



Ireland's Hidden Gems

An Insider's guide to the
hidden gems of Ireland

-

to make your visit to Ireland
complete.

By Susan Byron



Thank you for signing up for my **special insiders travel guide to Ireland.**

This is an abbreviated form of the website www.irelands-hidden-gems.com and your shortcut to a fabulous holiday here in Ireland.

Here is a carefully selected **Top 10 listing** of the best there is to see and do in Ireland.

Everything is listed conveniently under the various categories of *landscape, scenery, visitor attractions, houses, castles, parks, gardens, museums, art galleries, culture, traditions, food and drink, places to stay, travel tips* - plus a whole lot more.

This wonderful e-book goes a step further in that I have skimmed off the very top of these listings to bring you the cream of the crop.

My all time **personal favourites** in each category are listed. I regularly revisit these places and if I change my mind about any of them or come across something I think you would like better I will update you in the next **newsletter.**

Like the kid on the cover, I hope you will enjoy it and that it will provide you with enough ideas to have a great time here in Ireland and guarantee you an **authentic Irish experience.**

www.irelands-hidden-gems.com



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1 Things to do

It is hard to beat **Bunratty Castle & Folk Park** just outside Limerick. This is where you can 'do Ireland in a day' if you have to? This is the real deal not a Disney style mock up! Bunratty castle is a genuine 15th century medieval fortress situated where you can enjoy a medieval style banquet each night during the summer or simply wander around the keep and ramparts during the day as part of the folk park complex.

The folk park itself will keep you occupied all day as you visit the various cottages and homesteads which were either transported here faithfully, stone by stone or rebuilt in the vernacular materials of the day which included local stone, and river reeds for thatching.

You can see fruit scones being baked, sit in on a school lesson or enjoy the 'craic' in the pub. It was said 'that a yard of a counter was as good as a farm of land' in the old days. Most grocery shops included a bar, and some still do. Do not miss sampling an ice cream in the HB house, but beware of the deer in the park opposite they have developed a fondness for ice cream too and will pester you for a lick of yours!

<http://www.irelands-hidden-gems.com/bunratty-castle.html>



2 Landscapes

Close by in County Clare, the **Cliffs of Moher**. Their breath-taking beauty is well worth a visit. Even the drive or bus ride out there will take you through the most dramatic and beautiful countryside overlooking the western seaboard. A remnant of the last ice age, they have become Irelands premier visitor attraction with almost a million visitors annually. They are a kind of last frontier sat high on the western most tip of Europe. The next landfall, or as they say here, the next parish, being all the way across the Atlantic Ocean in Boston or New York.

A new state of the art visitor centre 'the Atlantic edge experience' not only explains the geological background, flora and fauna using interactive media, but also local history, music and folklore.

It is an excellent addition, in that it keeps children of all ages informed, amused and entertained, in what could otherwise be a disappointing experience as often the cliffs are shrouded in mists, fog and rain or as a recent visitor described it 'flying weather'.

The animated birds eye view of the cliffs is very funny....nearby Doolin is great for traditional music, you can also take a cruise along the bottom of the cliffs from there. Fanore has a golden beach and Liscannor plenty of good places to east fresh seafood.

<http://www.irelands-hidden-gems.com/cliffs-of-moher.html>



3 History & Castles

Ireland has millions of castles, ringforts and towers scattered about the countryside, most of them deserted which you can scramble over for free, but be careful and if you have to cross fields to get to them, close gates behind you. The more famous and better-preserved examples are maintained by the OPW and open to the public for a reasonable entrance fee.

The best of these in my opinion is **Trim Castle** in County Meath. This a really cool castle, it has everything you need to make believe you are a real live dashing knight, fierce warlord, hairy tartan-clad chieftain, or comely maidenwhatever?

Exactly the stuff of fantasy, which made it the perfect setting for the movie 'Braveheart' although they did have to make a few alterations..... But in fairness they had a good solid castle to start with, actually the largest Anglo Norman castle in Ireland, started in 1172 by Hugh de Lacy it took 30 years to build.

Now under the auspices of the OPW who lead conducted tours of the castles keep and battlements, which are about 80ft off the ground, there are plenty of scary gangways. For the vertically challenged take a walk around the perimeter walls, check out the barbican gate or picnic in the grounds? Kids of all ages will absolutely love it.....

<http://www.irelands-hidden-gems.com/trim-castle.html>



4 Culture & Traditions

The word Guinness is synonymous with Ireland, this year celebrating 250 years in existence with a universal pint being lifted on the 23rd September to honour the reverend Arthur.

You can indulge your curiosity about the fabled 'black stuff' at the Guinness Brewery in Dublin.

Cobbled streets dissected by tram tracks lead up to the **Guinness Storehouse** in one of the oldest parts of Dublin. A heady mix of yeast and hops is in the air. By contrast you enter a high-tech exhibition space, the centrepiece of which is a giant atrium in the shape of a pint glass. Spread over seven floors there is plenty to see and do. The ground floor displays the raw ingredients barley, hops, yeast and water, spectacularly as in an indoor sheet waterfall.

Follow the winding staircases, throughout the process to the tasting bar, which as you can imagine is very popular.

After that just about anything connected with the Guinness name throughout the world has been included in this visitor experience. You can learn how to pull your own pint, also popular or relax in the restaurant, the Guinness stew is highly recommended.

For a free pint, head up to the Gravity bar on the top floor for the best 360 views of Dublin, or drop down a floor to the Source if it is too crowded.

<http://www.irelands-hidden-gems.com/guinness-storehouse.html>



5 Sacred Places

Ireland is blessed with a myriad of sacred places from humble roadside holywells, to ancient burial mounds, tiny stone island cloisters, monasteries and cathedrals, spanning a long history of worship from pagan / celtic times through to Christianity.

The most impressive has to be **Newgrange** which occupies a unique place in the landscape and imagination of not only Irish people but also others who travel from all over the world to visit this ancient monument.

Pre dating the pyramids this megalithic structure is precisely aligned to the winter solstice on the 21st of December.

The rising sun gradually illuminates the carved standing stones of the passage eventually reaching the innermost chamber of Newgrange. I was lucky enough to witness this once. Time seemed to stand still, it was like seeing and breathing liquid gold, not something you would ever forget and a great privilege.

Nowadays to be present on the solstice, you have to apply to the national lottery to be in with a chance. Daily public access to the monument is through the excellent Bru na Boinne exhibition centre on the far side of the river, there is a simulated solstice light experience in the tomb.

It also has a good restaurant, great baked potatoes, shop and facilities.

<http://www.irelands-hidden-gems.com/newgrange.html>



6 Museums & Galleries

In my opinion the **Hunt museum** is the best in Ireland because it only exhibits a small but very well chosen selection of the finest national and international treasures and artefacts. Larger museums tend to overload the ordinary mind, never mind the casual foreign visitor just passing through.

You will not suffer from fatigue or culture overload in the Hunt Museum. Indeed you will probably see some delightful things you will not have seen anywhere else in the world, from half finished sketches by Renoir to exquisite Ming dynasty tableware.

My favourite is a small clay falcon brought back from Egypt by **John & Gertrude Hunt** who were a well-heeled and well-travelled couple. They collected these 'brightly coloured gems' from all over Ireland and Europe, having a particular interest in medieval religious art.

They then kindly donated their collection to the people of Ireland on condition that the state provided a building to house it in.

To cut a long story short this is now the former customs house on the banks of the Shannon. It is well sign posted with plenty of car parking nearby and a very good restaurant on the ground floor overlooking the river.

They also have regular excellently curated art exhibitions and offer 2 admissions for the price of 1 vouchers on their website.

<http://www.irelands-hidden-gems.com/hunt-museum.html>



7 Parks & Gardens

You really will be spoiled for choice as there will most likely be a national park, usually many thousands of acres and fairly wild and rugged like Glenveagh in Donegal or a smaller more typically managed public park like the Botanic Gardens in Dublin, on your doorstep wherever you land up in Ireland. Most are free and managed by the OPW or local County Council, have good facilities, small cafes or craft shops, children's playgrounds and or nature trail activities.

Ardgillan in north Dublin is particularly lovely with easy meandering paths, lovely gardens, and a teashop in the castle, great playground and sea view over Skerries and the Rockabill lighthouse.

St Stephens Green in the centre of Dublin at the bottom of **Grafton St.** is a firm lunchtime favourite with Dubliners who grew up feeding the ducks there, a great place to people watch, or just relax for a while in a green oasis.

Coole Park, near Galway, former home of Lady Gregory, founder of the Abbey theatre and patron of the arts is typical of old Irish country house estates with woodland walks and walled gardens that are now open to the public and make for very interesting and pleasant days out with their historic connections.

There is a famous autograph tree here with the signatures of many famous Irish artists, poets and playwrights carved into the trunk still to be seen.

<http://www.irelands-hidden-gems.com/coole-park.html>



8 Where to stay

Accommodation in Ireland depends like any other destination on the kind of holiday you want?

City based, touring, remote and rural, cosy country hotels, romantic castles or luxury spas?

And of course on the amount you are willing to spend?

Whatever the answers to the above two questions, one thing is for sure you will be spoiled for choice here in Ireland.

From self-catering lighthouses, to family run bed and breakfasts, stylish boutique hotels with spas, small country hotels and fairytale castles and all in stunning or convenient locations.

The 'up' side of the recession is that there are some great deals to be had in Ireland right now, check out their websites and phone them up?

My personal favourite is **Lough Inagh Lodge** in County Mayo, it is exactly what you would expect to find on a holiday in Ireland. It ticks all the boxes in terms of location as an ideal base for touring Connemara, one of the most beautiful areas in Ireland.

Waking up to stunning views in a comfy four poster beds you will not want to leave, spacious Victorian style bathrooms, afternoon tea beside cosy log fires, magnificent food and friendly staff.

Check out their website www.loughinaghlodgehotel.ie for 3 nights for the price of 2 deals.



9 Food & Drink

Irish stew is a traditional dish in Ireland and is nearly always included on lunchtime menus.

Heart-warming comfort food, its available most places for about €10. Traditionally made from lamb pieces stewed slowly with carrots, onions, celery and potatoes with a handful of barley thrown in for good measure.

It is quite sweet and lighter then Guinness Stew, which is made from beef pieces and vegetables stewed in Guinness but without the barley also widely available for about the same price.

Another favourite dinner is **Corned Beef or Bacon and Cabbage**, the creamy buttery mashed potatoes that come with it goes without saying.

Corned beef is more of a Dublin dish, which is beef pickled in salt and boiled slowly having the same consistency, colour and texture of ham but much more delicious.

Bacon is much more common down the country and can be quite salty so be sure to wash it down with plenty of water or a pint of Guinness.

A good tip if you are on a budget is to eat at lunch time, country people traditionally like to eat 'the dinner' in the middle of the day so lunchtime menus are quite varied and filling and great value at around €10.

Assuming you haven't had 'the full Irish' breakfast in which case you wont be able to eat at lunchtime for further details of this Irish staple check out the website.

Foodies should check out food writers Georgina Campbells restaurant recommendations on http://www.ireland-guide.com/places_to_eat.html



10 Travel Tips

Ireland is a very easy country to get around, English speaking throughout, apart from a few Gaeltacht areas where Irish is spoken, the currency used is euro and local time is GMT. Public transport is limited, there are good mainline train and bus links, but after that you really need a car or bike to explore deeper into the countryside, though there are plenty of good organised coach tours from the main cities.

Keep an eye out for notices of events happening locally, as these are often spontaneous, free and great fun, like traditional music sessions in pubs. Weather wise come prepared, you could get all four seasons thrown at you in a day. And even if it is lashing out of the heavens you can always duck into a friendly pub with an open fire and have yourself an Irish Coffee or hot whiskey.

Ireland has a reputation of warm hospitality and we want you to enjoy the very best food, drink and craic? What is that? craic is fun, nothing sinister and we are full of it ! Remember if in doubt just ask, we Irish love to talk and you will find most people extremely helpful or check out <http://www.discoverireland.com/int/>. Finally- don't trust the signposts!

Cead mile failte, a thousand welcomes, Susan Byron

For further information on all of the above feel free to browse my website www.irelands-hidden-gems.com for regular updates & free newsletters.