

Exploring Dublin

Discover the local charms of Ireland's capital city

The Liffey Bridge, commonly known as the Ha'penny Bridge, stretches over the River Liffey.

Dublin may be one of Ireland's oldest cities, but it's definitely young at heart. Sure, the Irish capital's 1,000-year history is evident almost everywhere you look — from its Viking remains and medieval castles to its Georgian-era homes and Huguenot cemetery — but its youthful exuberance (half the city's population is under 35) and forward-looking appeal are just as apparent. They can be found in the Temple Bar nightlife area, at the leprechaun museum, on campus at Google's European headquarters and in the free public Wi-Fi that's available throughout the city's streets.

While most of Dublin's 1.8-million residents live in surrounding suburbs, it's the city's 10-square-kilometre core that really shines. Divided into a handful of districts and separated into north and south by the River Liffey, Dublin's city centre is the only place in the world where visitors can step aboard Daniel Day (that's what Dubliners call Luas, their light rail system), where just about everybody has a U2-sighting story and where *craic* can be found around every corner.

Craic, by the way, is an Irish word that means enjoyment and fun — and that's what you can expect to find in downtown Dublin.



Grafton Street.



Guinness Gravity Bar.

See and Do

GRAFTON STREET

Home to restaurants, buskers and that famous statue of Molly Malone (the title character of the city's unofficial folk anthem, "Cockles and Mussels"), Dublin's lively, pedestrian-only street is the heart of the shopping district. Head to Ireland's own Brown Thomas department store, browse the country's rich literary output at Dubray Books and check out Jig, an Irish dance museum and show on Clarendon Street (about a block away). Another nearby must-see for music lovers is Tower Records, one of the country's largest wholly Irish-owned record stores. (brownthomas.com, dubraybooks.ie, jig.ie, towerrecords.ie)

GUINNESS STOREHOUSE

Inhale and take a mouthful of Guinness. The malt hits the tip of the tongue while the beer's other flavours tickle the rest. At the pint glass-shaped Guinness Storehouse, visitors learn how to appreciate this national drink and can also try their hand at the 119.5-second, six-part pouring process. "The black stuff's" history is told through high-tech interactive displays and museum-like exhibits. Try a sample of Guinness Chocolate Mousse, then have a drink at the top-floor Gravity Bar, which offers a 360-degree view of the city. (guinness-storehouse.com)



The Church.



Blarney Castle.

Easy Getaways



DRUIDS GLEN GOLF RESORT

This “Augusta of Europe” golf course is 45 minutes south of Dublin. One might expect to spot mythical creatures among its floral displays, sparkling water and Druids altar. For non-golfers, the adjacent resort offers a spa and activities like surfing. (druidsglenresort.com)

BLARNEY CASTLE

Every year, 200,000 people traverse 100 steps to kiss the Blarney Stone for the gift of eloquence. But the castle, located 2.5 hours south of Dublin in Cork, offers a whole day of sightseeing with wishing steps, eight gardens and arboretums and underground tunnels that were once the castle’s dungeon. (blarneycastle.ie)

Where to Dine

THE CAKE CAFÉ

It may be hidden down an alleyway at the edge of the shopping district, but The Cake Café is worth the trip. Part of Dublin’s burgeoning café culture, the shop’s floral tablecloths and jam-filled cakes make it a great spot for afternoon tea. The open-faced sandwiches — including goat’s cheese on cranberry relish — are divine and pair well with a Prosecco mimosa. (thecakecafe.ie)

THE CHURCH

The former 18th-century St. Mary’s Church of Ireland is now serving hearty food to Dublin’s souls. Located in the northern Jervis shopping district, The Church has three floors, each with its own experience. Try Guinness stew at the main-floor bar, or enjoy it in the traditional beef pie at the upscale restaurant in The Church’s gallery. The basement is delightfully more sinful, with its modern decor and creative cocktails (Jameson Irish Whiskey is used in abundance). (thechurch.ie)

ELY GASTRO BAR

After taking in a play at the nearby Bord Gáis Energy Theatre or a concert at 3Arena in the Docklands, head to the very popular Ely Gastro Bar, where celebrity sightings are common (Beyoncé and Shakira have both been spotted there). Though the place is always crowded, Ely’s servers are friendly and attentive, and they’re happy to dole out advice on which of the bar’s wines or 200 Irish beers and whiskeys complement the kitchen’s organic pork neck or Irish sea cod. (elywinebar.ie)

Travel Tips from a Calgarian

Jarrold Banadyga and Jenny Taylor moved to Dublin in April 2013 after a post-wedding nomadic itch coincided with a job opportunity in Dublin. Banadyga is now the creative director at an ad agency called The Social House, and Taylor works at a scrappy little upstart called Google. They enjoy golfing, cycling, pub-hopping and generally pursuing “the craic,” an Irish term that roughly translates to “enjoyment” and which they aren’t entirely comfortable using yet.

JARROLD BANADYGA’S DUBLIN CAN’T-MISS LIST

“Irish pubs are worth the hype. For something old-school and authentic, hit up The Long Hall, Slattery’s or Grogan’s (ask for a toastie). For full knick-knack overload, head to Johnnie Fox’s.

“Dublin is packed with great music venues, but the best is Whelan’s. Our first show there was an unforgettable set by Shovels & Rope.

“Dublin has a sneaky good barbecue scene. Any Stampede withdrawal is instantly remedied by a rack of ribs at The Bison Bar & BBQ and their saddle seats.

“The Phil Lynott statue is a must-see for Thin Lizzy fans. Or just hang around to overhear American tourists wonder aloud why Jimi Hendrix has a statue in Dublin.

“For a bit of Dublin detox, there’s some Guinness-offsetting scenic hikes at Howth or Dalkey, where Bono lives. If you see him, call him a ‘bleeding tax dodger’ to blend in with the locals.”



Shelbourne Hotel.



Corner Suite at the Marker.



Phil Lynott statue.

Where to Stay

THE MARKER

Just over a year old, The Marker is an ultra-modern, 187-room hotel located in Grand Canal Square, the Docklands, a business district that is quickly becoming one of the trendiest parts of Dublin city. Boasting views of Google’s and Facebook’s European headquarters, the rooms are appropriately equipped with free Internet (individual Wi-Fi for higher speed and security). Heated bathroom floors, a rooftop bar, a spa and an indoor pool just add to the luxury. (themarkerhoteldublin.com)

THE SHELBOURNE DUBLIN

Located on the edge of the Georgian district, this historic property dates back to 1824, and everyone from J.F.K. to Jonathan Rhys Meyers has stayed here. The hotel’s Horseshoe Bar was immortalized in James Joyce’s writing, and it also happens to be where U2 frontman Bono enjoys his drinks. Even the hotel’s meeting space has a claim to fame: the 1922 Irish Constitution was drafted there. The coolest amenity, however, is the genealogy butler who helps guests trace their Irish roots. (marriott.com) @