



Republic of Ireland

Brief Historical Overview

The History of Ireland has been heavily influenced by the concurrent history of Britain (its larger neighbour to the east) and by Europe as a whole. The first humans inhabited Ireland from around 7500 BC and were later responsible for major Neolithic sites such as Newgrange. Following the arrival of St. Patrick and other Christian missionaries in the mid-fifth century, a syncretized form of Christianity subsumed the indigenous pagan religion by A.D. 600. Christianity has played a major role in Ireland's subsequent history and culture.

From around 800, more than a century of Viking invasions wreaked havoc upon the monastic culture and on the island's various regional dynasties, yet both of these institutions proved strong enough to survive and assimilate the invaders.

The coming of Anglo-Norman mercenaries under Strongbow in 1169 marked the beginning of more than 800 years of direct English involvement in Ireland. The Crown of England did not gain full control until the 16th and 17th centuries, when the whole island had been subjected to numerous military campaigns in the period 1534–1691, and was colonised by English and Scottish Protestant settlers. Most of the Irish remained Roman Catholic. From this period on, sectarian conflict became a recurrent theme in Irish history.

Throughout this period, Ireland regained a form of self-governing status through the Parliament of Ireland, but power was limited to the Anglo-Irish, Anglican minority while the majority Roman Catholic population suffered severe political and economic privations. In 1801, this parliament was abolished and Ireland became an integral part of a new United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland under the Act of Union.

In 1922, after the War of Independence, the southern and western twenty-six counties of Ireland seceded from this United Kingdom and became the independent Irish Free State — now legally described as the "Republic of Ireland". The remainder of the island, known as "Northern Ireland", remained part of the UK. The history of Northern Ireland has been dominated by sporadic sectarian conflict between (mainly Catholic) Nationalists and (mainly Protestant) Unionists. This conflict erupted into the Troubles in the late 1960s, until an uneasy peace 30 years later.





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Some Important National Holidays

February 2nd -- **Feast of St. Bridgit**, feast day of very early saint; prior to Christianity may have been celebration of a Celtic goddess

March 17th -- **St. Patrick's Day**

June 16th -- **Bloomsday**, pilgrimage around Dublin retracing the steps of Joyce's Bloom

August -- ***Fleagh ceoil na h-Éireann*** (Feast of Irish Music), national music and dancing competition

September -- **All-Ireland Hurling and Football Finals**, championships for Ireland's two national sports.

September -- **Lisdoonvarna's Matchmaking Festival**, five-week festival in which Ireland's bachelor farmers come to find wives, also the occasion for renowned open-air music festival

December 26 -- **St. Stephen's Day**



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National Dishes



Ireland is famous for its seafood with smoked salmon, smoked fish, oysters, mussels and crab topping the bill. The country also produces excellent lamb, beef pork, black pudding, farmhouse cheese, soda bread and, of course, Guinness and maybe a drop of whiskey!

Irish stew, "ballymaloe" or "stobhach gaelach" as it is called in Gaelic, is a traditional dish made from lamb or mutton as well as potatoes, onions, and parsley. It is a filling, flavourful dish made with the cheapest, most readily-available ingredients. The Irish raised primarily sheep and root crops for subsistence. The sheep provided wool for warm clothing, milk for drinking and making cheese, and eventually food. Potatoes were the main food crop, prior to the potato famine.



Traditional Irish Breakfast - This is one of the glories of the Irish table and can include grilled bacon, black pudding and good quality sausages, tomatoes grilled with butter and chives, flat mushrooms and soda and potato bread. Nowadays, with the more hectic lifestyle, it is confined to weekend treats and holidays - not to be missed, it sets you up for the day!

Colcannon is a traditional Irish food made from mashed potatoes, cabbage (or kale), butter, salt, and pepper. It can contain other ingredients such as milk, cream, leeks, onions, chives or garlic. It is a cheap, year-round staple food. An Irish Halloween tradition is to serve colcannon with prizes of small coins concealed in it.





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Travel Tips

Geography

The island of Ireland is 300 miles / 450 km long and 190 miles / 300 km wide and covers approximately 32,600 sq. miles / 84,500 sq. km.

Ireland is divided into four provinces - Ulster Munster Leinster Connaught

Within these 4 provinces are 32 counties. The Republic of Ireland consists of 26 counties and Northern Ireland consists of 6 counties.

Demographics

The population of the island is currently approximately 5.6 million, with approximately 3.9 million living in the Republic and 1.7 million in Northern Ireland.

Ireland enjoys a rich diversity of ethnic groups and cultures and there is a dominance of young people - over half the population is under 30 years old.

Time Zone

Ireland is on Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and in accordance with daylight saving, clocks are put forward one hour mid-March and back one hour at the end of October.

During summer it stays light until as late as 11.00pm but by mid-December it can be dark by 4.00pm.



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Provinces and Counties

Connaught Counties Galway, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo.

The ancient Province of Connaught on the West coast of Ireland contains a rich diversity of stunning landscapes and coastal views, including the stunning sights of Connemara, Mayo and Sligo. The coastline consists of thousands of wildly shaped bays, inlets and islands. Galway City, the capital of the West, and an easy mix of ultra modern culture and proud Gaelic traditions, is worth a visit, as are the beautiful towns of Westport and Sligo.

Leinster Counties Carlow, Dublin, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Longford, Louth, Meath, Offaly, Westmeath, Wexford, Wicklow.

The most fought-over and colonised part of Ireland and this is reflected in the region's historical heritage. Now, Leinster is a mixture of beautiful countryside and modern towns, with well over half the population of the Republic living in Leinster.

Leinster includes Newgrange, Europe's greatest and most stunning Neolithic monument, the luxurious countryside of Wicklow and Kilkenny, with its rich Norman architecture and lively atmosphere.

Munster Counties Munster: Clare, Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary, Waterford.

The lushest of the four Provinces, and home to some of Ireland's most breathtaking scenery; Munster's winding roads lead over mountain passes descending to magnificent inlets of the sea. The area is rich in archaeological remains, not least the mysterious stone circles which dot the landscape. Throughout the region are many traces of plantation towns as well as numerous coastal and harbour towns such as Kinsale and Clonakilty. Munster is also home to Cork City, the second city of the Republic of Ireland and Limerick City, which is a historical gem with its 13th century castle fortress and old town.

Ulster Counties Antrim, Armagh, Cavan, Donegal, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, Monaghan, Tyrone.

The Northern part of Ireland - the great and majestic Ulster - offers a different and quite unique experience. The interwoven influences of several different cultures - the Ulster Scots, the Gaelic, the Norman and the Anglo-Norman have sculpted and coloured the landscape in a way quite different to the rest of the island. The geographical location of Ulster, as the most Northern part of Ireland surrounded by ocean on three sides, has formed a breathtakingly beautiful coast of dramatic cliffscapes, sweeping strands and tumbling mountain ranges rarely equalled elsewhere in Ireland.

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Travel Tips

Climate

Ireland has a mild temperate climate. The dominant influence on Ireland's climate is the Atlantic Ocean. Consequently, Ireland does not suffer from the extremes of temperature experienced by many other countries at similar latitude. Average annual temperature is about 9 °C. In the middle and east of the country temperatures tend to be somewhat more extreme than in other parts of the country.

- Summer temperatures generally ranging from 60°F / 15°C to 70°F / 20°C.
- Spring and Autumn are generally 50°F / 10°C
- Winter between 40°F / 5°C and 46°F / 8°C. (Snow is a rare occurrence, however showers can occur at any time of the year.)

Sunshine duration is highest in the southeast of the country. Average rainfall varies between about 800 and 2,800mm. With southwesterly winds from the Atlantic dominating, rainfall figures are highest in the northwest, west and southwest of the country, especially over the higher ground.

Money

Republic of Ireland :The Euro is the local currency of the Republic of Ireland. One Euro consists of 100 cent.

Notes are €5, €10, €20, €50, €100, €200 and €500.

Coins are €2, €1, 50c, 20c, 10c, 5c, 2c and 1c.

Banks

Banks in Ireland generally open around 9.30am and close about 4.30pm Monday through Friday and 5pm on Thursday.

ATM (cash) machines are located at most banks and accept most credit and debit card.

Language

Republic of Ireland : English and Irish (Gaelic) are the two official languages of the Republic of Ireland and street and road signs are all bilingual. In Gaeltacht areas Irish is spoken daily; however, everyone speaks English.

