

OFF THE BEATEN

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Cork City

Cork City, in the beautiful south-west region of the Republic of Ireland, is a port city on the Celtic Sea (part of the Atlantic Ocean). With a population of 400,000, it's Ireland's second-largest city, after Dublin. It is smaller, friendlier and the pace is more leisurely.

The City on the Water

Visitors can walk along the harbour or river, enjoying the smell of the sea and watching the many boats. The centre of the city is on an island in the Lee river, and at its eastern end, docks along the river lead out to Cork Harbour. This is one of the largest natural harbours in the world, and it was the last place that the Titanic stopped before its first – and final – voyage. The oldest yacht club in the world was founded here in 1720, and boating and sailing are popular to this day.

You can also walk through the city's many parks. Narrow streets have interesting shops, cafes and cosy pubs, while the covered 1788 English Market is famous for its delicious local produce*. Cork people are very friendly, and sellers happily offer customers samples of their food and have a chat.

Music in the Air

Music can be heard from the pubs, even during the day. There are lots of buskers on the streets playing all kinds of music and there are even dancers. Tens of thousands of music fans come to the Cork Jazz Festival each year, and that's far from being the city's only music festival. With all that music it's very difficult to be in a bad mood in Cork City!



Great food and genuine smiles: Cork is famously friendly.



There's music everywhere you go in Cork City.



The sculpture *Kindred Spirits* remembers a gift sent to the starving Irish by Native Americans.

Even the voices are musical: the Cork accent almost sounds as though people sing rather than speak. And a Cork English language school was voted the best English language school in Ireland in 2019. It would definitely be fun to study English here. Students stay with local host families.

Have you ever rung church bells? You can in Cork if you visit the Shandon Bells. On the first floor, visitors can view the workings of the clocks and are allowed to ring the eight bells (the largest weighs 1.5 tons). They can then climb the 132 steps to see the bells themselves and to look out over the spectacular views of the city.

An American Connection

In the 1840s, Ireland suffered a terrible famine* and over a million people died. Somehow – and no one knows how – news of this disaster reached a Native American tribe, the Choctaw. The Choctaw raised money and sent US\$170 (worth thousands of dollars today) to the people of Cork. Each year members of the tribe come to visit, and a beautiful steel sculpture of six-metre-high feathers honours the gift.

GLOSSARY*

- off the beaten track** – not very well known, not much visited
- famine** – a time where there is not enough food
- abbey** – a building where monks or nuns live

LANGUAGE POINT*

The verb to **produce** [prə'dju:s] is roughly synonymous with make or create. The noun for the action is **production** [prə'dʌkʃən], and the thing that is made is a **product** ['prɒdʌkt]. The noun **produce** ['prɒdju:s] refers specifically to agricultural products as opposed to manufactured goods.

TRACK IN IRELAND

Clare Island

Clare Island, in the stormy seas of the Atlantic Ocean, is 5.5 kilometres off the coast of County Mayo in the west of Ireland. It's only 8 kilometres long and 3 kilometres wide and is definitely off the beaten track for tourists, though you can be sure of a warm welcome.

Cliffs and Beaches

You can reach Clare Island by ferry from Roonagh Quay on the mainland. The crossing takes about 25 minutes and, if you're lucky, you might see the dolphins which often follow the boat.

Clare Island is mountainous, with 450-metre high sea cliffs, which are some of the most spectacular in Europe. There aren't any guard rails, so it's better not to go to the pub before heading for the cliffs. There are also many beaches. Some aren't suitable for swimming as they are rocky with huge waves crashing in (which are great to watch), but there's a super swimming beach right by the harbour. Nobody seems to mind that the Atlantic water is quite cold (averaging 12°C).

Clare Island lighthouse is now the island's most unique guesthouse.



Small Place, Big Fun

Only about 150 people live on the island, but there's plenty to do. It's famous for music and there are lots of intimate but welcoming music festivals throughout the year. There's a film festival too.

Since the island is so small and there's no traffic to worry about (there are only a few cars), one of the best ways to see the island is to hire a bike to visit the cliffs, beaches and lighthouse. For some history, there is a Napoleonic tower, a 12th-century abbey* and Granuaile's Castle, which was the home of Ireland's famous 16th-century female pirate, Grace O'Malley. There are also boat trips, kayaking and yoga classes – something for just about everyone.

Island Patience

Everyone on the island relies on the ferry for supplies and sometimes they run out of things. If you order food at the island's two pubs and they have run out of what you want, they will look out the window to see how close the ferry is and tell you how long you will have to wait. Or if you are staying in one of the island's guesthouses you can even fish and catch your own dinner, which the owner will happily cook for you.

You can finish the day off by watching the island's famously spectacular sunset over the Atlantic Ocean.



FACT FILE

THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

NOTE: The Republic of Ireland, or Éire, occupies 83% of the island of Ireland. Northern Ireland, which has a population of 1.9 million, is a different country and a part of the UK.

Population: 4.9 million

Land area: 70,273 km² (from the island's total of 84,421 km²)

Currency: Euro

Political system: Parliamentary republic with a president as the ceremonial head of state and a prime minister (the Taoiseach ['ti:ʃəx]) as the head of the government

Capital city: Dublin (1.2 million)

Top five languages: English, Irish (official languages), Polish, French and Lithuanian

Physical geography: Low central plains. Coastal mountains, of which the tallest is Carrauntoohil (Irish: Corrán Tuathail; 1,041 m). The Western coastline has many islands, peninsulas and bays. The longest river is the Shannon (360.5 km). Very wet (up to 3 metres of rain per year in the mountains).