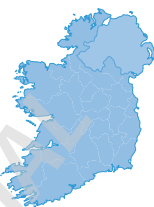


The Best of MTV Ireland



The Best Places to Have a Drink or Two

- **The Empire Music Hall** (Belfast): Launch yourself right into the center of student action at The Empire, a student den inside an old church where down-and-dirty youngsters go wild for cover bands and cheap drinks. Prepare to have your ears blown off. ☎ **028/9032-8110**. See p. 431.
- **Sandino's** (Derry, County Derry): Definitely the hippest bar in Derry. Boho girls and boys clutter up the tiny inside, sipping on Euro-bottled beers, while soaking up some of the funkiest sounds in the North. Not to be missed. ☎ **028/7130-9297**. See p. 470.
- **Sean's Bar** (Athlone, County Westmeath): Hunting for that quintessential Irish pub with sacks of atmosphere and a roaring fire? Try Sean's. Probably the oldest bar in the world, it also comes sprinkled with sawdust on the floor, impromptu jazz sessions, and a character-laden collection of locals. ☎ **090/649-2358**. See p. 404.
- **Octagon Bar** (Dublin): Oooh, is that Bono from U2? Could well be; it's his bar in his hotel and he has been known to hang out here. An incredibly trendy drinkery where you don't have to be rich or beautiful to get through the door. It's not cheap but it is a fave celeb hangout. ☎ **01/670-9000**. See p. 82.
- **Bodega** (Cork, County Cork): Hang with the hippest of Cork's university crowd as they slither past two-story mirrors and a capricious selection of automobile parts fixed to this bar's walls. Come as you are, but if you want to be in with the in-gang, the required uniform is boho chic. Go raid a granny's wardrobe. ☎ **021/427-2878**. See p. 239.
- **Tatu** (Belfast): A huge minimalist cavern with a glass front to enable all the beautiful people to be seen. And my-oh-my are they beautiful. Somewhere to see and be seen. Expect to queue for the privilege. ☎ **028/9038-0818**. See p. 434.

The Best Adrenaline Adventures

- **Surfing in Lahinch** (County Clare): Okay, so the water's freezing but the waves are mighty fine—especially between August and November when the Atlantic swell starts to make itself felt. Lahinch Surf School—run by a member of the Irish surf team—will get you hanging ten within 2 hours. ☎ **087/960-9667**. See p. 340.

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- ◉ **Kitesurfing in Bundoran** (County Donegal): Of course, if you're really hip to what's happening on the waves, you'll know surfing is already passé and all the hot young things have moved on to kitesurfing. Have a go on the beautiful, flat sand-duned beach of Tullen Strand near Ireland's surfing HQ, Bundoran. The boys at Bundoran Surf Company will show you how it's done. ☎ **071/984-1968**. See p. 379.
- ◉ **Kayaking at Union Hall** (County Cork): A little less action-packed than other sports in this section, Atlantic Sea Kayaking's Moonlight Adventure Trip will still get your blood pumping. Set off at dusk to explore the deserted craggy islands and tiny secluded coves of this stunning area all aglow with phosphorescent light. ☎ **028/33002**. See p. 267.
- ◉ **A Ride in a Zapcat** (County Kerry): Zapcats are mini speedboats with Ferrari-style engines and the ability to jump 8m (26 ft.) in the air. Take a tour of the craggy Skellig Islands in one. If you can see past the spray, you may spot the dolphins, porpoises, killer whales, and turtles that live in the area. Activity Ireland are the guys to get you wet. ☎ **066/947-5277**. See p. 294.
- ◉ **Coasteering off the Coast of Northern Ireland** (County Down): Do you fancy scrambling over endless rocks, jumping off high cliffs, and swimming in the icy cold seas around Northern Ireland? Well sign yourself up for a day's coasteering with the Mountain and Watersports Centre in Castlewellsan Forest Park. A hardcore hit. ☎ **028/4377-0714**. See p. 494.
- ◉ **Parachuting in Coleraine** (County Derry): Take to the sky—for a few brilliantly terrifying minutes—with Wild Geese Parachute Company. They will get you to fall from 1,050m (3,500 ft.) with a self-opening "static line," or from 3,900m (13,000 ft.) if you're happy to plummet attached to an instructor. ☎ **028/2995-8609**. See p. 482.
- ◉ **Walking across the Carrick-A-Rede Rope Bridge** (County Antrim): It may not sound like much but when you look down and see you're 262m (80 ft.) above the crashing Atlantic and you've still got another 197m (60 ft.) until you reach the other side, your adrenaline level will probably start rising. Built by local fishermen to allow them to reach the island's salmon fishery from the mainland, this is a huge draw for visitors to the Antrim coast. ☎ **028/2073-1582**. See p. 485.

The Best Live Music Venues

- ◉ **Spring and Airbrake** (Belfast): The little bro of the renowned Limelight club. While the older sibling gets the big acts like Oasis, Manic Street Preachers, and David Gray, Spring and Airbrake gets the up-and-coming and forever-hip acts like David Holmes and Gomez. ☎ **028/9032-5942**. See p. 438.
- ◉ **The Casbah** (Letterkenny, County Donegal): Set to become the Northwest's best live music venue, this is a down-and-dirty underground music venue where you'll get to hear independent Irish and international acts. From the moment you walk down the stairs, you know you've found somewhere exciting. No phone. See p. 382.
- ◉ **The Nerve Centre** (Derry, County Derry): Oooh, this place is good. If there's not an exciting guitar band or singer-songwriter topping the bill most nights of the week—Damien Dempsey, The Editors, Idlewild, and Ash have all played here recently—you'll get a DJ set from the likes of Tall

Paul or an animation workshop or something else superb. ☎ 028/7126-0562.

See p. 471.

- ◉ **McGann's** (Doolin, County Clare): There are traditional Irish music pubs and then there is McGann's. It's a magnet for Irish musicians and consequently one of the best places on the island to get an earful of impromptu Irish trad. ☎ 065/707-4133. See p. 334.
- ◉ **The Crane** (Galway, County Galway): Trad Irish music replete with old men dressed in tweed sporting scruffy old

beards. This is the genuine article.

Sessions can occur at any time, but the Sunday afternoon one is high-on-a-religious experience. Worship at the altar of folk. ☎ 091/567419. See p. 154.

- ◉ **Crawdaddy** (Dublin): One of the country's most intimate live music venues and one of the hottest places in Dublin to catch a band. Expect fab acoustic and indie gigs set amidst a deeply casual atmosphere. Love it. ☎ 01/478-0166. See p. 86.

The Best Festivals

- ◉ **Oxegen** (Punchestown Racecourse, County Kildare): One of Europe's hottest musical festivals. A huge weekend-long musical orgy with 100 acts smearing their talent over five stages. Headliners are usually rock divinities like Green Day and the Foo Fighters, but Coldplay and Snoop Dogg have also previously topped the bill. Early July. www.oxegen.ie. See p. 91.
- ◉ **Celtronic Festival** (Derry, County Derry): Something for fans of the relentless beat. This is one of Ireland's biggest dance music parties and has it all from crowd-pleasers to out there sonic mysteries. A seriously high-energy event. Summer. www.celtronic.co.uk. See p. 472.
- ◉ **Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival** (Belfast): From one of the coolest quarters in Belfast comes one of the country's top artsy festivals. It's all pretty cutting edge. Expect to encounter anything from Japanese punk rock to Canadian trip-hop. April or May. www.cqaf.com. See p. 440.
- ◉ **The Puck Fair** (Killorglin, County Kerry): Enough of all that trendy stuff, get down with the goats at an outback town in the Irish countryside. Three days of drinking and dancing in celebration of the Celtic god Pan all topped off with the crowning of King Puck—the most eligible male goat in town. Get in. Early August. www.puckfair.ie. See p. 295.
- ◉ **Tennent's Vital** (Belfast): Northern Ireland's big summer festival set in the lush surrounds of the Botanic Gardens. Previous acts have included Scissor Sisters, Franz Ferdinand, and Faithless. Not to be missed. August. www.vital05.com. See p. 440.
- ◉ **Diversions Temple Bar** (Dublin): One for the paupers. The most important thing you need to know about this festival is it's free. Next up, it's an all-outdoor, all-ages, all-arts mix of dance, film, theatre, and music performances. Stretch those euros. May to August. www.temple-bar.ie. See p. 91.
- ◉ **Murphy's Cat Laughs Comedy Festival** (Kilkenny, County Kilkenny): Laugh along with top international stand-up comedians and comediennes. Late May. www.wicklow.ie/tourism/events. See p. 218.
- ◉ **Ocean Fest** (Bundoran, Donegal): A celebration of all things wet focusing on surfing. Indulge in free surf lessons during the day and extreme sports videos at night, plus lots of drinking and dancing, of course. Late September to early October. www.bundoranoceanfest.com. See p. 379.

The Best Bargain Places to Stay

- o **The Malin Head Hostel** (Malin Head, County Donegal): A budget travelers' paradise and possibly the most chilled hostel in Ireland. It's an oasis of comfort in one of the most wild and desolate regions of the country. Pick your pudding from the garden—fresh strawberries. Yummy. ☎ **074/937-0309**. See p. 386.
 - o **Isaacs Hostel** (Dublin): A supernova hostel. Isaacs reinvents the hostel concept. Calling itself "Dublin's first V.I.P. hostel," it adds a full restaurant and an attractive sauna to the usual mix of TV rooms, lockers, and bunk beds. ☎ **01/855-6215**. See p. 66.
 - o **Arnie's Backpackers** (Belfast): Like coming home to a mad crazy family. Cups of tea, a log fire, garden, and two dogs all await your arrival. With no curfew and a my-place-is-your-place beat up appeal, Arnie's really is the quintessential hostel. ☎ **028/9024-2867**. See p. 422.
 - o **Sleepzone** (Galway): Is this really just a hostel? It's so damn plush it feels like you must be staying in a newly constructed motel at the very least. This is Galway's latest and greatest place to sleep. There's no curfew and free Wi-Fi throughout. Budget travel as it should be. Settle in. ☎ **091/566999**. See p. 148.
 - o **The Bastion** (Athlone, County Westmeath): Okay, so it's not as cheap as a hostel, but for what you get for your buck it surely can't be beat. A boho B&B decorated with
- a spot-on mix of stripped floorboards and miscellaneous clutter like stuffed animals and pot plants. Seriously cool. ☎ **090/649-4954**. See p. 402.
 - o **Macool's** (Portrush, County Derry): Right by the sea and run by the coolest couple and their handsome hound, Murphy. This is hostelling as you wish it always was, a bit like staying at a mate's house but a lot cleaner. Somewhere to stay while you learn to surf in Portrush. ☎ **028/7082-4845**. See p. 478.
 - o **Walunga B&B** (Kinsale, County Cork): It's a B&B, it's a garden, and it boasts views of the water. The beds are ultra-comfy, too, and you'll be kickin' back in plush country furniture. In short: It's heaven, and you'll still be able to afford dinner in the gourmet capital of Ireland. ☎ **021/477-4126**. See p. 252.
 - o **The Saddler's House and the Merchant's House** (Derry, County Derry): It's not *that* much more than a hostel and it's worth it. Two big old 19th-century houses with stripped wooden floorboards, comfy checked dressing gowns hanging up on the back of the bedroom doors, the best breakfasts you'll eat in all of Northern Ireland, and an English bulldog called Bertie. If you need any more reasons, stay in bedroom number five in Merchant's House, which was once used by a sniper to attack a nearby police station. ☎ **028/7126-9691**. See p. 466.

The Best Dance Clubs

- o **Savoy Theatre** (Cork, County Cork): One of Cork's newest and coolest nightclubs. It used to be a cinema, hence the slinky hand-me-down red velvet curtains. It's already hosted some big-name music acts like Fun Loving Criminals and drum 'n' bass king DJ Hype, and the party looks set to continue. ☎ **021/425-3000**. See p. 242.
- o **Lillie's Bordello** (Dublin): Lillie's has been going for over a decade but the punters still can't get enough of her kitsch-cum-whorehouse decor dotted with nude

paintings. The door policy can be fierce, so if you can't stand pretension find somewhere else to play. ☎ **01/679-9204**. See p. 86.

- **Kelly's** (Portrush, County Derry): All the big boys have played here from Digweed to Judge Jules. It's a bit like Ibiza only without the sunshine. The dance night you're after is Lush. Just follow the crowds from Belfast and Derry. ☎ **028/7082-3539**. See p. 480.
- **Shine** (Belfast): Unless something has gone horribly wrong by the time you're reading this, Shine is—without doubt—the hippest club night on the island of Ireland. Forget your designer clubwear, this is all about being edgy and underground with the über-cool set from Belfast Uni. It's their club night after all. ☎ **028/9032-3313**. See p. 436.

The Best Websites

- **www.knowhere.co.uk** Want to know the best place in town to find someone to get off with? Where to get a new pair of trainers or where the locals hang out? Take a look at knowhere.co.uk. Originally started by a bunch of skaters wanting to share info on where to do their thing, it's now expanded into a mob-ruled review of clothes, clubs, and so much more. Yes, the spelling is appalling but there's no better way of getting the truth about a town before you get a chance to chat with the locals yourself.
- **www.ireland.ie** The Irish Tourist Board's official website. Or *Bord Fáilte* as it's known in Ireland. No, it's not wildly exciting, but it is comprehensive and enables you to search for available hostels and guesthouses across the country. And it doesn't do a bad job on the activities front either.
- **www.freeflowmagazine.com** The website for what must be the hippest

- **The Potthouse** (Belfast): Currently being touted as one of western Europe's hottest new venues, The Potthouse is a frosted glass queen in Belfast's rapidly up-and-coming Cathedral Quarter. The crowd is hip without being haughty. A must. ☎ **028/9024-4044**. See p. 435.
- **The Globe** (Limerick, County Limerick): Proving there's more to Limerick than drunken brawls, the Globe serves psychedelic-looking cocktails to the county's beautiful young things. Ooh and celebs like the Cranberries and U2 have been known to pop by. If it's good enough for them . . . ☎ **061/313533**. See p. 324.
- **GPO** (Galway, County Galway): There's none of your chart nonsense here. In an inky cavelike interior small herds contort to fantastic soul and funk-infused house as well as hip-hop and drum 'n' bass. We like. ☎ **091/563073**. See p. 154.

extreme sports magazine in Ireland, if not Europe. The website is expanding all the time. But pick up the mag and you not only get the low-down on new skate and BMX parks, you also get great photos and profiles of the country's top extreme scenesters.

- **www.theaa.com** No, not Alcoholics Anonymous, this is the Automobile Association's website which does a fab job of giving you printout-able directions of tomorrow's route. Just plug in a starting point and a destination.
- **http://entertainment.ie** A handy, exhaustive, searchable database including just about every event going on in Ireland, from museum exhibitions to indie gigs to hot new plays to club nights.
- **www.anoige.ie** The Irish Youth Hostelling Association's website. Information on 24 affiliated youth hostels in the Republic, complete with star-ratings, prices, facilities, and photos. A great reference tool.

The Best Spots to Blow Your Budget

- o **A Bed at Malmaison** (Belfast): Northern Ireland's most luxe hotel—a seductive mix of old industrial stone and decadent velvet. Okay, so you might not be able to afford one of their enormous beds for the night, but you can spoil yourself with a meal in their divine restaurant or a cocktail at their minx of a bar. ☎ **028/9022-0200**. See p. 425.
- o **A Meal at Chapter One** (Dublin): Probably the city's most atmos-packed eatery, this stunner fills the vaulted basement space of the Dublin Writers Museum. On your plate you'll find modern Irish food made with local, organic ingredients. All around you are the city's movers and shakers. ☎ **01/873-2266**. See p. 77.
- o **A Gig at Slane Castle** (Slane, County Meath): David Bowie, U2, Paul Oakenfold, Iggy Pop, REM, and Madonna have all pumped out their tunes against the backdrop of Slane Castle. If your trip coincides with a gig here, go. The setting is stunning and the crowd usually goes wild. ☎ **041/988-4400**. See p. 138.
- o **A Flying Lesson** (Newry, County Down): Learn to fly in one of the most beautiful parts of Ireland. Okay, so you're not going to get your hands on a fighter jet, but for €75 per hour the boys and girls at Fly NI Airsports will teach you how to go solo in a microlight plane—if you can keep your eyes off the view. ☎ **07867/832185**. See p. 494.

The Best Gay Hangouts

- o **Mynt** (Belfast): A divine lounge bar with two club rooms and a chill-out area called Coolmynt. The dress code is funky and the vibe code is outrageous—stay at home if you're easily shocked. This place is seriously stylish, so don't expect to get in if you slob along in an old tracksuit. ☎ **028/9023-4520**. See p. 437.
- o **Garage** (Belfast): The usual sauna set-up: A Jacuzzi and steam room plus a video lounge and coffee bar. Open through the night on Fridays and Saturdays. "Prepare to have your nuts tightened." They said it. ☎ **028/9023-3441**. See p. 437.
- o **Howl** (Belfast): One for the girls. This group organizes a montly welcome-all alternative music night. Moon. Howl. Get it? They're strictly anti all phobias whether homo or hetero so check your prejudices in at the door. www.howlclub.com. The event takes place at **Pavilion**. ☎ **028/9028-3283**. See p. 438.
- o **The George** (Dublin): Dublin's most established gay bar is generally packed out with a chill crowd of locals and savvy travelers. It's coffee and chats during the day and dancing and DJs at night. A god-send. ☎ **01/478-2983**. See p. 90.
- o **GUBU** (Dublin): Okay, so it's not purely for a gay crowd but it's such fun here nobody should miss out. It's filled to the bursting most nights, with a casually, but beautifully, dressed, laid-back, enthusiastic crowd drawn by its party-pop music. Indulge. ☎ **01/874-0710**. See p. 90.
- o **Frankie's Guesthouse** (Dublin): Dublin's only exclusively gay guesthouse. Set on a quiet backstreet in a charming, mews-style building with a simple Mediterranean vibe. ☎ **01/478-3087**. See p. 68.
- o **Loafers** (Cork, County Cork): A relaxed and friendly venue stuffed full of the under-30s crowd. Summer sees everyone lounging around in the beer garden. On the weekends DJs get the crowd gyrating. ☎ **021/431-1612**. See p. 243.

The Best Bargain Meals

- ◉ **Quay Co-Op** (Cork, County Cork): The place where Cork's veggie and vegan crowd hang out. Chow down on creamy lentil and coconut soup, homemade bread, and cakes. Food worth queuing for. ☎ 021/431-7026. See p. 236.
- ◉ **The Nerve Centre Café** (Derry, County Derry): The food here may be pretty run of the mill, but how often do you get to eat your budget quiche and chips alongside musical heroes like David Gray and Gomez? As this cafe is attached to Derry's top alternative music venue, you never know who might be sitting at your table. ☎ 028/7126-0562. See p. 468.
- ◉ **Foodies** (Athlone, County Westmeath): Exposed stone, bare-wood floors, a handsome manager, plenty of mags to read, and fantastic simple food. Stop by for a sandwich of brie with sun-blushed tomatoes and green salad or a special of smoked salmon with cream cheese. Almost everything's under €5. ☎ 090/649-8576. See p. 403.
- ◉ **Beshoffs** (Dublin): In a restaurant nearing 100 years old, this is fish and chips gone posh. Go for your usual cod or try a bite of shark—some days there are as many as 20 different types of fish to choose from. The chips (sorry, fries to the Americans) are crisp on the outside and soft in the center. Just as it should be. ☎ 01/677-8026. See p. 72.
- ◉ **Soup Dragon** (Dublin): When you've been bruised by a fall on Dublin's cobbles and soaked through by the Irish rain and are wondering what the hell you're doing here, pop along to Soup Dragon and get some internal central heating. All sorts of soups—from curried parsnip to sag aloo—are served up alongside instant-bum-and-tum desserts like bread and butter pudding. ☎ 01/872-3277. See p. 75.
- ◉ **The Winding Stair** (Dublin): A Dublin institution dove-tailing the pleasures of caffeine and literature. A self-service cafe serving simple whole foods and three floors of secondhand gems. Turn up after dark and you may find a poetry reading in progress. ☎ 01/873-3292. See p. 76.
- ◉ **Flour Crepe Room 46** (Belfast): A lush mint-green serving counter balances out just a handful of Scandinavian style dark-wood tables. Off these you'll find hip young things scoffing down crepes filled with lovely things like cottage cheese, pineapple, and tomato or Parmesan, or Mars bars and Baileys. Yes, please. ☎ 028/9033-9966. See p. 427.

The Best Things to Do for Free

- ◉ **Moone High Cross** (Moone, County Kildare): A top-of-the-range high cross that is nearly 1,200 years old. Look closely to see that naughty little nymphet Eve trying to tempt Adam with some fruit, the sacrifice of Isaac, and Daniel getting down with the lions. See p. 129.
- ◉ **Monasterboice** (Collon, County Louth): One of the dreamiest ancient monastic sites in Ireland. Travelers will find a cemetery, one of the tallest round towers in Ireland, ancient church ruins, and two fab high crosses covered in carvings. Come at dawn or dusk to soak up the true atmos. See p. 140.
- ◉ **Catch a Free Show on Grafton Street** (Dublin): On a sunny Saturday its mimes, musicians, and artists are legion. Just watching them interact with the hassled shoppers and baffled tourists is a joy. See "Dublin" section, p. 51.

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- **Spend a Day on the Beach** (Dingle Peninsula, County Kerry): Brandon Bay in County Kerry is both real pretty and a great place to go swimming. Other beaches on the Dingle Peninsula—including the brilliant dunes of Inch Strand—also offer up some stunning sights as the wild sea crashes into the land, but not all of them are safe for swimming. See p. 309.
- **Get a Chance to Hang out with the Students at Trinity College** (Dublin): Although you do have to pay to sneak a peak at the original Book of Kells in the Old Library, there's no charge to look around the rest of the place. Spend a lazy afternoon watching cricket on campus. ☎ 01/6008-2308. See p. 100.
- **Spend a Morning in one of Dublin's Public Galleries** (Dublin): Check out the art work of Yeats' often-overlooked brother Jack B. in the National Gallery of

Ireland. ☎ 01/661-5133. Even better—and far funkier—is the Irish Museum of Modern Art. The traveling exhibitions are constantly changing so just stop by and see what's on. ☎ 01/612-9900. See p. 97 for both.

- **Pay a Visit to the Void Gallery** (Derry, County Derry): Just opened in 2005, this is a gallery fuelled by passion, bringing the best of thought-provoking international art to Derry. Expect poetic video installations and images strong enough to incite a revolution. See p. 473.
- **The Cliffs of Moher** (Liscannor, County Clare): Unmissable and totally breathtaking. The cliffs stretch for 8km (5 miles) about 210m (700 ft.) above the ocean. From O'Brien's Tower, a midway observation tower, you can see the Aran Islands, Galway Bay, and various other distant mountains. See p. 334.

The Best Sites to See

- **Newgrange** (Slane, County Meath): Don't miss this one. It really is mind-blowing. Ireland's best-known prehistoric monument is one of the archaeological wonders of western Europe. Massive and mysterious, it was built as a burial mound more than 5,000 years ago. It's not one for claustrophobics but, if you're lucky, your guide will reenact the solstice light display inside the burial chamber. ☎ 041/988-0300. See p. 137.
- **Dunluce Castle** (Bushmills, County Antrim): These ruins are great. Really, really great. See them at sunset and they appear as if from a film set, teetering on the top of the cliffs, black against the orange sky. Walk the 5km (3-mile) route up from Portrush to get yourself in the mood. ☎ 028/2073-1938. See p. 480.
- **Skellig Michael** (The Skellig Islands, Iveragh Peninsula, County Kerry): Two crags jutting out of the violent sea acting

as an eerie home to monastery ruins and thousands of gannets. The biggest isle, Skellig Michael, is ridiculously steep—the whole land mass is one sloping cliff face, with disused buildings perched precariously on its sides. Catch a boat across.

- ☎ 066/947-6306. See p. 293 and 294.
- **The Giant's Causeway** (Bushmills, County Antrim): The Giant's Causeway is considered by many to be "The Eighth Wonder of the World." Thousands of hexagonal basalt pillars jut out from the sea all along the shoreline. Together they make a huge plane of geometrically pleasing steps. Has to be seen. ☎ 028/2073-1582. See p. 484.
- **Cahir Castle** (County Tipperary—Southeast Chapter): This medieval fortress features fascinating features of the military architecture, tiny chambers, spiral staircases, and dizzying battlements. ☎ 052/41011. See p. 213.

The Best Brewery & Distillery Tours

- **The Bushmills Distillery** (Bushmills, County Antrim): This is the oldest distillery in the world. It was licensed to distill spirits in 1608 but some say they were churning out alcoholic beverages as early as 1276. Watch and learn as they turn river water into fire water. Free samples at the end. ☎ **028/2073-1521**. See p. 483.
 - **Old Middleton Distillery** (Middleton, County Cork): See the largest pot still in the world—it holds 30,000 gallons of booze—and learn everything you ever wanted to know about whiskey but were afraid to ask. Many of the original buildings from 1825 remain, including mills, corn houses, and a water wheel. And, yes, you get a glass of whiskey at the end of your tour. ☎ **021/4613594**. See p. 261.
 - **Guinness Storehouse** (Dublin): Ah, yes, we thought you'd be interested in this one. Founded in 1759, the Guinness Brewery is now world famous. Explore
- the Guinness Hopstore, Gilroy Gallery, and then comes the good bit: Stop in at the breathtaking Gravity Bar where you can grab a glass of the black stuff in this glass-enclosed bar 60m (200 ft.) above the city. ☎ **01/408-4800**. See p. 96.
- **The Old Jameson Distillery** (Dublin): This museum tells the history of the stuff known in Irish as *uisce beatha* (the water of life). What you get is a film followed by a whiskey-making exhibition and right-in-front-of-your-eyes demonstrations. Finally, get your gob around the stuff itself and see what you think. Pretty good, eh? ☎ **01/807-2355**. See p. 98.
 - **St. Francis Abbey Brewery** (Kilkenny City): This brewery in a 12th-century abbey serves up free samples in the summer (Smithwick's, a popular local ale, is produced here). ☎ **056/772-1014**. See p. 226.

The Best Pickup Spots

- **The Fly** (Belfast): If you're in Belfast and want to pick up someone half decent, The Fly is the place to head. Attracting a mix of up-for-it young professionals and non-skanky students, the vibe is fun-luvin' if a bit cheap and trashy but, hey, what's wrong with that? Hard-nut bouncers ensure there won't be any problems when you make a pass at someone else's girlfriend/boyfriend. ☎ **028/9023-5666**. See p. 432.
- **Bambu Beach Club** (Belfast): Belfast natives say this is the place to go if you like sluts. So, there you have it, what further recommendation could you possibly need? ☎ **028/9046-0011**. See p. 435.
- **Milk** (Belfast): If you're in the Northern Irish capital and want to get intimate with someone who isn't off their head, and perhaps even attractive, try Milk. You'll need to look good to get noticed here. It's one of *the* hottest dance clubs in town and hosts all the top international DJs. Bump and grind your way into someone else's affections. ☎ **028/9027-8876**. See p. 434.
- **Bruxelles** (Dublin): One of Dublin's late-night bars. Pile in with a crowd of well-lubricated and friendly locals. It's not a beautiful place, but it's very popular with the natives. Somewhere to get off your face and embrace an Irish boy or girl you've never met before. Fantastic. ☎ **01/677-5362**. See p. 79.
- **Copper Face Jacks** (Dublin): This is *the* Dublin pickup joint. Everybody here is on the make and image is all—it's not how smart you are that counts; it's how good

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you look. The young crowd (most are in their early 20s) are here to chat, drink, and—most importantly—meet members of the opposite sex. ☎ **01/475-8777**. See p. 79.

- o The Old Oak** (Cork, County Cork): The Oak packs out at the weekends and is considered a bit of a meat market—all those young fillies aren't wearing skintight jeans for nothing. Even if you don't pull, it's a friendly crowd, downing beer as U2 blasts out from the speakers. ☎ **021/427-6165**. See p. 240.
- o Padraigs Bar** (Galway): Galway's bars are notoriously friendly but if you're still desperate when the clock strikes 12, mosey on down to Padraigs where you'll find a bunch of hearty, salt-of-the-earth types exuding 80-proof perfume from every pore. Nice. It's down on the docks and a little sketchy, but if you can't pull one of the motley assortment of natives staggering in for "just the one more" you surely are a lost cause. Not one for girls

on their own. ☎ **091/563696**. See p. 153.

- o Sister Sara's** (Letterkenny, County Donegal): Sister Sara's draws partygoers in from across the local region usually keen for action of all sorts. Top nights are the commercial dance parties on the weekends and the wild Tuesdays and Thursdays when the students gather. There's usually some sort of drinks promotion every night of the week, making the crowd even more friendly. ☎ **074/912-2238**. See p. 383.
- o Earth Nite Club** (Derry, County Derry): Derry's top club is hugely popular with students from the nearby college and passing travelers. In fact, at the end of the night, you're likely to see almost everyone you took a passing fancy to earlier in the evening, turning up here. The music ranges from R&B to hip-hop and cheesy house. The clientele are notoriously youthful and up for whatever the DJ throws their way, and a lot more besides. ☎ **028/7136-0556**. See p. 470.

The Best Tours Worth Taking

- o A Paddywagon Tour** (countrywide): All aboard the big green bus for a hedonistic tour of Ireland with a bunch of other 20-somethings and a 100% Irish tour guide who's usually 100% up for fun. Billing themselves as "luxe budget tours of Ireland," they're a great way to get to know other travelers and are gentle on the wallet, too. Tours range from a 4-day weekend bender for £229 to a 10-day All Ireland tour for £309. All include beds, food, and entrance fees. A great way to get started. www.paddywagontours.com.
- o A Free Derry Tour** (Derry, County Derry): Community-based tours of the city from a Republican perspective. Get the real lowdown on the historic persecution of Ireland's Catholic population, the IRA,

Bloody Sunday, and the city's moves toward peace. Highly recommended. ☎ **0781/208-4903**. See p. 472.

- o A Tour of West Belfast** (Belfast): There are various ways of touring the city's troubled West Belfast Area. You can either take a Black Taxi Tour (☎ **07751/565359**), which—like it says on the tin—carries you around the area in a black cab; or you could explore the urban jungle with a Belfast Safari (☎ **028/9022-2925**); or wander around with a member of the Republican community who has spent time locked away as a political prisoner (☎ **028/9020-0770**). All will give you the lowdown on sectarian violence in the district and show you the

"peace" wall and murals, plus tell you all the stuff you never heard on the news.

See p. 441.

- ◉ **A Titanic Boat Tour** (Belfast): The mighty *Titanic* was built in Belfast. It took 1 year to design and another year to build. The Lagan Boat Company takes passengers on a boat tour right up to the original slipways that launched the tragic sinker into the River Lagan and on to meet her icy reaper. ☎ **028/9033-0844**. See p. 441.
- ◉ **A Historical & Mythological Cycling Tour** (Northern Ireland & the Republic of Ireland): A fantastic weeklong tour encompassing the legends and myths of both Northern Ireland and the Republic, taking in the Mourne and Cooley mountains, as well as Newgrange and the Hill of Tara, before finishing off in Drogheda. It's

a great way to get a taste of the North and the South and an insight into all that divides and unites them. Unfortunately it ain't cheap at €1,200 but it does include bed and board. ☎ **041/685-3772**. See p. 450.

- ◉ **An Outback Ireland Surf Tour** (Counties Galway & Clare): A beginners' surf tour starting off at the famous slow-rolling beach break at Lahinch in County Clare. An hour and a half of individual instruction is followed by a full day of surfing. The tour includes a beach barbecue lunch and a scenic return through the desolately beautiful landscape of the Burren. Of course, it would be plain rude not to stop at a pub or two on the way home. ☎ **091/84001**; ☎ **086/814-2661**. See p. 160.

The Best Places to Avoid the Crowds

- ◉ **The Burren** (County Clare): This extraordinary landscape looks like something from another world—desolation and beauty combined in a killer cocktail. If looking out at this moonscape doesn't fire up your soul, you're possibly not a real human being. Ponder on the vastness of time as you meander between sheets of rock created about 300 million years ago. And you won't really be alone; some of Ireland's rarest creatures—including pine martens, stoats, and badgers—hang out here. See p. 335.
- ◉ **Mourne Mountains** (County Down): A stunning collection of 12 peaks over 600m (2,000 ft.) including the hefty Slieve Donard, which at 839m (2,796 ft.) is Northern Ireland's highest mountain. Surrounding it are gentle rolling hills and lush majestic vistas, with more than enough barren stretches of uninhabited wilderness to discover the poet within. If

you do go up here alone, better watch out as the weather can turn pretty nasty in the mountains. See p. 489.

- ◉ **Connemara National Park** (County Galway): One of the best national parks in all of Ireland: over 2,000 hectares (4,940 acres) of still glacial lakes, towering mountains, and granite moorlands. Wild, barren, and almost eerie at times, a drive through this strange landscape will take your head places it has never have been before. Not a place to get lost hiking. See p. 169.
- ◉ **Slieve League** (County Donegal): The cliffs of Slieve League are the highest in all of Europe, rising dramatically up from the turbulent Atlantic. Take in their knock-out nature from one of the view points or head out for a lonesome walk across the cliff tops. Guaranteed to make you tingle from your heart to your toe-tips. See p. 380.

The Best Oddities to Check Out

- o **Oliver Plunkett's Head** (Drogheda, County Louth): Yes, it really is a human head. Little Irish children would be brought here to see the mummified head of this 17th-century saint as a day out on their school holidays. It sits in a sealed glass container and is strangely serene but still really quite weird. Treat yourself. See p. 131.
- o **Ferret Racing** (Nohoval, County Cork): At Claybird you can watch furry little rodents Max, Champ, and his friends race each other down a track while you place bets. If that's not your bag, there are various shooting sports on offer, too. Something to get acquainted with the ways of the Irish countryside. ☎ 021/488-7149. See p. 258.
- o **The Wolfe Tone** (Letterkenny, County Donegal): Now, you're not going to want to spend all night in this bar, but if you're in the area do stop by. It is one of the most bizarre bars in Ireland. A full-on lesson in the history of the Republican struggle replete with a hunger strikers' corner and the medals of Irish revolutionaries. Needs to be done. ☎ 074/912-4472. See p. 383.
- o **Dzogchen Beara Retreat** (Centre Castletownbere, County Cork): A small town with a very un-Irish attraction: a secluded Tibetan Buddhist retreat overlooking the ocean. Sign up for a number of seminars all aimed at attaining "rigpa" or intelligence and awareness. Damn fine idea. ☎ 027/73032. See p. 265.