

EXPLORE: IRELAND

Northern Sights

An amble through Northern Ireland.

From the legends preserved by medieval bards to the anecdotal musings known as *craic*, there's always a tale being spun in Ireland. Northern Ireland is no exception. This region of the Emerald Isle has a unique history, but the locals' friendly temperament is the same found in all Irish people, and the great value you'll find during your trip is an anecdote worth sharing. Imagine this sabbatical:

When you booked a surprisingly affordable flight to Ireland, you knew that this trip would be different. The plan was to have no plan, to simply go where the Irish winds swept you. As haphazard as your itinerary seemed, the primary goal was to return home with a story. And as you step out of Belfast International Airport, you're determined to meet that goal. The second-largest city on the island after Dublin, Belfast is known for its shipbuilding past, and was the birthplace of the fated R.M.S. Titanic. You wander over to Queen's Quay, where the **Belfast Titanic Maritime Festival** is hosting a seafood cooking demo. You meet a man visiting from Dublin, and decide to put your plan into action: wherever in Northern Ireland he suggests, you'll go. When he recommends the **Glens of Antrim**, your story begins.

The Glens of Antrim consist of nine wooded valleys that branch out from the Antrim Plateau to the coast. Mentioned in many an Irish folk song, the Glens are known for their outstanding natural beauty, and you admit that they live up to their reputation. You cross paths with a hiker and strike up a conversation. She tells you that she just hiked from the coast, which reminds her of the ocean views in her home town of Portrush, northwest of the Glens. If you're looking for the next stop in your journey, she says, **Dunluce Castle** is a must.

The castle was built in the thirteenth century by Richard Óg de Burgh, known to most as the Red Earl of Ulster. Surrounded by extremely steep drops on either side, the castle is an impressive feat of medieval architecture. As you're gazing at the structure from a nearby bluff, you run into a fellow sightseer, who you

learn is from Belfast. You implore her to share her favorite Northern Ireland sights, and she says that you simply cannot miss the **Giant's Causeway**.

A seaside collection of some 40,000 interlocking basalt columns, the Giant's Causeway is the product of an ancient volcanic eruption. Of course, inhabitants of medieval Ireland had their own explanation: Finn McCool, the mythological giant, built the causeway to use as stepping-stones while on his way to Scotland. As you scale the causeway, you meet a couple heading in the opposite direction. When you ask where they're coming from, they explain that they're on a cultural tour of the north, and they've just arrived from the **Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge** a little farther down the coast.

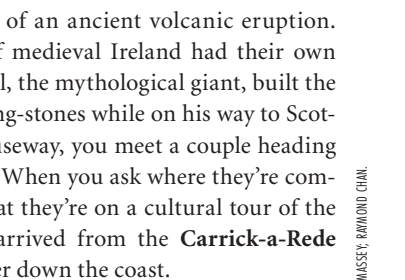
The bridge is much higher than the couple described! Fishermen are believed to have been erecting rope bridges to the small island of Carrick for more than three hundred and fifty years, in search of undisturbed schools of salmon. Far sturdier bridges are now installed every year, but a bit of bravery is still required. As you make it to the other side, your heart pounds, and you feel the same exhilaration that you imagine generations of Irish have experienced before you. It's in that moment that Ireland's story becomes your own.

No matter where in Ireland you begin and end your travels, it's the narrative you compose along the way that makes this island the legendary place that it is. And Ireland's great value makes the tale that much sweeter. On the island of a hundred thousand welcomes, any path you choose will be a memorable one.

Find the countless unforgettable and affordable opportunities that Ireland has waiting for you at discoverireland.com.



Clockwise from top left: the Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge; the Giant's Causeway; Dunluce Castle.



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