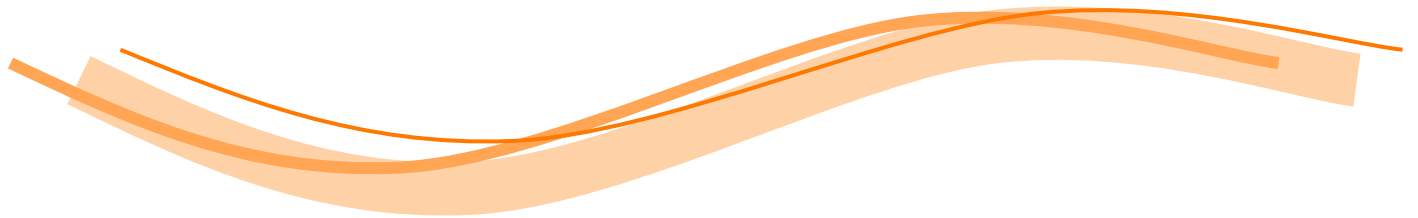




IRELAND & ROYAL IRISH TOURS





<p>ROYAL IRISH TOURS</p>	<p>Jump into Ireland with Royal Irish Tours - Canada's leading specialist tour operator to Ireland. With a depth of knowledge and understanding of Ireland plus friendly and well-informed staff, Royal Irish offer 16 exciting tours - or they can customize your own itinerary. They offer first class coach tours where you stay 2 nights at each stop, all with full Irish breakfast and 3 course evening meals and an abundance of visits showing the very best of Ireland.</p> <p>Royal Irish Tours have created the "Irish Twist – Pub & Heritage Tour" to make the most of this special year in Ireland – the year of The Gathering in 2013. This 8 day first class coach tour shows off some of the very best highlights of Ireland, starting in Dublin and visiting: Galway, Connemara, the Cliffs of Moher, Killarney, the Ring of Kerry, Limerick and Bunratty.</p> <p>There is 7 nights' accommodation in first class hotels of course, together with a luxury coach and expert driver guide...and all kinds of uniquely Irish opportunities to participate in what The Gathering is all about - meeting and mixing with the Irish!</p> <p>Another popular option for unbeatable value and choice are Royal Irish self-drive holidays. Discover true Irish hospitality at a family run B&B, relax in a deluxe, old world Manor hotel, live it up in a chic city centre hotel or spoil yourself in a luxurious Irish castle.</p> <p>Royal Irish currently have several departures of the Shamrock Royal coach tour on sale - call 1-866-907-8687 to learn more.</p> <p>You can view their 2013 brochure online at www.RoyalIrishTours.ca</p>
<p>Why Royal Irish Tours?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Value: Royal Irish offer more inclusions, meals and admissions than other vacation companies - Expertise: Ireland is their business and they are specialists in their field with friendly and knowledgeable agents who have a wealth of personal experience of travelling in Ireland - Choice: From B&B driving holidays to first class coach tours, rail tours to castle adventures and luxurious chauffeur drive vacations, Royal Irish offer a range of options to suit everyone - Security: Royal Irish are registered with TICO, the Travel Industry Council of Ontario - Commitment: The Royal Irish team is passionate about what they do and driven to giving you the holiday of a lifetime.

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<p>New for 2013</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2013 at 2012 Prices: Many of their tours for 2013 are priced similarly or lower than their 2012 rates - Shamrock Royal: All departures now include entrance to the remarkable “Titanic Experience” in Belfast, as well as a hop on/hop off tour of Dublin - British and Irish Classic: A new 18 day tour highlighting the very best of Ireland, England and Wales - Car Rental: All Irish car rental rates include collision insurance, location and service fees, plus an additional driver - Castles and Manors: Additional deluxe Castles and Manors have been added to their collection - The Gathering: The Gathering is a year-long celebration of all things Irish and you can be a part of it on specially selected vacations this year with Royal Irish Tours
<p>Coach Tours</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality and Reliability: All tours are exclusively designed by Royal Irish and combined with all the inclusions and low price airfares, these tours represent the best value in first class touring - Driver Guides: Their guides are friendly and knowledgeable, true professionals who will ensure that you have a great trip - Delightful Hotels: All their hotels are carefully selected to ensure highest standards of accommodation, dining and service - Leisurely Paced Tours: There are plenty of stops on the tours so you never feel rushed, plus many tours feature two night stops - Delicious Fine Dining: Days start with a hearty full Irish breakfast and most evening meals are included in your tour, featuring local dining at its best - Modern Touring Coach: Spacious deluxe coaches with panoramic windows provide the most comfortable way to see the Emerald Isle
<p>Irish Twist – Pub & Heritage Tour</p>	<p>Royal Irish Tours have conjured up a tour to make the most of this special year in Ireland – the year of The Gathering in 2013. This 8 day first class coach tour shows off some of the very best highlights of Ireland, starting in Dublin and visiting: Galway Connemara</p>

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	<p>the Cliffs of Moher Killarney the Ring of Kerry Limerick Bunratty.</p> <p>There is 7 nights accommodation in first class hotels of course, together with a luxury coach and expert driver guide...and all kinds of uniquely Irish opportunities to participate in what The Gathering is all about: meeting and mixing with the Irish!</p> <p>Enjoy a breakfast at the Man O' War Pub in Dublin, a Medieval Banquet at Bunratty Castle, and evening meals and entertainment at the Arlington in Dublin, Monroe's Tavern in Galway, and Kate Kearney's Cottage in Killarney.</p> <p>There are two departures: August 27th 2013 \$1399 October 15th 2013 \$1299.</p>
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<p>Travel Show Prize: Royal Irish Tour's Manor Adventure</p>	<p>The Manor Adventure is an eight day scenic driving holiday featuring elegance and comfort combined with genuine hospitality. It includes four nights B & B, three nights at Irish Manor Hotels and car rental.</p> <p>The three nights at the Manor Hotels are pre-booked from a choice of 18 options listed in the brochure including Fitzpatrick Castle, Ballyseede Castle and Kilronan Castle.</p> <p>The four nights B & B accommodation can be selected from over 1,000 homes throughout Ireland all featuring en suite accommodation and full Irish breakfast daily.</p> <p>You will also receive a touring map of Ireland and "Glimpse of Ireland" discount booklet.</p>
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IRELAND

This year (2013) is the “**Year of the Gathering**” in Ireland, which means the celebrations won’t stop! There will be over 2,500 Gathering festivals and events throughout 2013. And everyone is invited.... the whole country is the venue, and the entire population is the host.... with events, festivals and reunions up and down Ireland, creating one big party as only the Irish know how!

The Gathering offers anyone with links to Ireland (and almost 5 million Canadians claim Irish ancestry), or indeed anyone who simply shares a love of Irish heritage and culture, to come home and immerse themselves in Ireland’s culture, art, sport, adventure, music and clan Gatherings. These will take place in towns, villages and cities nationwide. Go to <http://www.thegatheringireland.com/>

Events include the "**Canada Come Home**" Gathering, a special event which charts the experience of over 6,000 people who left Coolattin Co. Wicklow for a new life in Canada during the Great Famine. And the "Irish Redhead Convention" will be a large gathering of carrot tops converging for a festival of ginger haired fun. Travellers can take in the great outdoors during the "Glen of Aherlow" and "Dingle Walking Festivals." And the competitive Irish spirit will be fired up by the Celtic Cup 2013 International Lacrosse tournament, the "Welly Throwing Championships" and the "World Mini Games" amongst others.

For **music fans** "Sets by The Sea" and "The Sea Sessions" offer a diverse musical line-up to be enjoyed against the backdrop of Ireland’s stunning coastline. "Vantastival" is the only campervan-focused music festival in Ireland - and the "Beatles Festival on the Lough" is a must for lovers of Liverpool’s fab four (whose roots, of course, are Irish!)

Family Gatherings include the "Acton Clan Gathering", where Canadian Lyle Acton, whose great great grandfather left Ireland in 1840 to settle in Ontario, invites his distant relatives to meet in Co. Mayo; plus Gatherings of the Powers, Gallaghers, MacKenna, O’Reilly, O’Sullivan and Stack clans.

Elsewhere, the "**International Quilt Festival**" will transform Galway City into an Irish Quilter’s Village created especially for the event. And the notorious "**Bog Snorkeling Championships**", where swimmers navigate 120 meters through an Irish bog, has to be seen to be believed plus much, much more.

This year **Derry-Londonderry is the 2013 UK City of Culture**, showcasing exciting cultural and artistic events. Derry-Londonderry

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	<p>boasts a colourful 1,400 year history which provides a riveting backdrop for the City of Culture's vibrant programme of arts, music and dance. The 2013 UK City of Culture highlights include the Turner Prize, presented outside of England for the first time in history; a new commission by the London Symphony Orchestra; performances from award winning choreographer Hofesh Shechter; the famous "Lumiere" city light show (which originated in Montreal); the return of "Field Day" – a new play by American playwright Sam Sheppard; "Fleadh Cheoil na Heireann" (Festival of Music in Ireland) comes for the first time to Northern Ireland; events with local Nobel Prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney and the first visit to Northern Ireland of the Royal Ballet for over 20 years. See http://www.cityofculture2013.com</p> <p>Occasionally overshadowed by its popular South Western cousin, don't neglect the region of Ireland in the South East - comprising the five counties of Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford. It is often called the hidden treasure of Ireland, with an evocative patchwork of fertile valleys and plains contrasted by extended beaches and rugged coastlines. Down through the centuries the Celts, Vikings, Anglo-Saxons and Normans have landed and passed through these valleys, leaving behind a landscape rich in history.</p> <p>Countless castles, abbeys, fortresses and ancient settlements remain to mark their passage. And large rivers criss-cross the area, meandering under old stone bridges, around magical mountains, through picturesque villages and past neatly thatched cottages before finally entering the sea at scenic and peaceful seaside towns.</p> <p>The region not only boasts old favourites such as Waterford Crystal, Kilkenny Castle and Rock of Cashel, but also the Dunbrody Emigration Centre, Irish National Heritage Park, Kilkenny's Medieval Miles and Waterford's Viking Triangles. http://www.southeastirelandhotels.ie</p>
Location	Western Europe, between the UK and the Atlantic Ocean
Geography	<p>Ireland is divided into 4 provinces: Ulster, Connacht, Leinster, and Munster</p> <p>With a landmass of approximately 84,434 sq. km, it is at most 484km north to south, and 274km east to west. No point in Ireland is farther than 113km from one of its encircling waters: the Atlantic Ocean, the Irish Sea, or the St. George and North channels.</p>
Name	From Irlanda, meaning the land of Ir, who was the son of Mile, the first man of that clan to be buried on the island
Population	6.4 million, with 4.6 in Eire and 1.8 in Northern Ireland.
Language	<p>English and Gaelic; road signs are bilingual.</p> <p>One of the most important elements in Irish culture is the Irish language.</p>

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	Ireland's West is fortunate to have Gaeltachts, or Irish-speaking areas, in both Galway and Mayo. In these areas, you will notice the Irish language on signs and shop-fronts as well as in everyday speech. Here, people still play music, sing and dance in the old traditional manner.
Currency	In the Republic of Ireland the currency is the Euro; one Euro = \$1.34 Cdn (March 2013) In Northern Ireland, the British Pound is the currency; one Pound = \$1.54 (March 2013) - it was \$2.26 just six years ago!
Tipping	Most hotels and guesthouses add a service charge to the bill, usually 12.5% to 15%, although some smaller places add only 10% or nothing at all. Always check to see what amount, if any, has been added to your bill. For porters or bellhops, tip around \$1.50 per piece of luggage. For taxi drivers, hairdressers, and other providers of service, tip as you would at home, an average of 10% to 15%.
Government	Republic of Ireland is a parliamentary democracy headed by President; Northern Ireland is part of United Kingdom
Documentation	A valid Canadian passport is needed to visit the island of Ireland. If traveling on a Canadian passport, no visa is required.
Time zone	5 hours ahead of EST
Health	No health documents or vaccinations are required to enter Ireland or Northern Ireland from Canada, but you should ensure that you have adequate travel insurance for your trip
Safety tips	Advice is standard for travel anywhere: don't leave cars unlocked or cameras, binoculars, or other expensive equipment unattended. Be alert and aware of your surroundings, and do not wander in lonely areas alone at night. Other than that, Ireland is one of the safest destinations for visitors to Europe.

CLIMATE	
General climate	January and February bring frosts but seldom snow, and July and August are very warm, but rarely hot. Summer temps are 15-20 C, with rain at any time!
Today's weather	9 degrees Centigrade and showers – liquid gold! (16 March 2013)
Best time to visit	Perhaps the best time to visit is in spring and fall, when weather falls somewhere in between bad and good, and you still get winter prices and no crowds.

GETTING THERE	
Flying	Air Canada has the only daily seasonal non-stop service from Toronto and convenient connection service from Montreal. www.aircanada.com Air Transat also has charter flights to Dublin in the summer season. www.airtransat.com Toronto to Dublin and Shannon flying time is 6 hours.

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Cities	<p>Dublin Elegant, sophisticated, historic and hip, Dublin is one of Europe's brightest capitals, with a youthful vibe and infectious energy. From its origins as a prosperous, multi-cultural modern city, Dublin's history spans more than 1,000 years. Explore its many historical and cultural hot-spots, lounge in cool bars or traditional pubs, enjoy the breathtaking scenery of the Dublin Mountains and the rugged Atlantic coastline, or transport yourself into the lively arts, music, theater and dance scene. Visit Dublin and make the city your own.</p> <p>Be enchanted by Dublin, a city of elegant Georgian boulevards and pulsating night life that is both cosmopolitan and intensely Celtic. Take in the Book of Kells at Trinity College, learn about the City's great literary tradition at the Dublin Writers Museum, enjoy a whiskey tasting at the Old Jameson Distillery, or sip a free pint of "Ireland's national drink" at the Guinness Storehouse which boasts one of the best panorama's of the bright city lights.</p> <p>Dublin attractions: Trinity College, Phoenix Park, Dublin Castle, Old Jameson Distillery, James Joyce Tower and Museum, Dublin Zoo, The Guinness Storehouse (in 1759 original brewery, Ireland's no 1 visitor attraction)</p> <p>With 40% of the Republic's population living within 100km of Dublin, the capital is the centre of the profound, high-speed changes that have been transforming Ireland into an increasingly European country, and it has been changed the most. Within an hour's drive of Dublin are Dalkey, Dùn Laoghaire, and many other engaging coastal towns, the rural beauty of the Wicklow Mountains, and the prehistoric ruins in County Meath.</p> <p>Belfast is the capital of Northern Ireland and the north's major city. Start your travel research at the city website: www.GoToBelfast.com Belfast is now a must-see destination and has experienced a large growth in visitor numbers over the last few years; it's been voted as 'city on the rise' by Lonely Planet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• New Luxury Belfast hotels and restaurants• New Ulster Scots attractions• Exciting times for Belfast – historic past with a vibrant new future• New CS Lewis trail• The new Titanic Quarter is ready to receive visitors• The range and quality of accommodation, food, place to see and things to do (festivals and events each month throughout the year) is now amazing.• The two yellow Harland & Wolff cranes that dominate the Belfast skyline are nicknamed 'Samson (1974) and Goliath (1969) after the two Biblical figures – each crane has a span of 140 metres and can lift loads of up to 840 tonnes to a height of 70 metres, making a combined lifting
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	capacity of over 1,600 tonnes, one of the largest in the world.
Distances	Cork to Dublin: 256km Belfast to Dublin: 165km
Ferries	Fishguard in Wales to Rosslare in Ireland is just 1hr 39min on Stena Lynx Fast Craft across the Irish Sea. Aran Islands, County Galway: Crossing the choppy waters to the remote Aran Islands by ferry is an experience in itself. Once you get there you're free to explore the island's patchwork fields, quiet pace of life, ancient monuments, awesome cliffs and crystal clear waters. Or you can marvel at the storytellers in the local pubs!
Trains	8 trains daily Belfast to Dublin; express in 2 hours; Irish Rover Rail Pass - 5 out of 15 days rail travel throughout Ireland Cost: €143. Children are discounted.
Car Rental	All major car rental companies are represented; renting is fairly expensive as is gas. Driving is on the left and most cars are manual.
Buses	Buses link towns and cities by convenient frequent service all across Ireland north & south. The Dublin - Belfast Express coach service operates 7 times daily Monday - Saturday
Passes	Dublin Pass: provides discounts at over 30 attractions; cost 1 day: 35 euros adult (2013), 19 euros child plus Aircoach from Dublin Airport; go to http://www.dublinpass.ie

ACCOMMODATION TYPES	<p>Castles and manor houses; hotels and guesthouses; B&B; Farmhouses; Hostels; Cottages and holiday homes; castle hotel such as: Ashford Castle, Co Mayo; Dromoland Castle, Co Clare</p> <p>One personal favourite of mine: Malmaison Hotel in Belfast was originally two seed warehouses belonging to two rival firms, McCausland and Lytle. Look at Lytle's (on the left) for its fantastic stonework friezes of nutcrunching squirrels, exotic birds and plants; and at McCausland's for heads illustrating five continents, Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania. Now one of Belfast's most prestigious hotels, with an inviting bar and superb French Brasserie Restaurant.</p> <p>Castle Hotels</p> <p>Imagine having an entire castle just for yourself and your family and friends, without having the bother of marrying into royalty. Ireland's castles can offer such an experience in sumptuously decorated places. Some even with a few ghosts roaming the corridors.</p> <p>Mingle with nobility at Crom Castle, which has self-catering apartments in its West Wing and an actual Lord (Erne) living in the other wing. Lovingly restored Cloghan Castle will transport you back 800 years for a party your friends and family will never forget. What better way to spend an evening than to be wined and dined in a magical castle? Throw on an apron and cook for your guests, or be treated like royalty with a</p>
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	<p>helping hand. Crack open the mead (or red wine) in Killiane Castle and party like it's 1699!</p> <p>Glin Castle, County Limerick Glin Castle, home of the Knight of Glin and his wife Madam FitzGerald, stands on the banks of the River Shannon amidst a 500-acre demesne. The castle is open to visitors from March to November and is a spectacular place to stay with seriously luxurious rooms and an authentic castle atmosphere.</p> <p>Kinnitty Castle Hotel, County Offaly Kinnitty Castle offers old world elegance, luxury and comfort. On top of that, you can enjoy friendly ghosts, a dungeon bar, hot stone massage at the first-rate spa and a spot of clay pigeon shooting.</p>
Bed and Breakfast	<p>Consider a B&B for some or your entire trip, to connect with the real Irish people and experience Irish family life.</p> <p>B&B Ireland has over forty years' experience in the promotion of bed and breakfast properties in Ireland and represent over nine hundred B&Bs throughout Ireland in urban, coastal, farm and countryside locations. Guests will enjoy comfortable surroundings, wonderful hearty home-cooked breakfasts and the opportunity to see inside an Irish home and meet the locals – your hosts.</p> <p>All B&B's offer "The Welcome" – guests staying in all family homes are greeted by their host on arrival. They are offered hospitality in the form of a cup of tea or coffee and home-baking. Their host will take time to enquire about their trip and offer tips, advice and assistance with their plans during their stay.</p> <p>You can also find Pet-Friendly B&Bs throughout Ireland - ensuring a warm welcome for your four legged best friend as well.</p> <p>www.bandbireland.com</p>

TARGET GROUPS	
Kids	<p>The Irish love kids, and Ireland is a wonderfully welcoming place to visit for families with children. Most public places and visitor attractions cater for those children, with changing facilities, children's menus, high chairs and ramps for strollers. Child-friendly activities available in Ireland's West include pony trekking, sandcastles, swimming, sailing, adventure centres, boat rides, canoeing, learning music.</p> <p>The Odyssey Complex in Belfast is great for kids and is home to W5 Interactive Discovery Centre, the IMAX Cinema, Hard Rock Café and the Odyssey Arena – home of the Belfast Giants Ice Hockey Team. Experience exotic animals at close range in Belfast Zoo, built into towering Cave Hill, or get a more 'hands-on' experience at Streamvale Open Farm.</p> <p>Here's some suggestions for Western Ireland: Aillwee Caves, County Clare Spooky and atmospheric, the Aillwee</p>

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	<p>Caves make a great place to bring kids who aren't afraid of the dark. Formed by the melt-waters of a prehistoric ice age, the caves are labyrinthine and dramatic.</p> <p>Ards Forest Park, County Donegal This 1,200-acre park is the perfect spot for a family outing. Situated on the shores of Sheephaven Bay on the rugged Donegal coastline, it's filled with woodland, rivers, picnic areas, sandy beaches, and play areas.</p> <p>Atlantaquaria, County Galway Kids can explore the deep with Ireland's largest aquarium, which houses 170 species of marine and freshwater life including stingrays, seahorses and the angel shark. There are sleepy starfish to hold, a load of fish to feed and a lot to learn about Bradán, the salmon, King of Fish!</p> <p>Birr Castle Demesne and Ireland's Historic Science Centre Birr Castle is the private home of the Parsons family and the stunning demesne has become famous for its exotic collection of trees and plants. The Science Centre is filled with 19th-century astronomical instruments, cameras, photographs and photographic equipment.</p> <p>The Blue Flag Beaches The West enjoys a dramatic Atlantic coastline dotted with gorgeous villages and stunning beaches. The Blue Flag Award confirms good environmental standards, good sanitation and safety facilities of these beaches.</p> <p>Boat cruises on Lough Corrib, County Galway Relax with a wonderful boat cruise on the pretty Lough Corrib.</p> <p>Bunratty Castle and Folk Park, County Clare This 15th-century castle has been restored to its full glory and is one of the finest surviving examples of an Irish tower house. The Folk Park is a living museum that aims to show what life was like in rural Ireland 100 years ago, with authentic reconstructions of farmhouses, cottages and shops.</p>
Teens	<p>Lots of outdoor activities; the Clarence Hotel in Dublin – owned by U2; castles galore; and the music scene is fabulous.</p> <p>The 'Belfast Eye'. Belfast has its own 'Belfast Eye' giving panoramic views of the city. Operated by World Tourist Attractions (www.worldtouristattractions.co.uk) the 60m high 365 tonne observation wheel has 42 capsules seating up to 6 adults and it gives unique 360 degree views of the city, its hills and the lough. The 'big wheel' is situated in the grounds of City Hall and reaches over the height of its dome.</p> <p>Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge: a scary swinging rope bridge to a sea stack off the North Antrim coast.</p>
Romance	<p>A lovely people and country to spend time together...How about a horse-drawn Romany caravan along the country lanes of Ireland?</p>
Honeymoons & Weddings	<p>Great venues – including castle hotels and dramatic scenery – help make Ireland a good destination to make these arrangements</p>
Genealogy	<p>Church and civil records throughout Ireland are now computerized: Irish Gen Project; Tourism Ireland: "Tracing your Ancestors in Ireland"</p>

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	<p>www.irishgenealogy.ie ; for Republic of Ireland www.familyrecords.gov.uk for Northern Ireland</p> <p>Canada – Northern Ireland Connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Over 4 million Canadians have Irish ancestors, or approximately 14% of Canada's population, and of those 2.2 million have connections to Northern Ireland - Eaton’s Department Store founder Timothy Eaton was from Ballymena, County Antrim, in Northern Ireland (as Liam Neeson). In the 1850s, at the age of 20, Eaton immigrated to Canada. - Retired Canadian soldier and diplomat John de Chastelain has been involved in the Northern Ireland peace process since November 1995, and from 1997 to 2011 he was Chairman of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, which was responsible for ensuring the decommissioning of arms by paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. - First Marquis of Dufferin Memorial outside Belfast City Hall (west side); he served as governor-general of Canada from 1872 to 1878. The base of the statue is made up of a turbaned Indian astride a cannon and holding a sabre, as well as a snowshoed Canadian with a musket, sitting on a dead moose. - Connection to Toronto, Ontario - The Irish Famine (1845–1849) brought a large number of Irish into the city and by 1851 the Irish-born population became the largest single ethnic group in Toronto. By the 1920s, Toronto was called the "Belfast of Canada".
<p>Seniors</p>	<p>The gentle pace of the countryside and the easy availability of coach touring options makes Ireland a good choice for seniors.</p> <p>Bespoke Belfast is a highly recommended local touring company that can personalize your vacation in Northern Ireland to your own interests. Whether you are looking for a cookery school, a spa day, a shopping extravaganza or some adrenalin activities, this company can set it up for you. Their website is www.bespokebelfast.com .</p>
<p>UNIQUES</p>	<p>Strangely, Ireland is the only country in the world where windmills turn clockwise!</p> <p>“Craic”, pronounced “Kraik” means good music, good story telling, conversation and drink in Gaelic. Here are some very Irish blessings:</p> <p>“May the roof above us never fall in. And may the friends gathered below it never fall out”.</p> <p>“May the saddest day of your future be no worse than the happiest</p>

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	<p>day of your past”.</p> <p>“May you live as long as you want. And never want as long as you live”.</p>
Surprising	<p>There are several haunted castles in Ireland – here is a list for those who do not fear a spooky experience:</p> <p>Ballygally Castle is 32 kms from Belfast on the Antrim coast</p> <p>Charleville Castle in Tullamore, County Offaly</p> <p>Clonony Castle in Birr, County Offaly</p> <p>Carrickfergus Castle is just east of Belfast in County Antrim</p> <p>Huntington Castle in Clonegal, County Carlow</p> <p>Killua Castle, located in County Westmeath</p> <p>Castle Leslie in County Monaghan, Northern Ireland</p> <p>Gormanston Castle in County Meath</p> <p>Kinnitty Castle in Country Offaly</p> <p>Wilton Castle in County Wexford, is in Ireland's Southeast Region.</p> <p>Leap Castle in County Offaly</p>
History	<p>Ireland is thought to have been inhabited from around 8,000BC by people of a mid-Stone Age culture. And about 4,000 years later, tribes from Southern Europe arrived and established a high Neolithic culture. The best-known Neolithic sites in Ireland are the megalithic passage tombs of Newgrange and Knowth in County Meath. Both were built around 3,200BC, making them older than Stonehenge in England, and the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt.</p> <p>The Vikings first launched their attack on Ireland in 795AD. And in 837AD, 60 Viking Dragon warships appeared at the mouth of the River Liffey. Five years later, Dublin was taken under force, but the Vikings were attacked by the local Irish and fled. They returned 17 years later under Olaf the White and made a permanent settlement at Dyflinn (later to be Dublin). The King’s Palace stood on the present Dublin Castle site and part of the town’s defences can still be seen at the Undercroft in Dublin Castle.</p> <p>The latter half of the 19th century was a period of tragedy in Irish history. Ireland was struck by the Great Famine caused by a potato blight that struck crops over a four-year period from 1845-49. Over a million of the population died from starvation, with many more falling prey to diseases such as typhus. Over two million people emigrated to countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, and from 1848-1950 over six million Irish fled the land. Now the Irish diaspora is thought to contain over 80 million people scattered all over the globe.</p>
Books	<p>“Ireland” by Dervla Murphy, photos by Klaus Franke</p> <p>“The Princes of Ireland” The Dublin Saga by Edward Rutherford</p> <p>Frommer’s Ireland 2013</p>

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<p>1000 Places to see before you die</p>	<p>Dromoland Castle Hotel; Cork Jazz Festival; Kinsale; Assolas Country House; Longueville House, CorkGlenveagh National Park, Donegal Bloomsday in Dublin; The Book of Kells, Dublin; St Patrick’s Festival; Aran Islands; Connemara, Galway; Galway; Dingle Peninsula; The Ring of Kerry; Killarney National Park, Kerry; Ashford Castle Hotel, Mayo; Waterford Castle Hotel; Giant’s Causeway; Mourne Mountains</p>
<p>Must Sees</p>	<p>Giant’s Causeway on the North Antrim Coast in 1986 became Ireland’s first UNESCO World Heritage Site. It was likely molten lava, cooled during the early Tertiary period some 62 - 65 million years ago. into some 40,000 hexagonal dark stone steps, a few million years ago, which produced the famous basalt columns. But some prefer the other version of events: the one about a Celtic warrior who got too big for his boots and went a-knockin’ on the wrong giant’s island. Legend goes that Finn MacCool built the basalt highway to Scotland to challenge rival giant, Benandonner, to a fight. But Finn’s wide-eyed glimpse of the enormous Scot sent him scurrying back to Ireland and to his quick-witted wife, Oonagh. As Benandonner thundered down the highway after him, Oonagh disguised the quavering Finn as an infant. “Don’t wake the baby” she scolded the giant Scot as he burst in the door. “If that’s the kid, I don’t want to meet the father”, thinks Benandonner, turning tail for Scotland and ripping up the basalt paving stones behind him.</p> <p>Ireland’s West is a region known as ‘The Cultural Heart of Ireland’. Magical, romantic, dramatic and utterly memorable, the West of Ireland has landscapes that will be etched in your memory forever. People flock to Galway City to experience a slice of its magic and its festivals – inc. the world famous Oyster Festival at Clarenbridge. For the finest gourmet sea food, live music and the best Guinness in town it has to be the Galway Oyster Festival! This thriving city enjoys a strong artistic heritage and a flourishing arts, music, theatre and film scene. It also plays host to the renowned Galway Arts Festival. Relax in Galway’s atmospheric pubs, stroll through its pretty medieval streets and soak up</p>

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	<p>its lively weekend markets.</p> <p>Mayo has the dramatic splendour of the atlantic ocean, and boasts the glorious Island of Achill, the award-winning town of Westport and Ireland’s holy mountain Croagh Patrick among its many sights. Unchanged for millennia the landscape of the Cliffs of Moher in County Clare will leave you awestruck. Towering 214 metres over the waters of the Atlantic Ocean - let your senses be arrested with the sheer drop of these imposing sea cliffs.</p> <p>The Ring of Kerry</p> <p>It may not fit on your finger or come in gold or silver, but this Ring is studded with gems. Skirting Ireland’s most western point, hogging an obscene amount of beauty and cute-as-can-be villages – The Ring (as it’s known down there) is just a bit special. The circular loop starts and ends in Killarney (they could have called it ‘The Circle of Kerry’ but it wouldn’t have had the same ‘ring’ to it!) Undisputedly one of Ireland’s most scenic drives, it also provides the backdrop to the renowned Kerry Way walking trail. Pedal power will get you around the 216km too, on a wind-in-your-hair cycle route. However you travel, keep your camera handy every step of the way.</p>
<p>UNESCO World Heritage</p>	<p>There are three World Heritage Sites on the island: the Brú na Boinne, Skellig Michael and the Giant's Causeway.</p> <p>Brú na Bóinne in County Meath, is the largest and one of the most important prehistoric megalithic sites in Europe. The site is a complex of Neolithic chamber tombs, standing stones, henges and other prehistoric enclosures, some dating from as early as 35th century BC - 32nd century BC. The site predates the Egyptian pyramids and was built with sophistication and a knowledge of science and astronomy, which is most evident in the passage grave of Newgrange. The site is often referred to as the "Bend of the Boyne".</p> <p>Skellig Michael (from Sceilig Mhichíl in the Irish language, meaning Michael's rock), also known as Great Skellig, is a steep rocky island in the Atlantic Ocean about 14.5 kilometres from the coast of County Kerry, Ireland. It is the larger of the two Skellig Islands. After probably being founded in the 7th century, for 600 years the island was a centre of monastic life for Irish Christian monks. The Gaelic monastery, which is situated almost at the summit of the 230-metre-high rock became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996. It is one of Europe's better known but least accessible monasteries. Since the extreme remoteness of Skellig Michael has until recently discouraged visitors, the site is exceptionally well preserved. The very spartan conditions inside the monastery illustrate the ascetic lifestyle practiced by early Irish Christians. The monks lived in stone 'beehive' huts (clochans), perched above nearly vertical cliff walls.</p>
<p>Titanic Belfast</p>	<p>Belfast’s notable ship-building heritage includes the design, building and</p>

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Experience	<p>launch of the most famous ship ever built – the Titanic. This April the city where she was built will mark the centenary of her tragic sinking on her maiden voyage across the Atlantic in the city’s Titanic Quarter. The new Titanic Belfast experience is the world’s largest Titanic visitor attraction and is twice the size of Belfast’s City Hall. The six-storey attraction is filled with exhibitions uncovering the story of Titanic – its origins, construction, launch and history.</p>
South East Ireland	<p>The Forever Happening South East of Ireland comprises the five counties of Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford. It is often called the hidden treasure of Ireland, with an evocative patchwork of fertile valleys and plains contrasted by extended beaches and rugged coastlines. Down through the centuries the Celts, Vikings, Anglo-Saxons and Normans have landed and passed through these valleys, leaving behind a landscape rich in history.</p> <p>Countless castles, abbeys, fortresses and ancient settlements remain to mark their passage - Large rivers criss-cross the area, meandering under old stone bridges, around magical mountains, through picturesque villages and past neatly thatched cottages before finally entering the sea at scenic and peaceful seaside towns.</p> <p>The region not only boasts old favourites such as Waterford Crystal, Kilkenny Castle and Rock of Cashel, but also the Dunbrody Emigration Centre, Irish National Heritage Park, Kilkenny’s Medieval Miles and Waterford’s Viking Triangles.</p> <p>www.southeastirelandhotels.ie</p>

SPORTS ACTIVITIES	<p>Belfast Giants</p> <p>The Belfast Giants are Belfast’s (and Northern Ireland’s only) Elite Ice Hockey League team. They took the entire country by storm, and after 3 months of road games, they made history on their opening night in December 2000 by selling out the Odyssey Arena. They may have lost that first game, but they won the hearts of an entire nation and started an ice hockey phenomenon that still remains today.</p> <p>They are part of the Elite Ice Hockey League, a professional ice hockey league in the United Kingdom. Formed in 2003 following the demise of the Ice Hockey Superleague, it is the highest level of ice hockey competition in the United Kingdom.</p>
Outdoors Northern Ireland	<p>Surf the Atlantic at Portrush; canoe the rapids at Benburb beneath castle ruins 120 ft above, sailing – Portaferry in June for the red sails of the Galway Hookers in Strangford Lough; diving Rathlin Island, north coast for deep underwater cliffs; parasailing, waterskiing, rock climbing...</p>
Boating	<p>Shannon-erne System, Europe’s longest leisure waterway at 800 kms, takes 12 days, self-skipped cabin cruise; also the Grand Canal from Dublin to Waterford.</p>
Golf	<p>An Irishman is currently the world’s #1 golfer: Rory McIlroy.</p>

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	<p>Ireland is a natural golfing country and is recognized as a world-class golfing destination. With more than 400 golf courses to choose from, the island of Ireland offers the Canadian golfer a challenging and memorable golfing experience. Home to more than one-third of the world's true links courses, Ireland offers four distinct golfing regions which can be explored individually or as part of a more extended itinerary. All around the island, world-famous championship links courses rub shoulders with lesser-known yet spectacular hidden gems. What's more, tee times can be booked easily and green fees are moderate (from \$40 to \$185 for signature championship courses). Green fees for parkland courses are approximately £6.00 - £40.00 or €10.00 - €60.00 on weekdays and £8.00 - £50.00 or €12.00 - €80.00 on weekends. Green fees for links courses are approximately £40.00 - £95.00 or €50.00 - €150.00 in the winter or £60.00 - £100 or €50.00 - €240 in the summer. The following list highlights some of the 'must play' courses in each region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dublin area - Portmarnock, the European, the K Club (venue of the 2006 Ryder Cup) - Northern Ireland - Royal County Down, Royal Portrush, Ardglass, Portstewart, Royal Belfast - The West - Ballyliffin, Carne, Enniscrone, Rosses Point/Sligo - The South West - Ballybunion, Doonbeg, Lahinch, Waterville, Old Head - The South East - Mount Juliet, Druids Glen <p>The 2011 Solheim Cup took place at Killeen Castle, County Meath, Ireland. Killeen Castle, the ancestral home of the Earls of Fingal, sits in a wooded estate in 500 acres in Dunsany, Co. Meath. An excellent golfing website is www.northandwestcoastlinks.com</p>
<p>Fishing</p>	<p>Salmon, brown, rainbow and sea trout in Cork/Kerry – State license and day permits; Coarse: roach, dace perch, pike, rudd, bream; deep sea: Pollock, skate, ray, turbot, blue shark</p> <p>The great Western lakes of Galway and Mayo are recognised as the greatest wild brown trout fisheries in the world, while Lough Corrib in Galway is a mecca for game fishermen and is famous for its exciting Mayfly season.</p> <p>The rivers of Ireland's West offer everything from big salmon to wild browns and, in Roscommon and Galway East, some of the best coarse fish stocks in Ireland. Shore fishing from rock, pier or beach is second to none, and deep sea fishing around the Galway and Mayo coasts is nothing short of spectacular.</p>
<p>Horse riding</p>	<p>Ireland is often called "The Land of the Horse". Companies offering riding vacations include Bonaventure tours.com; HiddenTrails.com.</p>

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	<p>There are 40 equestrian centres in Cork/Kerry alone; horse racing is part of Irish life e.g. Mallow, 35km north of Cork</p> <p>Equestrian Holidays Ireland is a selection of Ireland's top horseback riding establishments, each with its own individual character and style. Every centre is Irish Tourist Board listed and Association of Irish Riding Establishments approved.</p> <p>I recently visited the Irish National Stud near Kildare where Queen Elizabeth spent some time on her historic tour in 2011. An Irish mist made the blossoms smell more fragrantly as we met mares and their foals, the highly prized stallions and learnt about Irish Bloodstock Industry. All the horses and foals appeared to be in seventh heaven in their verdant pastures.</p> <p>Here also is a delightful surprise: the Japanese Gardens where the paths lead through grottoes besides streams and lakes to tea houses and arched bridges.</p>
Hiking	<p>Hill-walking: waymarked ways, Ulster Way – Europe's longest marked footpath at 560 miles, Wicklow Way, Dingle Way 179km – Ring of Kerry; Hollywood Hills – inspiration for CS Lewis' Narnia; Hidden Trails, Active Journeys, Bonaventure Tours.</p> <p>Long distance trails include the Foxford Way in Mayo, the Galway section of The Western Way, The Suck Valley Way in Roscommon and Galway, and the Arigna Miners Way and Historical Trail in Roscommon and Leitrim.</p> <p>Croagh Patrick, County Mayo: St Patrick spent 40 days and nights fasting on this 765-metre high sacred mountain near Westport, and banishing dragons, snakes and demonic forces from the site. Today, pilgrims follow in the footsteps of the saint and on "Reek Sunday", the last Sunday in July, over 25,000 people ascend towards the summit.</p>
Cycling	<p>715 kms cycling routes in Cork and Kerry e.g. The Sheeps Head Way; Connemara Trail, Donegal Trail – rugged coastline and mountains.</p> <p>Cycle the River Lagan towpath in Belfast or the Kingfisher Cycle Trail – 370 kms through the lakes of County Fermanagh;</p> <p>Cycling companies – check out G Adventures, Randonnee Tours, Butterfield and Robinson.</p>
CULTURE	<p>In 2013, Derry-Londonderry becomes the UK City of Culture. It will be the first time the title has been held anywhere outside of England and the walls will be alive with the sound of music</p> <p>On 1 January 2013, the entire city of Derry-Londonderry became a venue for culture. A brief look at planned events confirms the expected: music will play its part.</p> <p>Other Voices Other Voices defines the intimate concert. From the stone surrounds of</p>

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	<p>small church in Dingle, County Kerry, this was live music stripped. No bells and whistles were needed, just good acoustics and perfect voices combining to create a magical music television programme. Sinead O'Connor, Florence and the Machine, Jose Gonzalez, Jarvis Cocker, Snow Patrol... The big names came, they saw and they sang. Beautifully. Until now, aside from a trip to New York, Other Voices has never been planned for anywhere outside Dingle. That changes at Derry-Londonderry in 2013.</p> <p>Music will be a big theme for Derry-Londonderry 2013. Other Voices proves it. Another theme is firsts...like the Fleadh Cheoil.</p> <p>Think of the Fleadh Cheoil as the Olympics of traditional Irish music. It competitive, it's hard fought. Most of all, it's fun. Stages are erected mid-street, kids strain under the weight of bodhrans, fiddles and flutes and Irish dancing erupts on the sidewalk. A look down the list of Fleadh Cheoil since 1951 is telling: the event has never taken place in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>So, what should Derry-Londonderry expect from the fleadh? Music Journalist Colin Irwin described it as "Wild and wonderful" in the UK's Guardian newspaper. On the Fleadh Cheoil's Facebook wall, David Mills was similarly impressed with 2012's festival in Cavan:</p> <p>"There were kids up to my knee playing accordions as if they'd been at it for 50 years! A little girl on one of the stages, she must have been no more than 7, had a better command of the fiddle than adults five times her age. Traditional music is alive and well"</p> <p>Musical maestros</p> <p>Those who know Londonderry's musical pedigree won't be surprised to see music take centre stage for the city's year as UK City of Culture. The list of Derry-Londonderry's musical sons and daughters is a healthy one: Fergal Sharkey and the Undertones, singer-songwriter Phil Coulter, Girls Aloud's Nadine Coyle and Glee star Damian McGinty. The famous tear-jerker Danny Boy is also known as The Londonderry Air thanks to the place of its provenance. Music isn't just in the air here, it's in the blood.</p>
<p>Arts</p>	<p>Literary Ireland abounds in famous names: Joyce, GB Shaw, Oscar Wilde, WB Yeats, Walter Scott, Anthony Trollope, Seamus Heaney.</p> <p>Dublin – City of Living Culture</p> <p>Home to some of the world's best known authors, playwrights and musicians, Dublin truly is a city of living culture. Recently voted one of the world's top literary destinations, Dublin has so much to offer the culture-seeking visitor. With its Viking remains, atmospheric cobbled</p>

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	<p>alleys and Georgian squares, it's easy to absorb Dublin's thousand years of history. Step back in time in this city full of literary landmarks, from the James Joyce Tower and the Writers Museum to the famous Gate and Abbey theatres and historic Trinity College, alma mater of many of Ireland's greatest writers.</p> <p>The Saint Patrick Centre is in Downpatrick, just 30 minutes from Belfast: Ego Patricius Exhibition: new 21st century interactive experience telling story of patron saint. There is a Cathedral Garden Restaurant and Art Gallery Craft Shop.</p>
<p>Music</p>	<p>Two of the most enduring and internationally famed traditions are Irish traditional music, and Irish dancing. Traditional music can be heard all over the country from city centre pubs to rural festivals. The bodhrán, which is like a hand-held drum, is one of the most popular instruments in Irish music, along with the fiddle and the tin whistle.</p> <p>"Danny Boy" was a traditional street fiddle tune and was only 'discovered' in 1851 when Jane Ross wrote down the notes she heard in the street!</p>
<p>Films</p>	<p>Game of Thrones – HBO's award-winning hit series is filmed at Paint Hall Studios in Belfast in the Titanic Quarter, and on location elsewhere in Northern Ireland including Sandy Brae in the Mourne Mountains (standing in for Vaes Dothrak), Castle Ward and Doune Castle (Winterfell), Saintfield Estates (the Winterfell godswood), Tollymore Forest (outdoor scenes), Cairncastle (the execution site), the Magheramorne quarry (Castle Black) and at Shane's Castle (the tourney grounds). Its cast is mainly British and Irish.</p> <p>Michael Collins (Neil Jordan, 1996) is a fine biopic about the Irish rebel, filmed largely on location. Nora (Pat Murphy, 2000) is a good biographical film about James Joyce's fascinating and long-suffering wife.</p> <p>Veronica Guerin (Joel Schumacher, 2003) is a dark, fact-based film with Cate Blanchett about a troubled investigative reporter.</p> <p>Bloom (Sean Walsh, 2004) is a brave adaptation of Ulysses, with Stephen Rea.</p> <p>Intermission (John Crowley, 2003) has Colin Farrell talking in his real accent, in this Irish romance.</p>
<p>Museums</p>	<p>The Writers Museum and Natural History Museum in Dublin are two of my favourites in the capital. The Dublin Pass is great value (see above for details)</p> <p>Ulster Museum: a truly great museum and art gallery that deserves a full day. Rich displays of archaeology, ethnography, art, history and natural sciences. Award-winning Early Ireland gallery and the Made in Belfast exhibits are outstanding. Don't miss Treasures of the Armada, featuring intriguing and spectacular items recovered from the Spanish</p>

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	<p>galleass Girona. Ulster Folk and Transport Museum at Cultra brings history to life, with exhibit buildings including furnished houses, mills, shops, schools and churches which illustrate how people in Northern Ireland lived in the past.</p>
<p>Festivals</p>	<p>From the fire of the festival to the lure of literature, the island of Ireland boasts a rich tapestry of arts and cultural activities.</p> <p>St. Patrick’s Festival: March www.stpatricksfestival.ie Celebrated all over Ireland but especially in Dublin, this festival has to be experienced to be believed – and I talk from personal experience!</p> <p>Galway Arts Festival: July www.galwayartsfestival.com Galway, the most westerly city in Europe enjoys a strong artistic heritage and a flourishing arts, music, theatre, and film scene. Move to the beat of the Galway Arts Festival – an eclectic mixture of theatre, spectacle, dance, visual arts, music, literature & comedy involving hundreds of artists and performers.</p> <p>Wexford Opera Festival: October www.wexfordopera.com From its early Celtic and Nordic beginnings Wexford has become a thriving cosmopolitan hub, excellent for shopping and dining out, yet steeped in heritage and history. Re-live nine thousand years of history at the Irish National Heritage Park or experience the World-famous Wexford Festival Opera this fall. Enjoy much-loved operas including Rimsky-Korsakov’s ‘The Snow Maiden’ and Pedrotti’s ‘Tutti in Maschera’ in one of Ireland’s most picturesque coastal settings.</p> <p>Belfast Festival at Queens: October /November www.belfastfestival.com Belfast, Northern Ireland’s capital city is steeped in culture. Find out where great ships like the Titanic were built, marvel at the architecturally impressive City Hall or take a trip around its historic pubs by joining a Baileys Historical Pub Walking Tour. Be enthralled by The Belfast Festival at Queens and immerse yourself in the best of Irish theatre, dance, music, visual arts, and literature.</p> <p>Dublin Events: Dublin’s famous spirit of fun infuses over one hundred wonderful festivals and events throughout the year, from the spectacular St. Patrick’s Festival to the colourful Street Performance World</p>

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	<p>Championships. Events such as Bloomsday, Bloom and Festival of World Cultures are excellent events.</p> <p>In the West: Galway Arts Festival (July) Clifden Arts Week (September) Clarenbridge Oyster Festival (September) Galway Oyster Festival (September) Castlebar International 4 Day Walks Festival (June) Curragh Racing Inis Oirr (August)</p>
The Gathering 2013	<p>The Irish are throwing a party. A big one. It's country-wide, year-long, and larger and more ambitious than anything they've done before. From a minute after midnight on 1 January 2013, and for an entire year, The Gathering is taking over Ireland. The whole country is the venue, and the entire population is the host.</p> <p>Pierce Brosnan describes it as a year where we "celebrate what it is to be Irish".</p> <p>Liam Neeson says: "Whether you're first, second-generation or even with no connection to Ireland, you should visit in 2013 for a unique experience."</p> <p>Niamh Gallagher is one person who'll definitely be coming. In 2007, Niamh's "Global Gathering" broke the previous record for biggest number of people with the same surname attending a clan gathering. It even made ABC news in the United States.</p> <p>It's a tall order to top a Guinness World Record, but she and all the other Gallaghers are aiming to do just that when they stage their next clan reunion in September 2013 in Donegal.</p> <p>Of course, this time around, the Gallagher clan will be riding on the wave of The Gathering 2013, which is reaching out to Irish communities and those with Irish heritage to bring them back to Ireland for a massive shindig – and everyone else who just fancies joining in for the craic! Each Irish person will offer a slice of hospitality in their own way. The Gathering means a different thing to every person, town and community in Ireland – but it means something to everyone.</p> <p>After all, a party invitation, extended to some 70 million people with Irish connections was always going to be popular. And it's captured imaginations all over the world. Besides the street parties, tea parties, and reunions of all types, there's always a festival around the bend in</p>

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	<p>Ireland, whether it's for walking, racing, families, food or flowers... During the Gathering, they'll have their normal big, glitzy fireworks and blockbusters festivals – but they'll be even bigger.</p> <p>The bottom line is even if you have the biggest, smallest or even no connection at all with Ireland, The Gathering is an invitation to get over here and make a connection. http://www.thegatheringireland.com</p>
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ATTRACTIONS	<p>Blarney Castle, Cork, bestows the gift of eloquence. The Waterford Crystal Factory and Gallery. The tour of the factory is fascinating and yes – I fell for the gorgeous work and purchased a set of wine glasses which I keep for pized guests!</p>
Beaches	<p>Beaches abound on this island – from long glorious deserted strands to the popular beaches close to Dublin and Belfast; there's a beach for everyone...even if the sea temperature may be a little chilly!</p>
Wildlife	<p>Bird watching is wonderful and in the National Parks you can see deer...but there are no snakes, thanks to St Patrick!</p>
Parks	<p>Ireland has 6 national parks: The Burren NP in Co Clare; Connemara NP in Galway; Glenveagh NP in Co Donegal; Killarney NP in Co Kerry; Mayo NP; Wicklow Mountains NP. There are also 12 Forest Parks and 71 National Nature Reserves</p>
Gardens	<p>National Trust gardens in Northern Ireland: Gosford, Castlewellan; roses, daffodils, wild bluebells, primroses. Also: Mount Stewart (agapanthus display) and Rowallane (blue Himalayan poppies) Ardnamona Gardens, Lough Eske, County Donegal A wilderness until the 19th century, Ardnamona Gardens is now thriving with an exceptional collection of trees, shrubs and rhododendrons. In 1991, Ardnamona was declared a National Heritage Garden.</p>
Castles/Forts	<p>Dunluce, 16th century stronghold of MacDonnells, teeters on a cliff edge and has a secret entrance through a sea cave. Ennislillen was the medieval home of the Maguires of Fermanagh. Navan Centre and Fort: Armagh in Northern Ireland. This was the royal seat of the Kings of Ulster and the province's ancient capital. Start your tour in the 'Vanished World' of lost myths, travel into the 'Real World' of archaeology and then enter the 'Other World' to hear the legends of the Ulster Cycle. Visit the Iron Age/Early Christian period dwelling and, through Living History interpretation, learn about that way of life. Finally, walk the path of history to the great Ancient Seat of Kings, Navan Fort.</p>

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	Derry is the only walled city in Ireland and the walls date from 1613-18, with 4 original gates and bastions intact; the Tower Museum presents the city's history; St Columb's Cathedral is 17 th century.
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OTHER ACTIVITIES	
Shopping	In the west, traditional knitwear (and not so traditional high fashion knitwear too), pottery, decorative items, handmade bellows, trendy fleece-wear, musical instruments, jewellery and basketry. And of course Waterford Crystal.
Markets	St Georges Market in Belfast is an over 100 yrs old covered market with over 230 stalls ranging from zips to shark meat. It was recently voted one of the top three markets in the UK.
Arts and Crafts in Dublin	If you're after modern Irish design, then try Whichcraft (5 Castlegate) in Old City, Temple Bar for a mix of Irish art and jewellery. Kilkenny (Nassau Street) shop is also a fantastic spot for Irish homeware and design, with pottery and glassware alongside jewellery and clothing. Blarney Woollen Mills (Nassau Street) and Dublin Woollen Mills (41 Lower Ormond Quay) are good for traditional sweaters, scarves, cardigans and gloves. Avoca Handweavers (Suffolk Street) is a good spot for designer and children's clothing with a quirk, and you can also pick up renowned cookbooks from the much-loved Avoca café.
Nightlife	Everything under the sun – but perhaps the quintessential evening is spent in a warm Irish pub with the locals experiencing the camaraderie and craic that is so unique to the Irish people. Here's a quote from the Tourism Ireland website that eloquently pens a picture: <i>"So you're sitting on a stool, swishing your whiskey and watching the syrupy liquid run down the glass in little delicious rivulets. But suddenly, you're jerked out of your daydream by a bearded fellow in an Aran sweater sitting beside you with a guitar followed by a young woman with a fiddle and an elderly man holding a flute. Within seconds, you're front row at your first traditional music session and you didn't even buy a ticket! Hours later as you wave goodbye and shut the pub door behind you, you say to yourself – 'I'm not sure what just happened, but I liked it'. And whether your session occurred in a shibeen in Dingle, County Kerry or the Feakle Festival, County Clare, it is totally acceptable to dance all the way back to your hotel. In fact, that's kind of the point!"</i> In Belfast, the Crown Liquor Saloon is my favourite pub: Great Victoria St. 1839-1840; The Crown is owned by the National Trust. Drinkers of the city know well its opulent marble, brilliant Italian tilework, fine glass engraving, embossed ceiling, and cosy booths bedecked with gryphons and lions. Panels in the restaurant on the first floor were meant for the Brittanic, Titanic's sister ship.

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Food	Ulster Fry: potato bread fried with local-cure bacon, Moira pork and apple sausages, free-range eggs, Almargh mushrooms, bunch of dulse (edible seaweed); breads: afternoon tea: soda farls, treacle farls; pubs: locally harvested oysters with glass of Guinness; beef fillet flamed in Bushmills whiskey
Wine and spirits	<p>Irish whiskey and Guinness are justifiably world famous!</p> <p>Guinness: During the middle ages, St. James's Gate was western entrance into the city of Dublin. Later, the brewery was built at the site, and it was here at the St. James's Gate Brewery in 1759, that Arthur Guinness began brewing ale. Arthur's result is what is now known all over the world as Guinness Stout. The production of Guinness was moved to London between the 1930's to 2005, but has returned to its original site at St. James's Gate Brewery, which is also called the Guinness Storehouse and is Dublin's most visited attraction.</p> <p>Bushmills Distillery: At the top of the village you will find what Bushmills has become known worldwide for - the famous Old Bushmills Whiskey Distillery. The Victorian architecture of the Distillery dates from 1885 when it was rebuilt due to a fire. It is located on the on the banks of St. Columb's Rill and reputed to be the oldest licensed Distillery in the world - being given legal status in 1608 when King James 1st granted a license to local landowner Sir Thomas Phillips. The process of illegal distillation in the village goes back even further than 1608. Local folklore tells of whiskey being made illegally in the 1400's, there are also records of a Sir Robert Savage enjoying the 'aqua vitae' (whiskey) with his troops in 1276 and the drink is even mentioned in the Book of Leinster. The company itself was founded in 1783 and in 1800's we find records of the S.S. Bushmills, a large sailing ship own by company which transported whiskey across the Atlantic.</p>
Restaurants	<p>Ireland has an admirable range of restaurants in all price categories. The settings range from old-world hotel dining rooms, country mansions, and castles to sky-lit terraces, shop-front bistros, riverside cottages, thatched-roof pubs, and converted houses.</p> <p>The Merchant Restaurant in Belfast is a wonderful example of the resurgence of top notch cuisine in Belfast.</p>

MORE INFO	
Brochures	Call 1-800-SHAMROCK for Tourism Ireland to request brochures or go to www.shamrock.org
Websites	<p>For everything Irish: www.ireland.com</p> <p>For The Gathering info: http://www.thegatheringireland.com</p> <p>For Royal Irish Tours: www.RoyallrishTours.com</p> <p>For Dublin: www.visitdublin.com</p>

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	For Belfast: www.gotobelfast.com For the Ireland blog - http://discoverirelandblog.ca/?utm_source=chrisrobinson&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=crshow For the Ireland Newsletter signup - www.discoverireland.com/ca-en/forms/newezine
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PERSONAL EXPERIENCES	<p>See my Travel Blogs on Ireland at:</p> <p>http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/Blog/tabid/400/EntryId/73/Ireland-with-Trafalgar.aspx</p> <p>http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/Blog/tabid/400/EntryId/74/Titanic-Belfast.aspx</p> <p>Southern Ireland - March 2005 Dublin: Burlington Hotel; St Patrick's Day Parade; Ceili Mor; Luminarium; Donal Shiel interview; Literary Pub Walking Tour; Trinity College and the Book of Kells; The Writers Museum; Temple Bar Area and the Clarence Hotel (U2); St Stephen's Green and the Georgian Squares; The Guinness Storehouse (1759); St Patricks Cathedral; The Dublin Pass.com; double decker bus tour; Kilmainham Gaol; Natural History Museum; Custom House; Phoenix Park; O'Connell Street</p> <p>South to Rock of Cashel; Old Jameson Distillery in Midelton (world's largest pot still) 1796; Gresham Hotel in Cork; Cork walking tour; covered market; Blarney Castle (1446), kissing the Blarney Stone</p> <p>Killarney: Randles Court Clarion Hotel; Ring of Kerry (166km or 5hr route), MacGillycuddy Reeks, Irelands highest peak, mountain passes, beaches, hikes</p> <p>Northern Ireland - April 2006 Belfast: Belfast City Hall, St Georges Market (over 100 yrs old covered market); Giant's Causeway: North Antrim Coast, 40,000 stone columns Carrick-a-Rede: rope bridge across scary gap to fishermens island "rock of the casting" Derry: walls of Derry, 1613-18, 4 original gates and bastions intact; Tower Museum, history; St Columb's Cathedral Bushmills Distillery Dunluce Castle</p>
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	Ireland Tour and Belfast – April 2012
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	Trafalgar Tour: Dublin, Kildare, Kilkenny, Waterford, Youghal, Cork, Killarney, Ring of Kerry, Trafalgar Local Be My Guest Experience
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	Belfast: Titanic Belfast
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