

Setting the Scene

Welcome to Cork – the second city and biggest county in Ireland. This chapter gives a brief introduction to Cork – its history, culture, customs and most important – its weather!

Ireland is a small island in the extreme northwest of Europe – just 486km long and 275 km wide. The island of Ireland is made up of four provinces, Ulster, Connaught, Leinster and Munster, which are divided into thirty-two counties. 26 counties form the Republic of Ireland. The remaining six counties in Ulster make up the territory of Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain.

The population of the Republic of Ireland is quite small. In 2002 the total population was 3.9 million, with over 1 million people living in Dublin. Cork City is the second biggest city in the Republic, with a population of 123,000 (a further 325,000 people live in Cork County).



A Short History of Ireland

What we know today as the island of Ireland was connected to Britain by land during the last Ice Age. As the ice melted and sea levels rose, this land connection gradually disappeared and by 6000 BC Ireland was separated from Britain. Since that time, Ireland has been shaped by the arrival of several distinct groups, such as the Celts, Vikings and Anglo Normans. The timeline overleaf gives a basic overview of some of the key stages in Ireland's history.

2000 on	Economic growth heralds era of net immigration.
1998	Good Friday Agreement puts Stormont Assembly in place - Northern Ireland is run by its locally elected members.
1973	Ireland joins the European Economic Community (now the EU).
1937	New Irish constitution declares Ireland an independent state known as Éire.
1921	War of Independence is followed by the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which provides for separate parliaments for the North of Ireland and the remaining 26 counties. Divisions over this partition of Ireland lead to a Civil War in 1922/3.
Late 19th C	Pressure grows within Ireland for Home Rule (an Irish Parliament) and land reform.
1845-49	Potato crops fail and cause famine. 1.4 million die of starvation and 1.4 million leave for the USA and elsewhere – this tradition of emigration continued to the recent past.
1801	Irish Parliament abolished as Ireland becomes part of the United Kingdom.
18th C	Industrial Revolution flourishes in Belfast, strengthening economic ties with Britain.
17th C	Much land was confiscated from the native Irish and given to new settlers. “Penal Laws” try to further suppress Catholicism.
16th C	Henry VIII and Elizabeth I strengthen English control over Ireland and seek to repress Catholicism.
15th C	English influence gradually reduced to small area around Dublin, known as “The Pale”
13-14th C	English settlers colonise parts of Ireland – development of legal system and parliament based along English models.
1169	Start of the Anglo-Norman invasions – by 1250 75% of Ireland was under Anglo-Norman control.
9 & 10th C	Vikings arrive from Scandinavia.
432 AD	St Patrick comes to Ireland and is popularly viewed as having introduced Christianity.
500 BC	Arrival of Celts from Central Europe – their language is linked to the Irish spoken today.
3000BC	Late Stone Age (Neolithic) farming people reach Ireland – their stone burial sites can still be seen throughout the country.
6000BC	Middle Stone Age (Mesolithic) people are Ireland’s first inhabitants.

History Of Cork

The name Cork is derived from the Irish word “corcaigh” meaning “marshy place”, referring to the marshes on which much of the city developed. Its origins can be traced back to the early 7th century when, according to legend, Saint Finbarr founded a monastery – probably on the site of what is now St Fin Barre’s Cathedral. From this initial small settlement Cork developed into a town following the Viking invasions which started in the 9th century.

The Vikings gradually integrated with the native Celts, and Cork’s development continued to be shaped by external influences. The next major influence was the Anglo-Normans who captured Cork in 1177. Under them it was granted its first royal charter in 1185, giving it city status. The 800th anniversary of this charter was celebrated in Cork in 1985.

During the 12th century Cork continued to grow as a trading port. Most of the medieval walled city stood on an island formed by branches of the River Lee and was entered via the North and South Gates. The Gaelic resurgence, which began in the late 14th century, saw much of the countryside revert to the Gaelic Irish. However, Cork and other towns remained loyal to the English. Around this time Cork went into an economic decline, which continued until the late 17th century.

Cork has a strong maritime history and its deep natural harbour means it has always been a centre for trade – from the Viking longships to today’s passenger ferries and cargo ships. In the 18th century Cork regained much of its prestige as a trading centre because of its harbour, with trade in corn, butter, wool and beef particularly prominent. The city expanded as marshes were reclaimed.

The struggle for independence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries meant there were turbulent times throughout the country. In Cork this peaked in 1920, when the city’s Lord Mayor Tomás MacCurtain was murdered by British Crown forces and his successor Lord Mayor Terence MacSwiney died on hunger strike in a London prison. By the end of 1920 much of Cork, including the City Hall and what is now St Patrick St, was destroyed by fire by British forces.

As the second city of the Republic of Ireland, Cork continued to develop throughout the 20th century. The decline of traditional industries, such as shipbuilding and car manufacturing, has been followed by the development of strong pharmaceutical, engineering and IT industries.

Further information about the history of Cork City can be found in www.corkcity.ie



Culture

Irish culture is rich in its diversity and reflects the influence of the Celts, Vikings, Norman and others, who have come to Ireland over the centuries. The Irish language developed from one of the Celtic dialects during the Bronze Age in Ireland and Britain. The Irish language is still the main spoken language in parts of Ireland (known as the “Gaeltacht”) and is visible on road signs and heard on television and radio.

Traditional sports in Ireland include hurling and Gaelic football. Both games are played throughout the country and county teams compete fiercely in All Ireland championships each year. Cork has a strong track record in both All Ireland hurling and football championships and pride in the Cork teams’ achievements unites all its people.

Irish traditional music and folk music are part of a musical tradition that stretches back over many generations. The traditional instruments are the Harp, Uilleann Pipes, Bodhrán, Flute and Fiddle. The Harp became the symbol of Ireland. Nowadays Irish traditional music culture is closely associated with pubs, where music is often performed. Traditional Irish dance is still popular, particularly amongst children and has become famous

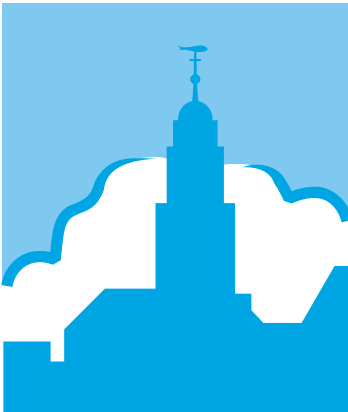
worldwide through the touring show “Riverdance”. Irish dancing sessions, known as “ceilí”, provide opportunities for everyone to enjoy Irish dancing. Throughout 2005 Cork will celebrate its designation as European Capital of Culture with an extensive programme of events (www.cork2005.ie)

Everyday Customs

As a newcomer to Cork (and Ireland) you may find that some of the customs and unspoken rules of behaviour are quite different to those you are used to. This can lead to misunderstandings. Some useful points to remember are listed below.

- Irish people are generally very polite and often use phrases such as “please”, “thank you”, “if you wouldn’t mind”, “sorry”, etc.
- Irish people often don’t like to say “No” directly. In general they will be polite and friendly and soften negativity by saying things like “I am afraid not”, “Unfortunately”, “I am sorry” or just “Sorry”.
- Irish people usually shake hands when greeting one another. When speaking with someone it is usual and polite to look him/her in the eye. Averting the eyes when talking may be interpreted as being uninterested.

- When waiting for a service, e.g. in a bank, post office, shop etc, it is usual to go to the back of the queue of people who are already waiting. This queue is usually clearly visible. In some cases, such as waiting for a bus, there may not be an ordered queue. Yet even here people usually take note of who is there before them and let them board first.
- Most Irish people send cards to friends and family to celebrate occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas Day, marriages, new babies etc.



Understanding the Cork people

You will notice that Irish people have accents. There's a huge variety of accents - depending on where the person comes from. The Cork accent can be hard to understand, until you get used to it, as people tend to speak very quickly. Ask them politely to speak more slowly, they won't mind. In Cork the people also use some local dialect which can make them more difficult to understand. Some commonly used words and phrases include:

“Boy” often added at the end of sentences eg “good on you boy” as a general form of address.

“C'mere” (or “c'mere to me”)

Literally means “come here” but it is really just an opening expression used to get someone's attention, like “listen” or even just “hey”.

“Cop on” means “common sense” – can be used as a noun or a verb, “cop yourself on” – have some common sense.

“Craic” Pronounced “crack” this means fun, enjoyment and laughter – often refers to a good night out.

“Grand” Literally means “impressive” and is also used for “thousand”. In Cork it means, “fine, good, OK”. For

instance if you ask how someone is, s/he is likely to reply, “grand”.

“I will, yeah!” Literally “ok, I will” but often said in a sarcastic way and actually means, “No, I will not!”

“It is sorted” Literally means “It is done” but it can also mean, “it is in progress or it will be done”.

“Lad(s)” Any male, though usually a friend. When pluralised, it can describe a group of males and females.

“Like” Usually used to compare something, but in Cork it can be placed anywhere in the sentence - mostly at the end (e.g. do you know like?). In this context “like” does not really have a meaning.

“Sorry” Literally an apology, but in most cases means “Excuse me” and also takes the place of “No” where it is too rude to say directly.

“Your man” Literally “the man belonging to you” but in Cork this is used to refer to a specific person.

Weather

The weather is a favourite discussion topic amongst Irish people. Strangers passing in the street often say “lovely day” or, more often, comment on the rain. Temperatures are fairly similar over the whole country. The coldest months are January and February with average temperatures of between 4°C and 7°C, and July and August are the warmest. Extremes of temperature, below -3°C or above 26°C, are very rare. While snow is very rare, rain can be expected all year round. The wettest months are usually December and January.

Since Ireland is situated in the northwest of Europe, the days are longer in summer and shorter in winter. The evenings are bright up to 10 pm in summer, while in winter it can be dark by 5 pm. In order to avoid very dark days the clocks are put back one hour in Autumn (usually the last Sunday in October) and go forward one hour on the last Sunday in March.

