

INTRODUCING DUBLIN



Crossing distinctive Ha'penny Bridge (p126) would once have cost you said ha'penny.

Definition of a great city: a place that makes virtue out of vice and knows exactly where to find fun. Welcome to Dublin, the greatest city in Europe.

At first glance, it's kind of difficult to see why. Dublin isn't as sexy or as sultry as other European capitals, the architecture is a bit of a jumble and it seems *everyone* has something to complain about. Dubs can be brutally unsentimental about their city, but their warts-and-all attachment is born out of a genuine love of a place that oozes personality, a city whose soul and sociability makes it the most charismatic of capitals.

Sure, the almost mythical economic growth of the last 15 years and the explosion of multiculturalism, which has seen people settle in the city from fields as far flung as Nairobi and Nagoya, have given the city a cosmopolitan strut and swagger it never had before – not to mention a whole new world of distractions and delights to rival those of any other city of comparable size. But Dublin's greatest draw remains Dubliners themselves, both native-born and blown in.

You should visit the excellent museums, amble through the landscaped parks and engage with Dublin's myriad cultural offerings, but make enough time for socialising, the beating heart that makes this city thrive. Garrulous, amiable and witty, Dubliners at their ease are the greatest hosts of all, providing a life-affirming experience that will restore your faith in human nature. How many other places can you say that about?

CITY LIFE

The designer gear hangs neatly in the wardrobe, the golf clubs sit tidily in the boot of the car and Jarek the Polish tiler and his crew are coming to do up the bathroom first thing Monday morning. Next week, let's celebrate the new house in that trendy Thai place the *Irish Times* gave such a great review to – I just hope we can get a table.

This yuppie idyll is just one element of the new Dublin, but the themes are vaguely universal to a city that is just now getting used to the most radical transformation in its thousand-plus year history, where for most of it the majority of Dubliners didn't have a pot to piss in and weren't in the least bit concerned with spray-on tans and Versace bling.

Despite common belief to the contrary, your average Dubliner isn't a smiling optimist but a fatalist who knows the immeasurable value of black humour in getting through the tough times – and in this climate, 'tough' means a crappy health service, venal politicians who just can't help doing it for themselves and a near-permanent gridlock that would try the patience of Job.

Everyone loves the prosperity, but many Dubliners are suspicious of the crass commercialism that accompanies it, and the Celtic cubs are dismissed as a bunch of D4 dickheads. What the hell is D4? Only the most sought-after postal district in town, comprising the southern suburbs of Donnybrook, Sandymount and Ballsbridge. Disdain and envy are often comic bedfellows.

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Feel the merriment on an Irish-music pub crawl (p240) at the Auld Dubliner (p168), Temple Bar.

GETTING STARTED

Dublin is a cinch in virtually every respect but budget, where it's often a pinch. The city is small, easy to get around and offers no greater challenge than struggling to be cultural the morning after the night before. That is, of course, if you don't care about the gridlock or the fact that nightclubs are calling chugging out time when their equivalents in southern climes are just getting going. Otherwise, just get stuck in.

WHEN TO GO

You don't like the weather? Wait 15 minutes. So goes the old refrain about a city where it's virtually impossible to predict the climate other than to make vague generalisations about it being warmer in summer than in winter – which are true, at least most of the time. From June to August, the days are reasonably warm and – most importantly – very long. At the height of summer you won't need to turn on lights until after 10pm. It is also peak tourist season, which means there are far more people pretty much everywhere and prices are at their highest.

Not surprisingly, most of the yearly festivals occur during these times so as to take advantage of the crowds and the more favourable weather. But then there was the 'summer' of 2007, when the thermometer barely rose above 15°C and it rained for 59 days in a row: the wettest since records began.

Spring and autumn are usually good times for a peek, although the city's popularity as a tourist destination can often blur the lines between mid- and high-season tourism. Still, you have a better chance of some peace and quiet and the weather can be surprisingly

better in April and September than in mid-July – again, it's all part of the uncertainty principle.

Winters are dark, wet and cold, with December the wettest of all (an average 76mm of rainfall), but hey, it's Christmas and everyone is high-spirited; plus, you can enjoy indoor pleasures and you won't feel as guilty lounging in the pub. January is the only time the city's not really itself, when it's a little quiet and cranky after the festivities, and the days seem interminably gloomy.

FESTIVALS

Dubliners need to justify their propensity for celebrating stuff – 'it's Wednesday!' just doesn't work for some – so the city's party planners have conveniently laid on an ever-changing menu of festivals and events for everyone to feel better about their hangovers.

January

NEW YEAR'S CELEBRATIONS

Experience the birth of another new year with a cheer among thousands of revellers at Dublin's iconic Christ Church Cathedral (p94).

ADVANCE PLANNING

From Easter to September, queues can be horrendous at popular attractions; arrive early. Most fee-paying sights offer discounts to students, the elderly, children and families. If you're serious about sightseeing, buy the [Dublin Pass](#) (p234) as soon as you set foot in the airport – it'll give you a free ride on the Aircoach.

Two Weeks Before You Go

Advance purchase is a must if you want to take in a hit play at the [Abbey](#) (www.abbeytheatre.ie; see also p184) or the [Gate](#) (www.gate-theatre.ie; see also p186). A couple of weeks ahead should be plenty of time. Ditto if you want to watch a game at [Croke Park](#) (p117), especially for the latter stages of the championship, which runs from April to September.

Three Days Before You Go

The very best and newest of Dublin's restaurants can be pretty tough to get a booking in for the first few months of business, but you shouldn't have any problems a couple of days in advance.

ONLY IN DUBLIN

All-Ireland Finals (☎ 836 3222; www.gaa.ie) The climax of the year for fans of Gaelic games when the season's most successful county teams battle it out for the All-Ireland championships in hurling and football, on the second and fourth Sundays in September, respectively. The capital is swamped with fans from the competing counties, draped in their colours and swept along by their good-natured, family-oriented exuberance.

Bloomsday (☎ 878 8547; www.jamesjoyce.ie) Every 16 June a bunch of weirdos wander around the city dressed in Edwardian gear, talking nonsense in dramatic tones. They're not mad – at least not clinically – they're only Bloomsdayers committed to commemorating James Joyce's epic *Ulysses* through readings, performances and re-created meals, including Leopold Bloom's famous breakfast of 'kidneys with the faint scent of urine'. Yummy.

Christmas Dip at the Forty-Foot Possibly the most hardcore hangover cure known to man, this event takes place at 11am on Christmas Day at a famous swimming spot below the Martello tower – made famous by James Joyce in *Ulysses* – in Sandycove, 9km from the centre of Dublin. A group of the very brave, and certifiably insane, plunge into the icy water and swim 20m to the rocks and back. With heads cleared after their frozen frolics, each heads home for Christmas lunch.

Handel's Messiah (Map p85; ☎ 677 2255; Neal's Music Hall, Fishamble St) *Messiah*, Handel's most highly esteemed composition and one of the most renowned works in English sacred music, was performed for the first time at this site in today's Temple Bar on 13 April 1742, an event commemorated with a special gala-style performance each April.

Liffey Swim (☎ 833 2434) Since 1924, at summer's end (late August/early September), hundreds of swimmers – or lunatics, as they're colloquially known – traditionally dive into the Sniffy Liffey for a swim through 2km of mud and murk in the centre of Dublin, from Rory O'More Bridge to the Custom House. There are separate handicap races for men and women and it's fun to line the bank and watch the competitors trying not to swallow a drop. You can see it depicted in Jack B Yeats' famous *Liffey Swim* painting in the National Gallery (p79).

February

JAMESON DUBLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

☎ 872 1122; www.dubliniff.com

Local flicks, arty international films and advance releases of mainstream movies make up the menu of the city's film festival, which runs over two weeks in late February (see the boxed text, p178).

SIX NATIONS RUGBY

☎ 647 3800; www.irishrugby.ie

Pending the reconstruction of the Lansdowne Road stadium, Ireland will play its home games at Croke Park, in the northern suburb of Drumcondra (see p117). The season runs from February to April.

March

ST PATRICK'S FESTIVAL

☎ 676 3205; www.stpatricksfestival.ie

The mother of all Irish festivals. Hundreds of thousands gather to 'honour' St Patrick over four days around 17 March on city streets and in venues throughout the centre. Events include the three-day Guinness Fleadh music festival in Temple Bar.

May

DUBLIN GAY THEATRE FESTIVAL

www.gaytheatre.ie

A fortnight devoted exclusively to gay theatre – plays by gay writers past and present that have a gay or gay-related theme.

HEINEKEN GREEN ENERGY FESTIVAL

☎ 0818 719 300; www.heinekenmusic.ie

A four-day festival that takes place in different venues around the city, with an open-air concert in the grounds of Dublin Castle as a highlight.

June

BUD RISING

☎ 0818 719 300; www.budweiser.ie

What began as a movable feast of music a few years ago at venues all over the city is now just a series of big gigs at Marlay Park from June to September.

CONVERGENCE FESTIVAL

☎ 674 6415; www.sustainable.ie; 15-19 Essex St

A 10-day green festival on sustainable living, with a diverse programme of

workshops, exhibitions and children's activities in Temple Bar.

DIVERSIONS

☎ 677 2255; www.temple-bar.ie

Free outdoor music, children's and film events occur during weekends from June to September in Temple Bar's Meeting House Sq.

DUBLIN WRITERS FESTIVAL

www.dublinwritersfestival.com

Four-day literature festival attracting Irish and international writers to its readings, performances and talks.

MARDI GRAS

☎ 873 4932; www.dublinpride.org

Dublin's Gay Pride event has turned into a week-long festival of parties, workshops, readings and more parties at gay venues around town, although these are just to warm up for the parade that takes place – and takes over – on the last Saturday of June or the first Saturday of July.

WOMEN'S MINI-MARATHON

☎ 670 9461; www.womensminimarathon.ie

This 10km road race for charity (on the second Sunday in June) is the largest of its kind in the world and attracts around 40,000 runners each year.

July

OXEGEN

☎ 0818 719 300; www.oxegen.ie; Punchestown Racecourse, County Kildare

This fabulous music festival takes place over the July weekend closest to 12 July and manages to pack a few dozen heavy-weight acts into its two-day line-up.

August

DUBLIN HORSE SHOW

Royal Dublin Society (RDS); ☎ 668 0866; www.dublinhorshow.com

The first week of August is when Ireland's horsey set trot down to the capital for the social highlight of the year. Particularly popular is the Aga Khan Cup, an international-class competition packed with often heart-stopping excitement in which eight nations participate.

DUN LAOGHAIRE FESTIVAL OF WORLD CULTURES

☎ 230 1035; www.festivalofworldcultures.com

A colourful multicultural music, art and theatre festival featuring up to 200 different acts is held on the last weekend of August in the southern suburb of Dun Laoghaire.

ELECTRIC PICNIC

☎ 478 9093; www.electricpicnic.ie; Stradbally Castle, County Laois

Our favourite festival of all is in the grounds of Stradbally Castle, County Laois, about 80km southwest of Dublin; this two-day experience in August combines top class acts with organic food and a mind-body-soul area. Let your good vibes flow.

SLANE FESTIVAL

☎ 041-982 4207; www.heinekenmusic.ie

Traditionally the biggest gig of the year, this August festival takes place in the grounds of Slane Castle, County Meath, about 45km northwest of Dublin, and usually features the biggest stars of the musical firmament: REM, Bruce Springsteen, the Stones and U2 have all played here.

September–October

DUBLIN FRINGE FESTIVAL

☎ 1850 374 643; www.fringefest.com

Our favourite theatre showcase precedes the main theatre festival (following) with 700 performers and 100 events – ranging from cutting edge to crap – taking place over three weeks. It's held in The Famous Spiegeltent, which has been erected in different positions in recent years; for more, see the boxed text, p185.

DUBLIN THEATRE FESTIVAL

☎ 677 8439; www.dublintheatrefestival.com

This two-week festival is Europe's largest and showcases the best of Irish and international productions at various locations around town. In tandem with the theatre festival is a children's season at the Ark (p86).

BULMER'S COMEDY FESTIVAL

☎ 679 3323; www.bulmerscomedy.ie

Big laughs over three weeks from an ever-widening choice of comic talents, both known and unknown. It takes place at more than 20 venues throughout the city.

DUBLIN CITY MARATHON

☎ 677 8439; www.dublincitymarathon.ie

If you fancy a 42km (and a bit) running tour through the streets of the city on the last Monday of October, you'll have to register at least three weeks in advance. Otherwise, you can have a lie-in and watch the winner cross the finishing line on O'Connell St at around 10.30am.

DUBLIN ELECTRONIC ARTS FESTIVAL

DEAF; ☎ 872 8933; www.deafireland.com

A must for anyone into the cutting edge of music, DEAF showcases the work of some truly innovative musical – and visual – talents, both home-grown and international. From moog to movies, this is the future, now. Venues vary; check the website for details.

GREEN SYNERGY

☎ 0818 719 300; www.heinekenmusic.ie

A small five-day live music festival centred on the venues on Wexford and Camden Sts – Anseo, Crawdaddy, Tripod and the Village, among others.

SAMHAIN/HALLOWE'EN

Tens of thousands take to the city streets on 31 October for a night-time parade, fireworks, street theatre, drinking and music in this traditional pagan festival celebrating the dead, end of the harvest and Celtic new year.

December

LEOPARDSTOWN RACES

☎ 289 3607; www.leopardstown.com

Blow your dough and your post-Christmas crankiness at this historic and hugely popular racing festival at one of Europe's

loveliest courses. Races run from 26 to 30 December.

FUNDERLAND

Royal Dublin Society (RDS); ☎ 668 0866; www.rds.ie
Dublin's traditional funfair (from 26 December to 9 January) features all kinds of stomach-turning rides and arcade games, as well as hundreds of thousands of light bulbs and millions of reasons why the kids needn't be cooped up indoors.

COSTS & MONEY

Wondering if Dublin is expensive is a bit like asking if Elizabeth Taylor owns a wedding dress. Dublin's pricey tag is obvious, but if you think it's bad for you, imagine what it's like for those who live here. According to Mercer (the folks who do those cost-of-living indices), Dublin ranks 16th in the list of the world's most expensive cities and comes eighth on the European list after London, Paris, Milan, Oslo, Copenhagen and every big town in Switzerland. You won't find nearly as many rip-off merchants as you do in some of the major tourist destinations of continental Europe (well, apart from in the Temple Bar area and taxi drivers from the airport) but Dublin is very expensive these days and you don't generally get value for money. Accommodation, meals, taxis, entertainment and shopping will all make your wallet sag and your purse pout.

Let's start with the big expense: accommodation. Dublin's got some pretty pricey pillows, and you won't get much change out of €200 for the better bedrooms in the city centre; a midrange room will cost upwards of €100 in the low season, while those on a tight budget will have to settle for a hostel (where dorm beds cost at least €13) or those fleapits around

NO SMOKE WITHOUT IRE

It was unenforceable. The irascible, irrepressible Irish just wouldn't be coddled by a nanny state. It would be a disaster; the police would be pulled this way and that, trying to enforce a law that went against the independent Irish spirit of iconoclasm and rebellion. It would kill tourism and put publicans out of business. Basically, it was the end of the world.

Such was the frenzy of doubt that greeted the announcement that the government was banning smoking in the workplace – which meant pretty much everywhere indoors except for one's own home. When it eventually came into effect in March 2004 after a couple of months' delay, the whole country took a deep breath... and that was it. Incredibly, Ireland went smoke-free and the withdrawal was as gentle as a spring breeze. It's true, some pubs have seen a slowdown in trade, but for the most part the only difference now is the gaggle of smokers clustered outside pubs and the different air within them, an air now scented with the dubious fragrance of beer farts.

HOW MUCH?

Admission to a big-name club on a Friday €20
 CD €18.99
 City-centre bus ticket up to €1.80
 Cup of coffee €2.80
 Petrol per litre €1.36
 Pint of Guinness Temple Bar/city/suburbs
 €4.80/€4.10/€3.50
 The Irish Times €1.70
 Theatre ticket €13-25
 Three-course meal with wine/beer from €40
 Ticket to a Gaelic match €25-45

the northern end of Gardiner St. If you're willing to endure a little bit of taxi trauma or the tolerance test of public transport, hotels on the north side of the city or in the salubrious suburbs south of the Grand Canal will give you far more bang for your buck.

Then there's food, that other great bugbear of the value-conscious Dubliner: memorable meals don't even begin to register for less than €16 a main dish, while if you're looking to spend no more than €10 on lunch, you'd better like sandwiches. Lunch and early bird specials – those three-course things that inevitably only ever include the menu's less inviting choices – are ubiquitous and a good way to save a few euro.

So, between a place to crash and daily sustenance, you should factor in anything between €50 (at the truly budget end of the scale) and, well, the sky's limit (ok, let's say a minimum of €250) daily. Anything less than that and you're performing miracles; anything more and we want *you* to take *us* on holiday.

But Dublin is about a hell of a lot more than sleeping and eating – let's not forget the all-important nights out. The price of a pint hovers around the €4.70 mark, so you can calculate how drunk you can actually afford to get from there. And if you're really popular, there's the round system to contend with – whereby you take turns buying a round of drinks for the group. But that roughly works out even in the end, unless of course you're only in for one or two and your 10 new friends are all looking thirsty.

Phew. And that's the bad news. The good news is that you can also have a great time in Dublin without your plastic going into meltdown. Parks are all free, as are the

National Gallery (p79), National Museum (p80), Museum of Natural History (p81), Dublin City Gallery – The Hugh Lane (p101) and pretty much all of the city's other gallery spaces – not to mention our favourite collection of all: the Chester Beatty Library (p70). Cinemas all have an early-bird price for shows up to 2pm of about €5, while there's absolutely no charge for strolling along the beach in Killiney (p218), climbing Howth Head (p214) or enjoying the musical entertainment along Grafton St!

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.balconytv.com Interviews and music from a balcony in central Dublin.

www.beaut.ie A superb blog ostensibly about beauty tips but really a great commentary on the Irish and their wants.

www.bloggerah.com Brilliantly funny blog on what's really going on in Ireland.

www.dublincity.ie Dublin Corporation's own website has a great link to live traffic cams.

www.ireland.ie Official website of Discover Ireland, the public face of the Irish Tourist Board.

www.nixers.ie A good place to check if you're looking for casual work over summer.

www.overheardindublin.com Proof that the general public are better than any scriptwriter.

www.philippankov.com Great black-and-white photos of the city by a great photographer.

www.thedubliner.com Gossip, features and other Dublin-related titbits.

www.visitdublin.com Official website of Dublin Tourism.

SUSTAINABLE DUBLIN

Dublin ain't that green, but it's trying. It's been tough trying to get a city that just got rich a wet week ago *not* to buy that new car

ECOCABS

In 2007 a new fleet of ecocabs – basically modern-looking rickshaws – were introduced, offering a clean and green solution to public transport in the city centre. **Ecocabs** (Map pp66–7; www.ecocabs.ie) are available for up to two passengers each between 10am and 8pm daily, and are free of charge for short distances within the city centre – a gratuity for your hard-peddalling driver is always appreciated. Pick one up at the top of Grafton St, by the St Stephen's Green Shopping Centre.

or go on three foreign holidays a year, especially in a city that for generations got around in a clapped-out Ford its uncle used to own and holidayed down the road in County Wexford.

The saving grace for Dublin's small-but-growing band of eco-responsible agitators has been the queue, which has done more than any Al Gore movie to remind Dubliners that life needs to get a little more sustainable. Endless traffic jams, snaking queues at overburdened airports and just general waiting in line to get stuff drives most Dubliners crazy, so when they're informed that becoming eco-responsible will go some way towards restoring a sense of sanity, they will react positively.

Which is how they reacted when the government passed a total ban on smoking in the workplace (see the boxed text, p19) and introduced a €0.15 levy on plastic bags – which was increased to €0.22 in 2007. Within a few months of its introduction it had reduced the use of plastic bags by 90%. We urge you to use as few of them as possible; most shops sell cloth bags that can be stashed away when not in use. Also in 2007, Environment Minister John Gormley (of the Green Party) announced that on-the-spot fines for littering would be raised to €150, although we suspect he's gotten tough on litterbugs because in order to get into the coalition in the first place the Greens had to forego most of their green-friendly platform.

The best resource in town is **Cultivate** (Map p85; ☎ 674 5773; www.cultivate.ie; 15-19 West Essex St) in Temple Bar, Ireland's only sustainability-focused living and learning centre. It has an eco-shop and lots of information stands, and hosts workshops and classes on everything from composting to green building.

Fly Less

There are numerous boat services to Dublin from Britain and often some return fares don't cost that much more than one-way tickets, not

GREEN RESOURCES

Check out the following online resources for in-depth info on how to travel in Dublin without being an environmental bully or leaving too deep a carbon footprint:

- www.cultivate.ie Sustainable Living Centre in Dublin's Temple Bar.
- www.sustourism.ie All-Ireland project committed to building a sustainable tourist infrastructure.
- www.enfo.ie Ireland's public information service on environmental matters, including sustainable development.
- www.friendsoftheishenenvironment.net A network of independent environmentalists that has logged up to 10,000 environment-related stories.

to mention the plethora of special offers designed to challenge the cheap flight hegemony. Boats arrive in Dublin Port or Dun Laoghaire; for details, see p229.

Stay Longer

An extended visit – as opposed to the rush-in, rush-out limitations of city break travel – is preferable because it allows for 'slow travel', the kind of exploratory travel that allows you to take your time and get to know a place without needing to rush. And it's the only way to get to know Dubliners properly!

Offsetting

Paying someone else to offset your greenhouse gas emissions isn't the perfect solution to the major issue of global warming, but it is a step in the right direction. The most popular offsetting programme involves tree-planting, but there are other schemes such as methane collection and combustion. **Carbon Neutral Ireland** (www.carbonneutralireland.ie) can help you calculate your emissions and work out how to offset them.

THE AUTHOR

Fionn Davenport



Half-Italian and a lifelong supporter of Liverpool Football Club, Fionn is the ideal Dubliner, a native son in love with the city of his birth but with one eye forever on somewhere else. He's left the city many times – usually

looking for warmer weather or a job – but always he returns, because too much sun is bad for you and all jobs get boring. But the reason he loves Dublin so much is that it treats gallows humour as high art: why look for a straight answer when a funny one is far more satisfying. Lonely Planet has kept him busy for the last 12 years or so, but in recent times Fionn has branched out, hosting his own radio show on Newstalk 106–108 (you can listen to *Culture Shock* online at www.newstalk.ie) and making the occasional foray into television.

FIONN'S TOP DUBLIN DAY

My best Dublin day begins with a copy of the *Irish Times* and a caffeine Big Gulp, followed by a stroll through St Stephen's Green (p71). It's one of those warm, sunny autumn days Dublin regularly gets as recompense for a wet summer, so everyone is in a good mood and I don't have to work – the perfect recipe for idleness. I nurture my retail chi around Grafton St (p130) and assuage my material guilt

with a silent visit to my favourite museum of all, the Chester Beatty Library (p70), home to some of the most beautiful objets d'art and books I've ever seen. A freshly made sandwich in Fallon & Byrne (p146) is all I need for lunch, after which I meet a friend visiting from out of town and I show off my knowledge of the lesser-known attractions of the city by taking her to Marsh's Library (p93) and the magnificent Memorial Gardens (p97) down by Islandbridge. A quick skip across the Liffey and we're on the way to the Strawberry Beds (p115) and a drink at the Wren's Nest before heading back across the city towards the south wall. I time our walk out to the lighthouse with the setting of the sun – there's surely no more romantic spot in Dublin (that's right: my friend is very friendly!). We follow dinner in Town Bar & Grill (p145) with a show: perhaps a gig at Vicar Street (p183) or a play at the Gate (p186), followed by late drinks at the Long Hall (p165) on South Great George's St or, if we're on the north side, at the small but splendid Sackville Lounge (p172). And then it's off home, and for my perfect day, it's a room in the main house of the Merrion Hotel (p201)!

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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