

## TRAVEL

Near Dublin's  
fair cityBy JUILENE OSBORNE-MCKNIGHT  
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James Joyce's "dear, dirty Dublin" is not as dirty as it once might have been, but it is a hurdy-gurdy modern city filled with swift-moving cars and Dubliners on "mobiles" – the Irish word for cell phones. If you grow tired of the hectic city pace, there are several locations within a one hour's drive of Dublin that can take you to quiet gardens and even into the ancient past.

Ten minutes north of Dublin by train is Malahide. A little village on an estuary of the sea, Malahide offers quiet walks by a tidal bay and a charming Norman castle that was owned by a single family – the Tailbois or Talbott family – for eight hundred years. The castle is haunted, of course, by a tiny spirit named Puck, who was once the castle dwarf and fool, and who possesses his own pint-sized door in the wall. Even the castle docent swears to his repeated presence.

Ghosts aside, you should gather your courage to drive a car out of Dublin, where you can venture even further afield and into the ancient past of Ireland.

Powerscourt Gardens, an hour south of Dublin, have been voted one of the top three gardens in all the world and the reputation is richly deserved. Here you can climb a stone tower, ramble through a traditional Japanese garden, linger by ponds and fountains or even contemplate a dog cemetery with generations of headstones for four-footed friends. Blooming mountain laurel here are as tall as trees.

During the period when England ruled Ireland, Powerscourt was the estate of an English viscount. His stately mansion now houses wool and handicraft shops as well as a restaurant with an outside eating terrace that gazes out on the Wicklow Mountains.

Approximately forty minutes further south is the ancient monastery of Glendalough, one of the earliest sites of Irish Christianity, founded by St. Kevin (Caoimhin in Irish) in the sixth century. Truth be told, Kevin didn't really want to found a monastery, he wanted to be a hermit.

However, followers trailed him into the Wicklow mountains and eventually he ended up founding an entire monastic city. Here there is a bell tower, several perfect churches, and a cemetery full of mysterious gravestones. Don't miss the glorious hike to the Upper Lake of Glendalough that takes you through green forest full of fairy ferns and places you at a lake perfectly situated between two mountains.

Want to travel still further back in time? Then drive an hour west of Dublin to the Boyne Valley. Here you can visit the Hill of Tara and the passage graves of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth.

The hill of Tara was the seat of the High King of Ireland as far back as the third century A.D. The hill is now a windswept height from which you will swear that you can see all of Ireland. At the crest of the hill is a single stone called the Lia Fail. Legend has it that this stone sang out when the rightful king of Ireland was crowned. Now, hopeful tourists clutch it, hoping for a song.

Nearby, on the elbow of Ireland's Boyne River, are passage graves from prehistoric Ireland. Built somewhere between 3200 and 3800 B.C. – much older than the pyramids of Egypt – these passage graves descend into the Earth along darkened stone hallways. They are aligned with the turning seasons, filling with sunlight at winter solstice. We don't know who built them or why, but the spiraling art carved onto every rock surface speaks to a deeply spiritual and seasonal people.

There is much to love in Dublin — Guinness and Temple Bar, St. Patrick's Cathedral and the Book of Kells — but the real heart of Irish history, the most ancient of sites and stories, are outside the city, but just within reach.

Juilene Osborne-McKnight's forthcoming book is *The Story We Carry in Our Bones: Irish History for Americans* from Pelican Publishing. It is now available for pre-order from amazon.com.



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