



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate. Covering 27,135 square miles (70,280 square kilometers), the Republic of Ireland is somewhat larger than the state of West Virginia. The country covers five-sixths of the island of Ireland, which is off the northwest coast of Europe. It shares the island with Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom (UK).

Some say Ireland is like a badly baked pie—crusty around the edges and soggy in the middle. Rugged coastal hills and low mountains surround the island's fertile central plains, numerous lakes, and bogs. No part of the country is more than 70 miles (112 kilometers) from the coast. The Shannon is the longest river. Snow falls only on a few days in winter and quickly melts because of the moderating effect of the North Atlantic Current; winters are therefore wet and mild. The coldest temperatures average 30°F to 40°F (-1 to 4°C). Summers are cool; the warmest month of July has an average temperature below 65°F (18°C). Ireland's dampness, fog, and rain make the country lush and green.

History. Although the Irish can trace the history of their island back several thousand years, the period of the Celts offers the most famous historical record and marks the beginning of Ireland's modern history. The Celts conquered the island in the fourth century B.C. Legend has it that St. Patrick came to Ireland in A.D. 432, bringing Christianity and converting the people. Norse Vikings invaded in 795 and established seaports in Ireland.

The Norse eventually were defeated in 1014, but then the English began invading in the 12th century. In 1171, King Henry II of England forced Irish nobles to recognize his supreme rule. Over time, though, the English invaders adopted local culture and allowed the Irish some autonomy. In 1603,

England established rule over all of Ireland after defeating the last major Gaelic leaders. Irish Anglicans, supported by England, excluded Catholics from controlling land and politics. In 1801, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was established with the Act of Union, a change that was not popular among Irish Catholics.

The country was devastated in the 1840s by the great potato famine; at least one million people died within five years and another two million emigrated to other countries, with one of the most common destinations being the United States. Political conflict intensified after the famine, bringing rebellions and agitation for independence. The movement climaxed in 1921 with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. This treaty established the Irish Free State as a British dominion and allowed six northern counties (with a Protestant majority) to remain in the UK as Northern Ireland.

Under a new constitution in 1937, The Irish Free State changed its name to Ireland (or Éire in Gaelic). The country began to decrease its association with the British Commonwealth. In 1949, Ireland formally withdrew from the Commonwealth and declared itself completely independent. The six northern counties remained part of the UK.

Many Irish have often sought the union of Northern Ireland and Ireland, but talks over the years have not been fruitful. The issue has been complicated by significant violence initiated by vocal minorities who favor the use of violence to support or oppose unification. Militant forces include the Irish Republican Army (IRA), which favors unification, and loyalist Protestant paramilitary groups who oppose it. Nationalist and Unionist groups have opposing views, but the vast majority favor peaceful means of reaching agreement. Very few people

Ireland

actually support the agendas of the violent minorities.

Peace talks in the 1990s repeatedly failed. When the IRA finally called a cease-fire in 1994, the gesture was soon returned by loyalist militias. Encouraged by this, Great Britain, Ireland, and some Northern Ireland leaders pressed forward with a peace plan. By 1995, all-party talks on the issue of power sharing between Northern Ireland political/religious groups were met with optimism on all sides. However, talks stalled, and in February 1996 the IRA broke its 17-month cease-fire.

In June 1996, former U.S. senator George Mitchell led efforts to revive the talks, despite sporadic violence. In April 1998, eight political parties and the British and Irish governments were able to reach agreement on a historic peace accord. The Good Friday Agreement called for the creation of a Northern Ireland Assembly and cabinet-style administration, with power to govern local matters in Northern Ireland; a North-South Ministerial Council for joint policymaking between Belfast and Dublin; and a British-Irish Council for summit-level meetings. Ireland also agreed to give up constitutional claims to Northern Ireland. Seventy-one percent of voters in Northern Ireland and 94 percent in Ireland supported the accord in a June 1998 referendum.

Continued violence, IRA and paramilitary disarmament, and other issues complicate chances for lasting peace. Despite the setbacks, negotiators continue their work in the hope that the Good Friday Agreement may yet be salvaged.

THE PEOPLE

Population. Ireland's population of 3.9 million is growing at an annual rate of 1.1 percent. Emigration and immigration tend to decrease or increase population growth more than the natural birthrate does. Many emigrate from Ireland each year, principally to Britain, the United States, or Australia. At the same time, however, a large number are returning to Ireland from the United States or the UK to secure employment. Nearly one in four people lives in the metropolitan Dublin area. Overall, almost 59 percent of the population lives in urban areas. Ethnically, the people of Ireland are Celtic. There is also a strong Norman influence and a small English (Anglo-Irish) minority. There is an increasing non-European minority.

Language. The Irish-Gaelic language (also known as Irish) is the officially recognized first language. It is a part of the Celtic family of languages and is closely related to Scottish Gaelic, Welsh, and Breton. Use of Irish-Gaelic is limited, but increasingly popular. It is spoken on a daily basis in Gaeltacht areas and in parts of Meath and Cork. English, recognized as Ireland's second language, is spoken by everyone and is the language of instruction in schools; Gaelic, however, is a required course. Government documents and road signs are written in both languages. Ireland has a television station with all Irish programming. The government wants to increase fluency in the primary language.

Religion. About 88 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, and a relatively large number of residents actively practice the religion. Nearly three percent belongs to the Anglican Church of Ireland. The remaining 9 percent holds various other beliefs—both Christian and non-Christian—or has no religious affiliation.

Although not a state church, the Catholic Church has played an important role in Ireland's cultural and political history and continues to shape the values of the people and laws of the land. For instance, the constitutional ban on abortion (and pre-

viously divorce, until 1995) remains in effect largely because of the Catholic Church's efforts. Despite Catholicism's dominance, freedom of religion is guaranteed.

General Attitudes. The Irish are easygoing, lighthearted, good-humored, polite, and cheerful. They are quick-witted and have the ability to laugh at themselves. A general attitude that things will work out in the end affects their daily lives. The pace of life is somewhat influenced by the old maxim "God gave us time and he gave us plenty." Traditions are important, but some groups are calling for social and political liberalization, including greater tolerance for nontraditional lifestyles.

Traditional Irish values include having a good education and a secure job, owning a home, and possessing a good sense of humor. However, material goods do not top the list of Irish priorities. Individualism is admired, but aggressiveness, arrogance, and fanaticism are not. The Irish avoid personal confrontation; they rarely say "no" to a person's face but communicate it in a different way. Most Irish resent outside criticism of their society or politics, preferring to be the only ones openly critical of themselves. The Irish consider it important to be politically neutral. For example, Ireland did not participate in World War II.

Some people wonder what differences exist between residents of Ireland and those in Northern Ireland. Because both nations share a common cultural heritage, much is similar. The differences that do exist have their roots in centuries-old conflicts over exploitation, political affiliation, and religion.

Personal Appearance. European fashions are most common, although Irish styles influence those fashions. For example, traditional earth tones and warm colors are popular in Ireland. Sweaters and other woolen items are common because of the cooler climate. Fine-quality tweeds and linens are produced in Ireland. Casual dress is acceptable in most situations, but attire worn in public is generally conservative. Light rainwear is necessary for anyone living or traveling in Ireland.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings. The Irish may shake hands when being introduced. Greetings vary by locale and ancient tribal tradition. English phrases such as *Hello* and *How are you?* are used throughout the country. Depending on the situation, the Irish may say *Good morning*, *Good evening*, *Hello*, and so on. A typical Irish-language greeting is *Dia Dhuit* (God to you), to which the response is *Dia is Muire duit!* (God and Mary to you!). *Slan* (meaning "safe") is used for good-bye. The more formal farewell is *Slan agus Beannacht* (Safe and blessed).

When addressing friends, relatives, and acquaintances, the Irish generally use first names. However, titles (*Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Ms.*, *Miss*, *Dr.*) and last names are used formally or with people of higher status. Rural Irish greet each other when passing on the street, even if not acquainted, but urban residents reserve such greetings for neighbors and people they know.

Gestures. The Irish do not use hand gestures excessively during conversation, but neither do they keep hands entirely still—some gesticulation is common.

The Irish value politeness and generally do not push each other (even if in a hurry), eat on the street (or on the run), comb hair in public, or otherwise offend those around them. If one breaches social norms, apologies are usually in order.

Visiting. The Irish are warm and hospitable. They often invite others, particularly families, to their home for dinner. *Calling by* (visiting) is a common custom. It stems from the tradition of gathering groups of people together by going from house-

to-house. In rural areas, stays are usually longer and more informal. Guests are always offered tea or coffee. If it is *teatime* (dinnertime), visitors are invited to stay for dinner.

People like to get out and gather for conversation in pubs (*public houses*). Some say conversation is the national pastime. Many pubs feature folk music as entertainment. Visiting in the home takes place during holidays, especially between Christmas and New Year's Day. Parties are also popular during holidays. It is polite to take a gift to someone if overnight accommodations are provided.

Eating. The Irish eat three meals a day, with the main meal either at midday (if a family's schedule allows) or in the evening. When possible, families sit down together for their meals. Supper, the final meal of the day, often is served later in the evening. The Irish eat in the continental style, with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right.

Traditional Irish dishes are simple and hearty. In addition to Irish cuisine, European dishes are popular. Many types of restaurants, including U.S. fast food, are found in Ireland. *Farmhouse* restaurants feature traditional recipes. *Tea kitchens* serve hot drinks and homemade cakes and pastries in the afternoon. Tipping is not customary.

LIFESTYLE

Family. Family cohesiveness in Ireland is very important. Extended families often live near one another. When work or study takes a family member to distant parts of Ireland or to other countries, he or she makes a great effort to return home for family celebrations—especially Christmas.

The average family has two children. Irish women stay at home to care for the children and household more often than do women in some other countries. Still, many younger women are becoming career oriented, and some 32 percent of the workforce is comprised of women. Competitive salaries and support services for women lag behind those for men. But Ireland's president presses her agenda for greater women's equality.

Although many young families rent an apartment (*flat*) or house, most eventually own a home. In fact, home ownership is high in Ireland. Houses usually are constructed of brick or concrete. Traditional thatched-roof cottages can still be seen in some western areas, but these are no longer built today. Many families also have resort homes for summer vacations.

Dating and Marriage. While couples commonly married in their late twenties or later during the 1960s and 70s, many are now marrying in their early twenties. This may be because young people begin dating at an earlier age. Teenagers enjoy going to movies and dancing. The tradition of taking a special date to the graduation ball (similar to the prom in the United States) has developed in the last decade. *Debs* (graduation balls) call for formal suits and dresses, a large meal, and a dance at a local hotel. Going to *pubs* is a popular social activity for people of all ages. Pubs, which serve more than alcohol, are open to those under drinking age and are prized for their food and atmosphere.

Most weddings are performed in a church and are automatically accepted as legal, but some are also performed in a registry office. Until 1995, Ireland's constitution prohibited divorce. The Irish traditionally had supported the ban due to the influence of the Catholic Church. Efforts to lift the ban arose in the 1980s but did not succeed, and hot debate between liberals and conservatives continued in the 1990s. Government efforts led to a national referendum in November 1995,

in which voters chose by a margin of 1 percent to legalize divorce. The current law permits Irish couples to divorce after four years of separation.

Diet. As an agricultural country, Ireland produces many fresh vegetables. Fresh dairy products, breads, and seafood are also widely available. Potatoes are a staple food for the Irish. A wide variety of fruits have become available since Ireland joined the European Union (EU). Smoked salmon is considered an Irish specialty, as are Irish stew and Irish lamb. Other local delicacies include *crubeens* (pig feet) and *colcannon* (a cooked mixture of potatoes and cabbage). Tea is the most common drink. Breakfasts usually are large and include such foods as bacon and eggs. The main meats eaten for dinner include chicken, pork, beef, and lamb.

Recreation. The Irish are sports-oriented, and most weekends include some sporting activities for the family or individual. Popular sports include the two national pastimes: *Hurling* and *Gaelic football*. *Hurling* is played on a soccer-type field with wooden sticks and a small leather ball. The women's version of hurling is called *camogie*. *Gaelic football* is played with a round ball and seems like a cross between soccer and basketball. Players can touch the ball with their hands, but they cannot pick it up from the ground. The ball is punched, not thrown, and it can be kicked. Teams score for getting the ball into a soccer-type net but can also make points for putting it over the top of the goal. Soccer, rugby, sailing, cycling, golf, hunting, shooting, and horse racing are also favorite activities. Fishing is also a common recreational activity, featuring mainly trout and salmon fishing.

The Arts. Literature is a major part of Irish culture, and the country has produced many distinguished writers. Irish literature is written in Gaelic and English. Much traditional folklore is in Gaelic and records genealogy or tells stories of patron saints, ghosts, and fairies.

Ireland's musical tradition is thousands of years old. When the native language was outlawed, history was transmitted by song. Traditional Irish music, often blended with contemporary forms, is popular around the world. Common instruments include bongos, lutes, flutes, bagpipes, fiddles, button accordions, concertinas, harps, *bodhráns* (Celtic drums), and penny whistles.

Many Irish enjoy participating in events or clubs that focus on the arts. They also enjoy handicrafts such as knitting and embroidery.

Holidays. The main public holidays in Ireland are New Year's Day, St. Patrick's Day (17 Mar.), Easter (Friday–Monday), Labour Day (1 May), the bank holidays (the first Monday in both June and August, and the last Monday in October), Christmas, and St. Stephen's Day (26 Dec.). St. Patrick's Day features street parades in every city, but the largest is in Dublin. In honor of St. Patrick, Ireland's patron saint, the Irish wear a shamrock and have banquets. However, some people in the United States celebrate the day more fervently than people in Ireland. Christmas is the main family and social celebration. Families return home to share a traditional meal of turkey and ham. It is also a popular time for the wealthy to take a "sun" holiday in a warmer climate.

Commerce. Generally, business and banking hours are from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., with an hour break for lunch in all but the major cities. Shopping centers remain open until 9 p.m. on Thursday and Friday evenings. Most people buy basic goods from shopping centers, which have replaced the more traditional corner shops and open markets.

SOCIETY

Government. The Irish republic is headed by a popularly elected president (currently Mary McAleese) who serves a seven-year term. The president has few executive powers but can exercise considerable influence on national politics. A prime minister (currently Bertie Ahern) serves as head of government. The cabinet is drawn from members of Parliament.

The bicameral legislature is structured to provide both vocational and proportional representation. All members of the 166-seat House of Representatives (*Dáil*) are directly elected. Of the 60 members of the Senate (*Seanad*), 49 are indirectly elected and the rest are appointed. All citizens may vote at age 18. Parliamentary elections are held at least every five years. Ireland's highest court is the Supreme Court, which helps decide matters of constitutionality. Judges are appointed by the president. Ireland has 26 counties. Many residents of Ireland refer to Northern Ireland as the "six counties."

Economy. Ireland has a small, but rapidly growing, open economy. In recent years, the government has been able to drastically reduce inflation, encourage more exports, and attract foreign investment, especially from high-tech companies. Ireland relies heavily on trade, especially with nations of the European Union (EU).

While agriculture was once the main sector of the economy, only 8 percent of the population is now employed in it. Instead, a diversified economy now relies more heavily on the services and technology sectors, as well as industry, including textiles, chemicals, and machinery. In agriculture, ranching and dairy farming are important. Key crops include potatoes, sugar beets, turnips, barley, and wheat. Ireland is generally self-sufficient in foodstuffs, although fruits and some other items must be imported. Tourism is a large and growing sector of the economy. In 2002, the euro replaced Ireland's old currency, the *punt*.

Transportation and Communications. Buses (single- and double-decker) are the most common form of public transportation. They are efficient within and between cities. Taxis are expensive and not regulated by the government. Irish rail systems provide links to major cities. Roads generally are paved and in good condition; however, there are too few highways to accommodate shipping and commuters. Most families have at least one car. Vehicles travel on the left side of the road. Although the communications system is small, it is modern and efficient. There are several radio and television stations in Ireland. A variety of daily newspapers are published throughout the country.

Education. The Irish constitution recognizes that parents have the freedom to provide for the education of their children, either in their own homes, in private schools, or in schools established by the state. Schooling is compulsory for students between ages four and fifteen, and about two-thirds of all children are still in school full-time at age sixteen. The government provides free education in primary and secondary schools and gives substantial aid to post-secondary institutions. University education is free.

Local boards composed of parent representatives, teaching staff, and relevant religious authorities manage primary schools. To be accepted as a pupil in secondary school, a child

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	12 of 175 countries
Adjusted for women	16 of 144 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$32,410
Adult literacy rate	99 percent (male); 99 (female)
Infant mortality rate	5 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	74 (male); 79 (female)

must be at least 12 years old and have completed primary education. Following secondary school, one may attend vocational or technical colleges, or a university if one passes proper examinations.

Health. Ireland's population is generally healthy. Well-equipped public medical clinics are located throughout the country. Care in public hospitals is provided at government cost. Many people choose to go to private doctors and facilities to avoid the waiting lists and other inconveniences of the public system. Long-term medical services are free to persons with infectious diseases and to children suffering from certain conditions.

AT A GLANCE

Events and Trends.

- Long criticized for having a poor infrastructure, in 2004 Ireland announced plans to invest 5 percent of its gross national product for the next several years in creating and improving roadways.
- After initially rejecting a plan for European Union enlargement, Irish voters in late 2002 agreed to allow 10 new member countries join the EU. In early 2004, Ireland took over the rotating presidency of the EU, and was leading when the new countries joined in May 2004.
- Prime Minister Bertie Ahern began his second term in office after parliamentary elections in May 2002. Ahern's minority coalition government is the first to win reelection in more than 30 years. The party includes his Fianna Fáil Party and the Progressive Democrats. Ahern is credited with contributing to the country's economic strength and the peace process in Northern Ireland.
- In 2001 and 2002, the IRA decommissioned some of its arsenal of weapons, thus avoiding the collapse of the power-sharing government. Two months later, it made an unprecedented apology for "non-combatant" victims of political violence. However, hostilities continued, and Britain suspended the region's devolved institutions. The success of further peace talks hinges on the IRA's willingness to renounce violence.

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