over rugged terrain can be draining for both driver and passengers. Stop and spend an hour exploring a lush garden or park, for a calm respite from the stress of travel. A cuppa (of tea) and a scone, and you'll be refreshed and ready to take to the road again.

Some good stops along the way:

- [Powerscourt Demesne](#), Wicklow
- [Woodville](#) Walled Garden, Galway
- [Botanic Gardens](#), Belfast
- [Mount Usher](#), Wicklow
- [Kylemore Abbey](#), Galway
- [Garinish Island](#), Cork
- [Dereen Gardens](#), Kerry
- [Mount Stewart](#), Down
- [Sky Garden](#), Lissard Estate, Cork
- [West Cork Garden Trail](#)



Garinish Island, County Cork



Attend a festival

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An Ireland vacation can coincide with one of the many festivals taking place year-round: music events (often sold out early), family festivals, agricultural shows, art and craft extravaganzas, horse racing at the Curragh, Galway, or Limerick racecourses, golf tournaments and more.

Six of the best:

- * [Bloom](#): Dublin's Garden, Food and Drink orgy
- * [Galway International Arts Festival](#)
- * [The Galway Races](#)
- * [Cape Clear Storytelling Festival](#)
- * [A Taste of West Cork](#)
- * [Atlantic Sessions](#), Portstewart, NI



Seek out local art & crafts

Since the 1960s, art and craft in Ireland have been elevated to high arts, supported by government funding and local support. Spurred on by the success of the [Kilkenny Design Centre](#), artists and craftspeople from throughout Ireland, as well as incomers from the UK and Europe, have produced a high caliber of work in all media, well worth the time of collectors as well as visitors.

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- ❖ [Design and Crafts Council of Ireland](#)
- ❖ [August Craft Month](#) – Cork
- ❖ [August Craft Month](#) – Northern Ireland
- ❖ [Adrigole Arts](#) Gallery – Beara peninsula



Visit an island, stroll on a beach

In Ireland, one is never far from the coast, a lake, river, or stream. It makes sense to spend some time enjoying the beauty of Ireland's offshore islands, beaches, lakes, and waterways.

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Many serene choices await:

Seacoast islands:

- Bere Island, Garinish, Cape Clear, and Sherkin Islands: West Cork
- Inishmore, Inishmaan, Inisheer ([The Aran Islands](#)): Galway/Clare
- Great Blasket, [The Skelligs](#), Valentia Island: County Kerry
- Rathlin Island, Antrim
- [Saltee Islands](#), Wexford
- Aranmore, Donegal
- Inishturk, Mayo
- Ireland's Eye, Dublin

Islands in lakes:

- Belle Isle: Lough Erne, County Fermanagh
- [The Lake Isle of Innisfree](#): Lough Gill, County Sligo
- King's Island: River Shannon, Limerick

Beaches for walking, running, or horseback riding:

- Barleycove Beach: Goleen, West Cork
- Inch Beach: Dingle Peninsula, County Kerry
- Dog's Bay Beach: Roundstone, County Galway
- Silver Strand: Malin Beg, County Donegal
- Strandhill Beach: Strandhill, County Sligo
- Inchydoney Beach: Clonakilty, West Cork



Share your experience!

*I've enjoyed compiling these **Ireland Travel Tips** for first-time or return visitors to Ireland. Though not comprehensive, I hope they offer some practical advice and will prove useful as you plan your visit to Ireland.*

If you have found this document helpful in planning your Ireland journey, or you would like to share a newfound favorite place with other travelers and myself, please share your insights with me [via email](#). I'm always open to receiving your feedback, and to learning about new attractions, restaurants, and top-notch accommodation throughout Ireland, north and south.

If you are considering an independent or group tour around the country, keep [The Ireland Expert](#) in mind. We are uniquely qualified to assist adventurers with everything from a simple itinerary featuring public transport, to complete travel planning for your bike tour, B&B stay, hotel, or castle experience.



About the Author



Kathleen Lyons

Ireland. It's where I'm most comfortable, always ready to be amazed by its raucous, youthful exuberance, inspired by stunning landscapes, frustrated by the labyrinthine bureaucracy. It's not the land of leprechauns and fairy forts that many first-time visitors expect. Though full of history and charm, it's a sophisticated, high-tech country with its share of 21st-century challenges. And yet, the Irish people are still the most hospitable you will meet!

My passion is helping visitors to explore beyond the main attractions, go off the beaten path and experience the Real Ireland.



As a 20-year-old University student with a major in Hospitality & Tourism Management, I was fortunate to be offered a summer hotel job by the legendary Brendan O'Reagan, developer of Shannon Airport and inventor of the Duty-Free Zone. So began a lifelong attachment to the land and people of Ireland.

I became a Foreign-born National in 1978 thanks to my lucky heritage: my grandmother, Mary Magdalene O'Donovan, was born in Goleen, West Cork in the 1880s. During many long stays in the country, I've bonded with extended family and made lifelong connections and cherished friends.

For over 40 years now, I've traveled from Malin Head to Mizen Head, east to west, in an ongoing quest to discover new vistas and experiences in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.



A lifelong solo female traveler, I'm sensitive to the desire for independent exploration and connection. I enjoy helping solo travelers strike a balance between autonomy and social interaction. Having led groups traveling throughout Ireland and the UK, Europe, the Caribbean, Alaska, and the continental US, I can thoughtfully plan a well-paced itinerary for yourself or your group.

Living in County Cork for part of each year, I stay current with what's new and fresh, frequently revisiting classic, well-loved destinations. Restaurants, country houses, gardens, water parks - I'll only recommend those that I or my colleagues in tourism have personally vetted.

Work with me

Create your unique story of discovery in Ireland, based on the preferences of your group and yourself. Brainstorm with me to seek the facets of Celtic culture that speak to you; then craft a unique adventure that fits your personality and style.

As a professional travel counselor, I'm delighted to assist visitors to Ireland with:

- * Itinerary planning day by day
- * Detailed maps and directions on your route
- * City guides, restaurant recommendations, and reservations
- * Genealogy connections
- * Escorted, chauffeur-driven, or self-drive tours
- * Accommodation choices, from hostels to castles
- * Family reunions and group golf, biking, or literary excursions



Success for me is an email from clients asking for help arranging their return visit to Ireland, to experience more of the elusive charm and magnetism of the country.

Slàinte!



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- Follow us on the [FastNet Travel Facebook](#) page!
- Browse through my [Ireland Expert Pinterest Boards](#) for suggestions and recommended restaurants, music venues and more.

