

Diverse Ireland

Ireland's tranquility and countryside are just part of its charm. Its cities are vibrant and dynamic, travelling around the country is easy and the Irish are renowned as a friendly nation. AMY BAKER reports.

Ireland is a country that can offer extreme rural experiences or a taste of modern city living; an essentially rural country that has seen its cities become progressive, multicultural and vibrant, due in part to the boom in the Irish economy since the 1990s. The Ireland that greets international students today is somewhat different to the country that they would have discovered 15 years ago, although one central aspect to Ireland remains unchanged: its people.

As Jack Healy, General Manager of World High Schools – which places students in Irish high schools throughout the country – points out, “The welcome that students receive from the Irish people is legendary.” He adds, “The national greeting in Irish is after all *Céad Mile Fáilte*, which means a hundred thousand welcomes.”

Wherever students choose to study, they will be sure to meet Irish people and many students will choose to stay with an Irish host family, which agents underline as a selling point for the country due to their good reputation. Healy says, “The majority of our students make very strong and lasting friendships with other students, teachers and host families. Over the years, we have seen

our students return again and again either for further study or to renew friendships they made during their first visit.”

The first choice for many students is, of course, Dublin, Ireland's capital city and its largest urban centre by far. Despite this status, Jonathan Quinn of Centre of English Studies points out that the city centre is relatively small and it is possible to walk to all the city's art galleries and museums. “This is the essence of Dublin,” says Quinn. “It may be a big city for Ireland but it is small in comparison to many other European cities and it is still a friendly, safe place to visit.”

The Georgian architecture, famous Trinity College and the trendy shopping and eating district of Temple Bar are among the attractions for students. Quinn says, “At weekends, students visit the open air markets, art exhibitions and visit the Merrion and Mountjoy Squares, which are wonderful examples of architecture of

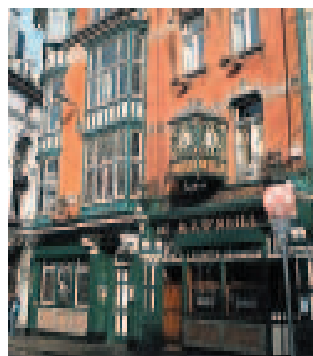
another era. Most of all, they enjoy the buskers and performers on Grafton Street on a Saturday afternoon.”

Like Madrid in Spain, another overriding attraction of Dublin is its reputation for an exciting nightlife. The city has a youthful population and the Irish are renowned for being up for a good *craic* (party/good time). Quinn says, “Students have a choice of 200-year-old pubs, Irish music nights, concerts and many live music acts.” Dublin's club scene is also gaining in reputation and there are many late-night options for students.

If students are looking for a slightly more low-key urban experience, but still want to experience city life, then Cork can

be a good option. To the first-time visitor, Cork often has a small town feel, and this is one of the appealing aspects of the city. Nevertheless, there is a lot going on in Cork, and Joëlle Coade of Cork Language Centre International points out that Cork will be the 2005 European Capital of Culture.

Aside from all the trappings of Irish city life, such as “traditional Irish pubs, modern European



O'Neills Pub, Dublin
Existing as a licensed premises for over 300 years, O'Neills pub in Suffolk Street stands on the meeting place of the old Norse Thingmoot – or parliament. The pub now has five separate bars

PHOTOGRAPH: CENTRE OF ENGLISH STUDIES

Ireland's largely unspoilt coastline adds to its rugged and romantic charms (left)

nightclubs, cosy theatres and multiplex cinemas”, Cork can also offer easy access to the beautiful Irish countryside. Coade says, “Cork is an ideal location for sports enthusiasts whether they are interested in football, golf, cycling, tennis, sailing, fishing, windsurfing, canoeing or other sports.”

The city is also a gateway to southern Ireland and its wonderful scenery. Among the full-day excursions offered by Cork Language Centre International is a trip to the Ring of Kerry, “perhaps the most travelled touring drive in all of Ireland with many areas of scenic beauty”, says Coade. Other trips take in Kinsale, an old seaport, the 17th-century Charles Fort and Timoleague Abbey, built by the sea for Franciscan monks in 1240 AD. Coade adds, “Many of our students choose to hire cars at the weekend. The places they usually visit are Waterford,



Aran Islands

The three Aran islands of Inishmór, Inishmaan and Inisheer are home to the most ancient Christian and pre-Christian remains in Ireland. Stone forts and traditional stone walls feature in the landscape

Kilkenny, West Cork, Kerry, Limerick and Galway. Students also take the train to Dublin to spend weekends there.”

Limerick is Ireland’s third city, after Dublin and Cork, and another city that is popular with international students. One education institution in the city is the University of Limerick, where international students can take a range of language courses, including general English with Irish culture and a foundation year programme. The university campus boasts the largest sports centre in Ireland and there are plenty of opportunities for overseas students to try traditional Irish sports such as Gaelic football and hurling, according to Siobhán Murphy at the university’s language centre.



She adds, “Limerick City has a very strong tradition of rugby and is considered the home of rugby in Ireland.”

The city itself is not huge, with much Georgian architecture and a good range of entertainment options including pubs, cafés, restaurants and clubs.

Northwards from Limerick is Rectory Language School, set in a truly rural location, half way between the cities of Limerick

Agent viewpoint

“There are probably many individual reasons why students choose to study in Ireland. Reasons include the beautiful land; towns that are still on a human scale; the history and culture reflected in museums, libraries, art galleries, theatres; and many different music festivals. Most of all, there are the friendly people whose character Italians find very similar to their own.”

Chiara Bolognesi, Euro Master Studio, Italy

“Clients choose Ireland for several reasons: they may have been to England already and

and Galway. It is based in Portumna in county Galway, which boasts a castle and forest and is on the river Shannon, “just where it flows into Lough Derg, the largest lake in the Republic,” explains Director, John Killeen.

“Our school is a small one, which is a bit more expensive, because the maximum number in any class is four,” says Killeen. He claims that students leave Ireland very satisfied after their stay, having improved their English skills, learnt how to ride a horse – “there are five equestrian

centres within easy reach” – and had the chance to practise English with local people. “We try to make sure that every student leaves us feeling that

they have had a taste of real Ireland.”

On the west coast of Ireland is Galway City, a city that inspires emotion and devotion among visitors, with many returning again and again to relax and soak up the charms of the city that is both hedonistic and folk-

“A Japanese student wanted to know why the locals in the pub were always talking about Hawaii. On investigation, it turned out to be how he heard the local greeting, How are ye?”

John Killeen, Rectory Language Centre, Galway

loric. With its narrow streets and old stone and wooden shopfronts, the city centre is picturesque as well as dynamic and busy – in part ensured by the youthful population from the National University of Ireland in Galway.

The city has a reputation for being the Gaelic centre of Ireland and Irish is widely spoken here. There is a hugely popular arts festival held here every summer and Galway Race Week in July is also well attended by locals and visitors. Further afield, the county of Galway has many beautiful sights to see, such as the Aran Islands and Connemara National Park. □



The city of Cork
Cork's city centre is on an island in the middle of two branches of the Lee River. The city's port, Cobh, played a key role in the Irish diaspora as the main departure point for emigrants until the 1960s



want to try another country and there are direct and reasonably priced flights. Ireland has an attractive pop culture, is known for its friendliness and the Irish host families are usually couples and not single women, which is often the case in England. It is much easier to start working legally as a student in Ireland, you do not have to take a six-month course to get working rights.”

Karel Klusak, Intact, Czech Republic

“Ireland has been, for years, our most popular destination for Spaniards to learn English abroad.



Originally because Ireland is a Catholic country and in the 60s and 70s parents felt more comfortable sending their children to a “similar country to ours”.

The character of the Irish people and the warm welcome they give to our students have made Spaniards feel at home while staying there. In Ireland, Dublin is the number-one city, especially for those over 18. Dublin is famous in Spain for its pubs and its people, as well as being a very easy city to live in. Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick are our main destinations that we recommend.”

Alfonso de los Mozos, Sheffield Centre, Spain



“Ireland is a very safe country and there are not too many Japanese students. A lot of our clients are already interested in Irish culture such as traditional music,

Irish dancing and literature. Galway is becoming very popular among our clients because it is a lovely small city with a lively atmosphere. The cost of living is not as expensive as in Dublin so it is especially popular with long-term students. Galway is also close to famous tourist sights such as Burren, Connemara and the Aran Islands.”

Noriko Okada, Ireland Celtic Travel (ICT), Japan