

PART ONE

PLANNING *your* VISIT *to* IRELAND



How **FAR** *in* **ADVANCE** **SHOULD YOU PLAN?**

YOUR ORGANIZED, BLACKBERRY-DRIVEN FRIENDS ARE RIGHT: advance planning has definite advantages. Airline fares are generally (but not always) lower if you book at least a month in advance, and many lower-priced air-and-hotel packages require advance booking. Advance planning is an especially good idea if you're visiting Ireland in the summer. First of all, airfares are highest then and flights are well booked, so if you wait until the last moment, only the highest-priced seats will be available. Second, hotels in Dublin, Dingle, Galway, and many other popular places in Ireland fill up quickly in the summer—remember, many summer resorts are as popular with vacationing Irish and other Europeans as they are with visitors from America and elsewhere. Hotels, too, will often put last-minute guests in their most expensive rooms.

Of course, even spur-of-the-moment travelers will have to admit that the more time you have to plan your trip before it actually begins, the better prepared you'll be. You'll have more leisure time to read up on the places you want to visit, plan the logistics of your trip, and contact the friends of friends you might want to visit.

But what if you just can't plan in advance—or don't want to? Take heart. Advance planning is not as important outside of the busy summer months and at Christmastime, when many Irish return home. In fact, at times waiting to book can have definite advantages. Eager to fill empty seats, airlines often offer extremely low fares during the winter (usually January through March) and sometimes run special flight and hotel packages. Hotels try to lure guests with special weekend rates; three-nights-for-two specials; bed, breakfast, and dinner packages; and many other attractive offers.

WHEN *to* GO

THINK “RAIN” WHENEVER YOU GO TO IRELAND. OK, that said, don’t think about rain, because the predictably unpredictable Irish weather should not keep you from going to Ireland. Then think about where you want to go.

Dublin doesn’t really have a tourist season, so prices don’t necessarily come down outside of summer. The city’s indoor attractions can keep you just as occupied and content in winter as in summer, and the fire-warmed pubs, lively concert halls, and treasure-filled museum galleries seem especially well suited to winter visits. What’s more, transatlantic airfares are much lower in winter, putting Dublin within reach for a long weekend from the eastern United States.



unofficial TIP

If you plan on seeing more of Ireland than city life—and you should—think May, September, and October. Long twilights make May especially attractive; the scent of peat fires and the feel of autumn in the air will win you over to Ireland in September and October.

The pleasures of the Irish countryside can wane with the colder months. Outside Dublin, Cork, Galway, and other major cities, many hotels, restaurants, and attractions close “for the season” in late October and don’t open again until March or April, when more than flowers begin to bloom. Hotels and restaurants are in full swing from mid-April through September or October. Summer days in Ireland are long, especially from late May through late July, giving you hours of extra light for country drives and walks (the lovely Irish gloaming can last well past 11 p.m.). The downside is that the Irish and their visitors alike take advantage

of the season to descend on beaches and mountain glades, sometimes taking the bucolic blush off even the most lovely spot.

PRICES

IN GENERAL, DUBLIN HOTEL and restaurant prices are on par with those in New York and other expensive cities in North America and Europe. Hotel rates are lower outside of Dublin, but a meal in a good restaurant is fairly expensive anywhere in Ireland. You can blame the tax man in part for the high bill: value-added tax, or VAT (see page 49), is 21% on wine and 13.5% on food. Admission prices for the country’s top attractions are also fairly steep.

Prices in Dublin don’t necessarily vary with the seasons. Elsewhere in Ireland the high season is roughly from Easter to mid-September, with prices hitting highs in July and August. You’re likely to find better deals on hotels during the “shoulder seasons” of mid-September to mid-December and January to March, but many hotels, especially in smaller towns and in the countryside, close in November and don’t open again until March or April.

To give you a very rough idea of what things cost in Ireland, here’s a list of some approximate prices in dollars:

Bus or shuttle to and from airport in Dublin	\$18
Double room at a medium-range hotel in Dublin	\$175–\$250
Meal for one in an upscale Dublin restaurant (without wine)	\$40–\$60
Pub meal	\$20–\$30
Admission to top attractions throughout the country	\$8–\$25

WEATHER

RAIN IS A CONSTANT IN IRELAND—even summer months can be showery, and they aren't really that warm. Extremes of climate are rare, and temperatures don't often fall below freezing or soar to uncomfortable levels.

Dublin's Average Temperatures and Rainfall

TEMPERATURE	(FAHRENHEIT)	(CELSIUS)	RAINFALL (INCHES)	(CENTIMETERS)
January	36–46°	2.2–7.7°	2.6	6.6
February	37–48°	2.7–8.8°	2.2	5.6
March	37–49°	2.7–9.4°	2	5.1
April	38–52°	3.3–11°	1.8	4.6
May	42–57°	5.5–13.8°	2.4	6.1
June	46–62°	7.7–16.6°	2.2	5.6
July	51–66°	10.5–18.8°	2.8	7.1
August	50–65°	10–18.3°	2.9	7.4
September	48–62°	8.8–16.6°	2.8	7.1
October	44–60°	6.6–15.5°	2.8	7.1
November	39–49°	3.6–9.4°	2.9	7.4
December	38–47°	3.3–8.3°	2.9	7.4

AIRFARE DEALS *and* PACKAGE TOURS

START WITH YOUR LOCAL TRAVEL AGENT

THE WEB IS RENDERING THE SERVICES of travel agents redundant, but don't give up on these professionals yet. A good agent can save you time and money by booking your flights, scouting out special package deals, reserving hotels, arranging car rentals, and arranging rail tickets and rail passes. If you don't already have a travel agent, ask your friends if they can recommend one. Or contact the American Society of Travel Agents, 1101 King Street, Suite 200, Alexandria, VA 22314; ☎ 703-739-2782; www.asta.org. Ask the travel agent if he or

she has experience with booking trips to Ireland or has visited the country—if the answer is no, find someone else.

When you meet with the agent, you'll need to provide the dates of your trip and at least a rudimentary budget. With the information you provide, the agent can make suggestions about specific flights and hotels and make the reservations for you. You are not charged for the travel agent's services—although this could change in the future, now that agents no longer receive the same kinds of commissions from airlines and hotels.

CHECK THE TRAVEL SECTION OF YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER

ONE OF YOUR BEST SOURCES of information on package tours to Ireland is the travel section of your local paper. Ireland—especially Dublin—is a favorite destination of North Americans, and to serve this lucrative market there are frequently special money-saving deals that combine airfare and hotel costs. Blackout dates and a host of restrictions generally accompany these offers. Do a little research before you book a flight or package. Call the tour operator and ask questions: What is and is not included in the deals they're offering? What restrictions apply? Will you receive a refund if you cancel? What are the hotels included in the package? (Then check out the property on the Web.)


SURF THE WEB

WITH ALL THE INFORMATION available on the Internet, more and more travelers are acting as their own travel agents. Using the Web you can find and book special airfares, surf for discounted hotel rooms (see page 86 for specific hotel Web sites), order Eurail Passes, and much more.

Many travel-related Web sites offer reservations and tickets for airlines, plus reservations and purchase capabilities for hotels and car-rental companies. Some to check out include

Travelocity (www.travelocity.com), **Expedia Travel** (www.expedia.com), **Yahoo! Travel** (travel.yahoo.com/destinations), **Cheap Tickets** (www.cheaptickets.com), and **Orbitz** (www.orbitz.com). You can find some of the lowest prices on **Hotwire** (www.hotwire.com), but there's a catch—you provide the dates you want to travel, Hotwire comes up with a fare, and you purchase the ticket—but you don't know departure times or the airlines until you've finalized the purchase. Similarly, you can get some great deals on **Priceline** (www.priceline.com)—with this outfit's most popular and inexpensive booking option, you provide the price you want to pay, along with your credit card info, but if your price is accepted, your card is charged before you know your departure times or airlines.

It's also useful to check out the Web sites of airlines that fly to Ireland (see facing page for a list). Frequently they post special

 **unofficial TIP**
Special low prices and seasonal deals are often available only on the Web.

discounts only available through online reservations. Some airlines will send you weekly e-newsletters and special last-minute e-fares, including specials for weekend travel from major North American hubs to Ireland. The airlines are also among your best sources for finding package tours to Ireland.

Check the sites below for air-and-hotel-package options:

• Aer Lingus Vacation Store	(www.aerlingusvacationstore.com)
• American Airlines Vacations	(www.aavacations.com)
• British Airways Holidays	(www.baholidays.com)
• Continental Airlines Vacations	(continental.covacations.com)
• Delta Vacations	(www.deltavacations.com)
• Northwest Airlines WorldVacations	(www.nwaworldvacations.com)
• United Airlines Vacations	(www.unitedvacations.com)

The following airlines serve Dublin. Many have nonstop service into Shannon; Continental Airlines has nonstop service from New York to Belfast; and British Airways offers connections through London and Manchester to Dublin, Shannon, Belfast, and Cork

AIRLINE CONTACT INFORMATION FROM NORTH AMERICA

Aer Lingus	☎ 800-474-7424	www.flyaerlingus.com
Air Canada	☎ 888-247-2262	www.aircanada.com
Air New Zealand	☎ 800-262-2468	www.airnz.co.uk
American Airlines	☎ 800-433-7300	www.aa.com
British Airways	☎ 800-247-9297	www.ba.com
Continental Airlines	☎ 800-231-0856	www.continental.com
Delta Air Lines	☎ 800-241-4141	www.delta.com
United Airlines	☎ 800-538 2929	www.united.com

You can, of course, call an airline directly—but you may get a better deal by using the Web. If you do call the airline, have your travel dates handy and be prepared to ask questions: “Will this flight cost less if I fly on a different day of the week or at a different time?” and “What is the cancellation policy if I can’t use tickets I’ve already paid for on my credit card?” Your goal is to get the lowest fare to your destination. You can be direct and simply ask what the lowest fare is from your city to Dublin, Shannon, or Belfast, and if flying into one is considerably cheaper than flying into another. Chances are that the service representative will tell you; if he or she won’t, hang up and try again.

unofficial TIP
If you’ve done some comparison shopping on the Web, an airline will usually match the lowest fare you’ve already found for specific flights.

Sometimes, you might find it less expensive to fly to London from major hubs in the eastern United States and continue on to Ireland from there. Ireland-based **Ryanair** (☎ 01-609-7800; www.ryanair.com) operates especially inexpensive flights from Britain to Dublin, Shannon, Cork, and other Irish airports; British Airways and Aer Lingus often match the low fares.

SUGGESTED TOUR OPERATORS

ESCORTED TOURS DIFFER FROM package tours in several fundamental ways. A package tour generally includes your airfare and hotel, but you are left on your own for everything else. Escorted tours offer full-service itineraries that generally include transfers to your hotel(s), some meals, sightseeing, nightlife, and more. Dozens of companies offer escorted tours to Dublin and other destinations in Ireland. A good travel agent can help you find a tour that suits your particular interests. It's also a good idea to scan the travel section in your local paper for tour possibilities.

It's important to know the basics of what is and isn't offered on an escorted tour before you sign up. Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- When do you pay, and how much?
- Will the trip be canceled if not enough people sign up? If so, what must you do to get a refund?
- How big will the group be? What are the age groups? Singles or couples? Men, women, or both?
- What's the daily schedule? Is it reasonable or so jam-packed that you won't have time to breathe?
- What are the accommodations? (Ask for the names and check these out on your own. Some tour operators use large, anonymous hotels in unappealing parts of town.)

Don't assume that anything not specifically spelled out is included in your fee. For example, you may have to pay to get yourself to or from the airport, or admission to attractions may not be included.

Cosmos (www.cosmos.com), **Trafalgar Tours** (www.trafalgartours.com), and **Maupintour** (www.maupintour.com) all offer escorted tours to Dublin and the rest of Ireland. For more information about specific offerings, check out their Web sites, and call or write with questions. *Remember:* Be a wise consumer.

Other companies provide flights, hotels, and ground transportation but leave you to do touring on your own. The advantage is that you sometimes get fairly good rates along with independence and the assurance of having the trip arranged before you leave home. Consider **Sceptre Tours** (www.sceptretours.com), which specializes in England and Ireland. In planning your itinerary, the company allows you to select from a long list of bed-and-breakfasts throughout Ireland and provides a rental car.

GATHERING INFORMATION

IRISH TOURIST BOARD OFFICES

FOR GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT IRELAND, contact an office of the **Irish Tourist Board** at one of the following addresses:

IN THE UNITED STATES

Irish Tourist Board

345 Park Avenue

New York, NY 10154

☎ 800-223-6470 or 212-418-0800

[V m 212-371-9052

www.discoverireland.com

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

551 Fifth Avenue, Suite 701

New York, NY 10176

☎ 800-326-0036 or 212-922-0101

[V m 212-922-0099

www.discovernorthernireland.com

IN CANADA

Irish Tourist Board

2 Bloor Street West, Suite 1501

Toronto, ON M4W 3E2

☎ 800-223-6470 or 416-925-6368

[V m 416-929-6783

www.discoverireland.com

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

2 Bloor Street West, Suite 1501

Toronto, ON M4W 3E2

☎ 800-576-8174 or 416-925-6368

[V m 416-925-6033

www.discovernorthernireland.com

IN IRELAND

Irish Tourist Board—Bord Fáilte

Baggot Street Bridge

Dublin 2

☎ 01-602-4000

[V m 001-602-4100

www.discoverireland.ie

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

16 Nassau Street

Dublin 2

☎ 01-679-1977

[V m 01-679-1863

www.discovernorthernireland.com

IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Irish Tourist Board

53 Castle Street

Belfast BT1 1GH

☎ 028-9032-7888

[V m 028-9024-0201

www.discoverireland.com/ire

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

59 North Street

Belfast BT1 1NB

☎ 028-9023-1221

[V m 028-9024-0960

www.discovernorthernireland.co.uk

TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRES

YOUR BEST SOURCE OF UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION in any city or town is the Tourist Information Centre. You'll find addresses for them in every "Planning Your Visit to . . ." section in this guidebook. Tourist Information Centres are always centrally located, usually in the busiest areas of a city or town. In larger cities, you'll often find a branch in the train station. What are they good for? First and foremost, this being Ireland, for the chance to ask the friendly personnel any questions you might have. In general, you'll find that these people are eager to help visitors. Handouts, sometimes free, sometimes costing a few euros, usually include easy-to-use maps and guides to the city or town. You'll also find racks of brochures on local attractions. Something might catch your fancy, but remember that the brochures are advertisements—the fact

that they are in a Tourist Information Centre doesn't automatically mean they are worth your time or money. There will often be a currency-exchange window in the center, along with a convenient hotel-booking

service. For hotel booking there's usually a fee (10% of room cost) that is refunded when you pay for your room. Some Tourist Information Centres have small bookstores stocked with books of local interest, regional maps and guides, and souvenirs.

unofficial TIP
Many Tourist Information Centres offer free or low-cost guided walks of a city or town; join one of these informative tours if you have the time.

WEB SITES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

THE WEB IS AN INVALUABLE TOOL when it comes to travel research, so even if you don't have Internet access at home we suggest you arrange to spend some time in front of a computer, perhaps one of those available for free use at local libraries. Web sites typically contain the most up-to-date information (provided that the site is well maintained)—hotels, for instance, list current prices and discounts (and provide pictures of their rooms), and attractions provide current prices and opening and closing times. We list Web sites whenever possible throughout this guide.

The following Web sites should provide you with enough info, as well as links to other sites, to keep you glued to your computer for weeks. We also recommend contacting the Web sites for visitors centers in cities, towns, national parks, and other places we list throughout this guide—you'll find a wealth of information specific to the places you most want to visit.

- **www.dublintontouristboard.com** Contains up-to-the-minute info on events, hotels, restaurants, sightseeing, exhibits, and more.
- **www.ireland.com** The online edition of the *Irish Times*, the country's most esteemed newspaper. Try reading it before you go to get a taste of what's happening in Ireland today.
- **www.timeout.com** *Time Out* magazine's Web site posts detailed information on what's currently happening in Dublin.
- **www.entertainment.ie** Find up-to-date listings of events and exhibitions.
- **www.visitdublin.com** A plethora of information about Dublin can be found here, ranging from news about galleries and concerts to facts about car rentals and tours.
- **belfast.world-guides.com** Locate information on most facets of travel to Belfast: accommodations, weather, attractions, and more. An excellent source if you are traveling to Northern Ireland.

WHAT *to* PACK

AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE. Resist the urge to cram your entire closet into your luggage. Take just *one suitcase*, preferably the kind with

wheels. Augment that with a backpack or a zippered, waterproof carryall. Add a practical purse or bag that you can sling over your shoulder and use every day.

Keep in mind that not all Irish hotels have elevators or porters. In smaller, less expensive hotels and B&Bs, you're going to be lugging your own bags. Remember, too, that airlines now allow only one carry-on bag plus a purse or briefcase or laptop. They are strict about this, and you will have to go through various security checkpoints before boarding with your luggage.

In the wake of September 11, 2001, airlines now confiscate all sharp objects, no matter how innocuous, if they are in your carry-on luggage. This includes tiny scissors, hypodermic needles (unless you have a note from your doctor explaining why you need one), corkscrews, any kind of knife, and sporting equipment.

The amount of liquids, gels, and aerosols that airline passengers may carry on board is also severely restricted. These substances must be in three-ounce or smaller containers and placed in a single quart-size, zip-top clear plastic bag (each traveler can use only one), which must be removed and placed on the conveyor belt for x-ray screening. There are exceptions for baby formula and medicines. For more information, go to the **Transportation Security Administration** Web site at www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel.

PASSPORTS AND VISAS

IF YOU ARE AN AMERICAN, Canadian, Australian, or New Zealand tourist visiting Ireland for less than three months, a valid passport is the only legal form of identification you'll need to enter the country. Visas are required for any stay longer than three months. The Web site of the **U.S. State Department Bureau of Consular Affairs** (travel.state.gov) provides exhaustive information about passports (including a downloadable application), customs, and other government-regulated aspects of travel for U.S. citizens. Alternatively, call the **National Passport Information Center** at ☎ 877-487-2778.

Consulates and Embassies

Irish consulates abroad (see next page for a list) can advise you on obtaining visas for work or study in Ireland and address other legal and administrative questions prior to your trip.

If your passport gets lost or stolen or you need some other kind of special assistance while you're traveling in Ireland, the embassies at the bottom of the next page, both located in Dublin, will be able to help you or direct you to the resources you need.

unofficial TIP
Leave all your electric and electronic doodads at home; if you lug them with you, they'll have to fit in your luggage, and when in Ireland you will have to get a special adapter plug to use or recharge them.

unofficial TIP
Make a copy of the information page of your passport, and keep it in your luggage in order to expedite replacement in case the passport gets lost or stolen.

CONSULATES

IN THE UNITED STATES

Irish Consulate General

Chase Building
345 Park Avenue, 17th Floor
New York, NY 10154-0037
☎ 212-319-2555; fax 202-980-9475
congenny@aol.com

Irish Consulate General

Ireland House
535 Boylston Street
Boston, MA 02116
☎ 617-267-9330; fax 617-267-6375
irlcons@aol.com

Irish Consulate General

400 North Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60611
☎ 312-337-1868; fax 312-337-1954
irishconsulate@sbcglobal.net

Irish Consulate General

44 Montgomery Street
San Francisco, CA 94104
☎ 415-392-4214; fax 415-392-0885
irishcgsf@earthlink.net

Irish Embassy

2234 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20008-2849
☎ 202-462-3939; fax 202-232-5993
washingtonembassy@dfi.ie

Honorary Consul

6186 Squire Lane
Reno, NV 89509
☎ 775-829-0221; fax 775-829-0221
bbrady@nybell.net

Honorary Consul

65 Broadview Drive
St. Louis, MO 63105
☎ 314-381-5112; fax 314-398-5189

Honorary Consul

2711 Wesleyan Road

Houston, TX 77027

☎ 713-961-5263; fax 970-925-7900

Honorary Consul

2511 NE 31st Court
Lighthouse Point
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33064
☎ 954-785-3427; fax 954-974-7524

Honorary Consul

191 Peachtree Street NE, 21st Floor
Atlanta, GA 30303
☎ 404 332 6401; fax 404-332-4299

IN CANADA

Embassy of Ireland

130 Albert Street, Suite 1105
Ottawa, ON K1P 5G4
☎ 613-223-6281; fax 613-233-5835
embassyofireland@rogers.com

Honorary Consul

100 West Pender Street, Tenth Floor
Vancouver, BC V6B 1R8
☎ 604-683-9233; fax 604-683-8402
irishconsul@telus.net

Honorary Consul General

20 Toronto Street, Suite 1210
Toronto, ON M5C 2B8
☎ 416-366-9300; fax 416-947-0584

Honorary Consul General

3803-8A Street SW
Calgary, AB T2T 3B6
☎ 403-243-2970; fax 403-287-1023

Honorary Consul

13 Glenmeadow Crescent
St. Albert, AB T8N 3AT
☎ 780-458-0810; fax 780-458-6483

Honorary Consul General

1590 Dr. Penrose Avenue
Montréal, QC H3G 1C5
☎ 514-848-7389; fax 514-848-4514

EMBASSIES

THE UNITED STATES

42 Elgin Road, Ballsbridge
Dublin 4
☎ 01-668-8777; FAX 01-668-9946
webmasterireland@state.gov

CANADA

65-68 St. Stephen's Green, 4th Floor
Dublin 2
☎ 01-678-1988; FAX 01-417-4101
dublin@international.gc.ca

HOW TO DRESS

GIVEN THE UNPREDICTABILITY of Irish weather, think layers. Bring mix-and-match coordinates that you can shed or add to as needed. A sweater will be welcome in any season, as will a waterproof coat or jacket with a hood and an umbrella (many hotels supply these to guests). A comfortable and casual pair of waterproof walking shoes is handy for city walks and country treks. If traveling to Ireland in the winter months, bring protection against the damp chill: gloves, a scarf, and a warm coat.

A Word on Tourist Garb

The Irish are pretty casual about their clothes, so wearing a pair of blue jeans while sightseeing will not set you apart as a gauche tourist. In better restaurants and at cultural events, a “smart but casual” dress code generally applies: slacks and footwear other than running shoes are usually the norm for men, a dress or good slacks and a nice blouse for women. (There are still a few places where gentlemen are required to wear a coat and tie, but not many.)

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

TRAVELING WITH CHILDREN

THE RATING SYSTEM in our attraction profiles attempts to gauge suitability for children and adults of various ages, but keep in mind that all children have different interests and differing levels of tolerance for museums and other sights. All in all, though, we find that kids love Ireland—the common language provides a level of comfort, there are enough castles and suits of armor around to satisfy their romantic notions of days of yore, and a ride on a double-decker bus can be sheer heaven.

You’ll find kid-friendly amusements throughout Ireland. Audio guides are available at many attractions, making them more fun and interesting for children age 9 and up. Kids under age 5 get in free almost everywhere. Finally, remember that kids get jet lag, too, so you’ll want to plan your first day accordingly.

unofficial TIP
If you’re traveling as a family, you can usually buy money-saving family tickets at major attractions. These tickets are available for two adults and two children (three children in some cases).

DISABLED ACCESS IN IRELAND

MANY IRISH ATTRACTIONS, as well as hotels and restaurants, are accessible to disabled visitors in wheelchairs, but portions of some historic properties cannot be changed to accommodate chairs. Larger and newer hotels, plus many smaller properties, provide special rooms designed for the disabled. We provide information on access for the disabled in our listings, but call ahead to find out what, if any, arrangements have been made for wheelchairs.

To make your trip pleasurable rather than a struggle, plan ahead by checking out these resources:

In Ireland and Northern Ireland

- The **Irish Wheelchair Association** (Áras Chuchulainn, Blackheath Drive, Clontarf, Dublin 3; ☎ 01-833-8241; www.iwa.ie) has information about holiday destinations for travelers with disabilities, as well as other helpful items.
- The **Irish Rail** (www.irishrail.ie) provides services and information for travelers with disabilities.
- In Northern Ireland, **Disability Action** (Portside Business Park, 189 Airport Road West, Belfast BT3 9ED; ☎ 028-9029-7880; www.disabilityaction.org) lists facilities for the disabled.
- At any **Northern Ireland Tourist Board offices**, pick up **Information Guide to Accessible Accommodation**.
- The **National Rehabilitation Board of Ireland** (24–25 Clyde Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4; ☎ 01-608-0400) publishes **Guide to Accessible Accommodation in Ireland**, helpful in finding lodging.

In the United States

- **Access-Able Travel Source** (☎ 303-232-2979; www.accessable.com) has a wealth of information about traveling with disabilities.
- **Accessible Journeys** (☎ 800-846-4537 or 610-521-0339; www.disabilitytravel.com) caters to mature travelers, slow walkers, wheelchair travelers, and their families and friends. The company specializes in accessible travel planning, group tours, and cruises.
- **Flying Wheels Travel** (☎ 507-451-5005; www.flyingwheelstravel.com) specializes in travel for persons with physical disabilities. The company offers a range of escorted tours.

SENIOR TRAVELERS

IF YOU'RE A SENIOR who gets around fairly well, Ireland won't present any particular problems for you. If you have mobility or health issues, though, be aware that not all hotels, particularly less expensive B&Bs, have elevators. Before reserving a hotel room, ask whether or not you'll have access to an elevator or if other facilities for travelers with disabilities are available.

Being a senior may entitle you to some travel bargains, such as reduced admission at theaters, museums, and other attractions. Always ask, even if a reduction isn't posted.

The following sources can provide information on discounts and other benefits for seniors:

- **AARP** (601 E Street NW, Washington, DC 20049; ☎ 888-687-2277; www.aarp.org) offers member discounts on car rentals and hotels.
- **Elderhostel** (75 Federal Street, Boston, MA 02110-1941; ☎ 877-426-8056; www.elderhostel.org) offers people 55 and older a

variety of university-based education programs in Dublin and throughout Ireland. These courses are value-packed, hassle-free ways to learn while traveling. Package prices include airfare, accommodations, meals, tuition, tips, and insurance. And you'll be glad to know that there are no grades. Recent programs have included "Definitive Ireland," "Discovering the West of Ireland," "Medieval and Gaelic Ireland: A Celebration," "Walking Southwest Ireland's Coast and Country," "Theater and Art in Dublin," and "Celebrating Irish Mythology."

- **Grand Circle Travel** (347 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210; ☎ 800-321-2835; www.gct.com) provides escorted tours for older travelers. Call for a copy of the publication "101 Tips for the Mature Traveler" or order online at the Web site above.

GAY AND LESBIAN TRAVELERS

HOMOSEXUALITY WAS NOT DECRIMINALIZED in Ireland until 1993 (in the North, not until 1982), and this largely conservative, predominantly Catholic country is still not terribly gay friendly. Gay and lesbian travelers should keep in mind that public expressions of affection may easily attract unwanted attention—gay bashing is not unheard of, even in Dublin.

That said, there's a growing gay community in Dublin and in other, more-liberal cities such as Galway. You can find gay-oriented activities in the monthly newspaper **Gay Community News (GCN)**, available at some bookstores. *In Dublin*, the city's main events guide, devotes several pages to gay information, and two recent Dublin publications, **Free!** and **Scene City**, highlight gay venues. On the Web, **Gay Ireland Online** (www.gay-ireland.com) and **Outhouse** (www.outhouse.ie) provide listings, organization info, and discussion forums.

The following resources have knowledgeable staffers who can assist gay and lesbian travelers in Dublin and the rest of Ireland:

- **National Lesbian and Gay Federation (NLGF)** 2 Scarlet Row, Dublin 1; ☎ 01-671-0939; nlgf@tinnet.ie
- **Outhouse Community Resource Centre** 105 Capel Street, Dublin 1; ☎ 01-873-4932; www.outhouse.ie
- **Gay Switchboard Dublin** Carmichael House, North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7; ☎ 01-872-1055; www.gayswitchboard.ie
- **Lesbian Line Dublin** Carmichael Centre, North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7; ☎ 01-872-9911

In the United States

- **International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA)**
☎ 800-448-8550 or 954-776-2626; iglta@iglta.org; www.iglta.org
Provides a wealth of information on gay travel.
- **Now, Voyager** ☎ 800-255-6951; www.nowvoyager.com.
A gay-owned and -operated travel service.

OTHER TRAVEL CONCERNS

ELECTRICITY

LEAVE ALL BUT THE MOST ESSENTIAL electric gadgets and appliances at home. The electricity supply in Ireland is 220-volt AC, which will blow out any American 110-volt appliance unless it is plugged into a transformer. Irish outlets are made for large three-prong plugs, so in addition to the transformer, you will need to get an adapter, available at any hardware store, chemist (drugstore), supermarket, or gadget store. *Don't plug in anything until you've checked the voltage on the transformer!* It should be set to "Input AC 110-volt, output AC 220-volt."

HEALTH

CHECK YOUR EXISTING INSURANCE to see if it covers medical services abroad. If it doesn't, consider purchasing a policy from a company that offers health coverage for travelers, such as **Travelex**, ☎ 800-228-9792, www.travelex.com; **MEDEX International**, ☎ 800-537-2029 or 410-453-6300, www.medexassist.com; or **Travel Assistance International**, ☎ 800-821-2828, www.travelassistance.com.

MONEY

THE CURRENCY OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND is the euro (€). For this book, we've assumed an exchange rate of €1 to \$1.60 U.S. Euro notes come in denominations of €500, €200, €100, €50, €10, and €5. A euro is divided into 100 euro cents. Coins come in denominations of €2, €1, €0.50, €0.20, €0.10, €0.05, €0.02, and €0.01.

unofficial TIP

Coins cannot easily be changed into foreign cash, so spend them while you're in Ireland; better still, donate them on your way home to the **UNICEF Change Collection** program sponsored by most airlines.

As part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland continues to use British pounds (£), one of which converts to about \$2. The pound is divided into 100 pence (p).

There are no longer any £1 notes. There are red £50s, purple £20s, brown £10s, and green £5s. Coins are divided into £2, £1, 50p, 20p, 10p, 5p, 2p, and 1p.

Check any major newspaper's business section for current exchange rates, or go to www.travlang.com or www.x-rates.com.

ATMs, Banks, and Bureaux de Change

There are ATMs all over Dublin and in cities and towns throughout the country that are large enough to have a bank branch. This is your best bet for getting the optimum rate when you withdraw money. Remember, you can't access your credit-card funds from an ATM without a PIN (personal identification number).

Weekday hours for banks are generally 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. All banks are closed on public holidays, but many branches have 24-hour banking lobbies with ATMs and/or ATMs on the street outside. Banks and *bureaux de change* (exchange centers) will exchange money at a competitive rate but charge a commission (typically 1% to 3% of the total transaction). All U.K. *bureaux de change* and other money-changing establishments are required to clearly display exchange rates as well as full details on any fees and rates of commission. Before exchanging your money, always check to see the exchange rate, how much commission will be charged, and whether any additional fees apply.

 **unofficial TIP**
Bureaux de change are found in major tourist sections of Dublin (some are open 24 hours). Steer clear of those that offer good exchange rates but charge a heavy commission (up to 8%).

Value-added Tax (VAT)

In the Republic, the VAT is 13.5% for restaurants, hotels, car rentals, and the like; the VAT on wine, gifts, and souvenirs is 21%. In Northern Ireland, the VAT is 17.5%; food, children's clothing, and books are exempt. If you are not a citizen of a country in the European Union, you can often get a refund on this tax (see page 92). VAT is usually added directly to an item's sticker price, except for some merchandise sold in some small shops and some services. Check before you book a hotel to see if the quoted price includes VAT.

TELEPHONE, E-MAIL, AND POST OFFICES

Telephones

Three types of public pay phones are available: those that take only coins (increasingly rare), those that accept only phone cards, and those that take both. You can buy phone cards from newsstands and post offices. At coin-operated phones, insert your coins before dialing.

LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL CODES The country code for the Republic is **353**; for Northern Ireland it is **44**. To call Ireland from the United States, dial 011-353 or 011-44, the area or city code, and then the six-, seven-, or eight-digit phone number. You will notice that area codes in Ireland always include an initial 0, as in 01 for Dublin. If you're calling from the U.S. or somewhere else overseas or are in Ireland and dialing a number within the same area code, do not use the 0; however, when calling another area code from within Ireland, do include the 0.

To make an international call from Ireland, dial the international access code (00), then the country code, then the area code, and finally the local number. Or call through one of the following long-distance access codes: **AT&T**, ☎ 800-550-000; **Sprint**, ☎ 800-552-001; or **Verizon**, ☎ 800-55-1001.

Some Important Numbers

00 International dialing code; that is, if calling outside Ireland, dial 00 + 1 for U.S. and Canada, 61 for Australia, 64 for New Zealand, and the like

IN THE REPUBLIC

10 General operator

999 Emergency for police, fire, or ambulance

1190 U.K. and Irish directory assistance

1198 International directory assistance

114 International operator

IN NORTHERN IRELAND

100 General operator

999 Emergency for police, fire, or ambulance

192 U.K. and Irish directory assistance

153 International directory assistance

155 International operator

CELL PHONES Within Ireland you can use any cell phone compatible with the GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) network. However, you'll pay less in roaming charges by swapping out your phone's SIM (subscriber-information module, or "smart card") with a prepaid one that has an Ireland phone number (available at electronics stores or through online retailers). Be aware that some wireless providers configure their phones to work only with the SIMs they supply, so check whether your phone is locked or unlocked before you buy. You can also rent a GSM cell phone for use in Ireland, either before you leave home or once you arrive. For more information, contact **Cellular Abroad** (☎ 800-287-5072; www.cellularabroad.com), **InTouch USA** (☎ 800-872-7626 or 703-222-7161; www.intouchglobal.com), or **Road-Post** (☎ 888-290-1616 or 905-272-5665; www.roadpost.com).

E-mail

You'll find Internet cafes in Irish cities, although they can be few and far between in the countryside. If you're in dire need of a computer to check or send e-mail, go to the local library.

If you have a laptop that can take advantage of it, a wireless connection will provide you with a high-speed connection without cable or a phone line. Ireland has been a little slow on the uptake with Wi-Fi, though many hotels now provide wireless access for guests.

Post Offices

Mail is called *the post* in Ireland. *Postboxes* (mailboxes) are green with POST lettered on them in the Republic, red and green with ROYAL

MAIL lettered on them in Northern Ireland. Post offices are generally open Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and Saturday, 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

CALENDAR *of* SPECIAL EVENTS

IRELAND HAS MANY TRADITIONAL EVENTS and festivals throughout the year. Good resources for checking events and dates before you leave home are **www.discoverireland.ie** and **www.tourismireland.com**. If you're spending a major portion of your trip in Dublin, log on to the **Dublin Tourist Board's** Web site, **www.visitdublin.com**, or **www.dublintown.com**. As you're traveling through the rest of Ireland, stop in at Tourist Information Centres to find out what's going on.

January

FUNDERLAND Royal Dublin Society, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4; ☎ 061-419988; **www.funfair.ie**. A yearly indoor fair, with carnival stalls, exciting rides, and family entertainment.

YEATS WINTER SCHOOL Sligo Park Hotel, Sligo Town; ☎ 071-42693; **www.yeats-sligo.com**. A relaxing weekend in late January with lectures and a tour of Yeats Country.

February

ANTIQUES AND COLLECTIBLES FAIR Newman House, 85 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2; fax 01-670-8295; **antiquesfairsireland@esatclear.ie**. Four consecutive Sundays.

JAMESON DUBLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL Temple Bar, Dublin. The Irish Film Centre (see page 121) and other venues screen the best of Irish and international cinema. Contact Dublin International Film Festival, Temple Lane, Cecilia Street, Dublin 2; ☎ 01-635-0290; **www.dubliniff.com**.

SIX NATIONS RUGBY TOURNAMENT Lansdowne Road, Ballsbridge, County Dublin. Athletes from Ireland, the U.K., France, and Italy participate in this annual tourney. Contact Irish Rugby Football Union, 62 Lansdowne Road, Dublin 4; ☎ 01-668-4601; fax 01-660-5640.

March

BRIDGE HOUSE IRISH FESTIVAL Bridge House Hotel and Leisure Centre, Tullamore, County Offaly; ☎ 506-22000; **www.bridgehouse.com**. The biggest indoor festival in Ireland, with Irish song and dance.

ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADES Throughout Ireland.

ST. PATRICK'S DUBLIN FESTIVAL Fireworks, dance, street theater, sports, carnival acts, and music ending in a spectacular parade; ☎ 01-676-3205; fax 01-676-3208; **www.stpatricksdays.ie**.

April

PAN CELTIC FESTIVAL Kilkenny, County Donegal; ☎ 056-51500; www.panceltic.com. Celts from all over the British Isles gather for song, dance, cultural events, and nature walks.

WORLD IRISH DANCING CHAMPIONSHIPS Waterfront Hotel, Belfast; ☎ 01-475-2220; fax 01-475-1053; cirg@tinet.ie. Thousands come from around the world to take part in this competition.

May

BELFAST CITY MARATHON Six thousand runners compete in this 26-mile event, which starts and finishes at Maysfield Leisure Centre; ☎ 028-9027-0345.

COUNTY WICKLOW GARDENS FESTIVAL On certain days, heritage properties and gardens are open to the public; ☎ 0404-20070; www.visitwicklow.ie.

MAY DAY RACES Down Royal Racecourse, Maze, Lisburn, County Antrim; ☎ 028-9262-1256; www.downroyal.com. An important event in the horse-racing calendar.

June

AIB MUSIC FESTIVAL IN GREAT IRISH HOUSES A ten-day festival of classical music performed by Irish and international artists in stately buildings and mansions; ☎ 01-278-1528; fax 01-278-1529.

BLOOMSDAY FESTIVAL A celebration of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and its central character Leopold Bloom. Contact the James Joyce Centre, 34 North Great George's Street, Dublin 1; ☎ 01-878-8547; fax 01-878-8488; www.jamesjoyce.ie. June 16.

BUDWEISER IRISH DERBY The Curragh, County Kildare; ☎ 045-441205; fax 045-441442. This horse race is one of the stars of European racing. Fans converge from around the world in fancy dress, men in jackets and women in hats (think of the Ascot Day scene in *My Fair Lady*). Buy tickets in advance at www.curragh.ie.

KILLARNEY SUMMERFEST Fitzgerald Stadium, Killarney, County Kerry. This rock festival is one of Ireland's summer highlights. The big-name performers have included Sheryl Crow and Bryan Adams. For tickets contact www.ticketmaster.ie.

WATERFORD MARITIME FESTIVAL Quays of Waterford City. This four-day celebration takes place over the June bank holiday. The highlight is a powerboat race from Waterford to Swansea, Wales. Boats from the Irish, British, French, and Dutch naval fleets gather in Waterford Harbour. Other highlights are kayak races and concerts.

July

BATTLE OF THE BOYNE COMMEMORATION Belfast and other northern cities. This event, often called Orangeman's Day, commemorates a

historic battle between two 17th-century kings. Protestants all over Northern Ireland celebrate and parade. Contact the House of Orange, 65 Dublin Road, Belfast BT2 7HE; ☎ 028-9032-2801. July 12.

GALWAY ARTS FESTIVAL AND RACES Galway City and Racecourse; ☎ 091-566577; fax 091-562655; www.galwayartsfestival.ie. Celebrates all manner of arts, with hundreds of participating writers, artists, and performers from around the world. The Galway Races follow, with five more days of racing and entertainment. Mid-July.

LUGHNASA FAIR Carrickfergus Castle, County Antrim; ☎ 028-4336-6455. A 12th-century Norman castle provides the setting for this fair. Enjoy medieval games, observe people dressed in period costumes, and sample traditional food and crafts. Late July.

OXYGEN Punchestown Racecourse, County Kildare. One of the largest and most popular rock festivals. To buy tickets, log on to www.ticketmaster.ie. Early July.

August

KERRYGOLD HORSE SHOW RDS Showgrounds, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4; ☎ 01-668-0866; fax 01-660-4014; www.rds.ie. This event draws a fashionable crowd and is considered the most important equestrian and social event on Ireland's calendar. Early August.

KILKENNY ARTS FESTIVAL Kilkenny Town; ☎ 056-52175; fax 056-51704; www.kilkennyarts.ie. This festival celebrates all the arts, from classical and traditional music to poetry readings.

LISDOONVARNA MATCHMAKING FESTIVAL Tralee, County Kerry; ☎ 065-707-4005; www.matchmakerireland.com. The idea is one that's sure to be a hit—bring a bunch of singles together and ply them with beer and music. The latter is some of the best you'll hear in Ireland.

PUCK FAIR Killorglin, County Kerry; ☎ 066-976-2366; www.puckfair.ie. A wild goat is captured, garlanded, and declared king in this three-day festival, one of Ireland's oldest.

ROSE OF TRALEE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL Tralee, County Kerry; ☎ 066-712-1322; fax 066-22654; www.roseoftralee.ie. This famous five-day festival includes concerts, horse races, and a talent pageant culminating in the selection of the Rose of Tralee.

September

ALL-IRELAND HURLING AND GAELIC FOOTBALL FINALS Croke Park, Dublin 3; ☎ 01-836-3222; fax 01-836-6420. The finals of hurling and Gaelic football, hugely important in Ireland. Buy tickets at www.ticketmaster.ie.

FLEADH CHEOIL NAH ÉIREANN Listowel, County Kerry; ☎ 01-280-0295; fax 01-280-3759; www.comhaltas.com. Since 1951, Ireland's most important celebration of traditional music. Late August.

GALWAY INTERNATIONAL OYSTER FESTIVAL Galway and environs; ☎ 091-522066; fax 091-527282; www.galwayoysterfest.com. A true feast for oyster lovers, with an oyster-opening championship, a golf tournament, traditional music, and more. Late September.

IRISH ANTIQUE DEALERS' FAIR RDS Showgrounds, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4; ☎ 01-285-9294. The most important antiques fair in Ireland; hundreds of dealers participate. Late September.

NATIONAL HERITAGE WEEK Throughout the country hundreds of events are held, including lectures, music, walks, and more. ☎ 01-647-2455; www.heritageireland.ie. Early September.

October

BABORÓ INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL FOR CHILDREN Galway; ☎ 091-509705; fax 091-562655; www.baboro.ie. Children ages 3 to 12 can enjoy music, dance, and more. Late October.

BELFAST FESTIVAL AT QUEENS Queens University, Belfast; ☎ 028-9066-7687; fax 028-9066-5577; www.belfastfestival.com. An outstanding celebration of the arts—music, film, and more.

DUBLIN CITY MARATHON This popular run takes place on the last Monday in October. ☎ 01-626-3746; www.dublincitymarathon.ie.

DUBLIN THEATRE FESTIVAL Theaters throughout Dublin; ☎ 01-677-8439; fax 01-679-7709; www.dublintheatrefestival.com. Features new plays by major Irish and international companies. Early October.

GUINNESS CORK JAZZ FESTIVAL Cork City; ☎ 021-427-8979; fax 021-427-0463; www.corkjazzfestival.com. International acts play around town, in pubs, hotels, and concert halls. Late October.

KINSALE INTERNATIONAL GOURMET FESTIVAL ☎ 021-477-4026. Kinsale, known as the center of action for Irish foodies, struts its culinary might with special menus throughout area restaurants.

MURPHY'S CORK INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL Cinemas in Cork; ☎ 021-427-1711; fax 021-427-5945. Ireland's premier film festival offers features, documentaries, and shorts.

WEXFORD FESTIVAL Opera Theatre Royal, Wexford City; ☎ 053-22400; fax 053-424289; www.wexfordopera.com. A delightfully refreshing informal festival known for its productions of little-known 18th- and 19th-century works as well as recitals and classical music.

December

LEOPARDSTOWN NATIONAL HUNT FESTIVAL Leopardstown Racecourse, Foxrock, Dublin 18; ☎ 01-289-2888; fax 01-289-2634; www.leopardstown.com. Three days of thoroughbred racing. Late December.

WOODFORD MUMMERS Feile Woodford, County Galway; ☎ 059-49248. A celebration of traditional music, song, dance, and mime performed in period costume. Late December.