

# Dublin

Éire's capital stands splendid in its grey soberness, but as **Albert Ernrooth** discovers, the city of James Joyce, Bram Stoker and Handel's first *Messiah* is as rich and smooth as a good Guinness

Few people would challenge the idea that Dublin's most memorable architecture is Neoclassical, Georgian and Victorian. To put it plainly; most historic buildings look British. On first impression the British and the Irish seem to have so much in common, but you only need to listen to their traditional music, their way with words and visit their pubs to realise that the Irish people have a strong sense of self, perhaps even a stronger sense of nationhood than ever before.

For three decades, while the sectarian violence was going on in Northern Ireland, the Irish government was reluctant to celebrate the 1916 Easter Rising against British rule in Ireland. Marking the Insurrection could have been interpreted as condoning the actions of the IRA in the North. But 18 years have now passed since the Good Friday Agreement was signed and the Irish now feel free to mark and celebrate the rebellion that set them on a path to independence.

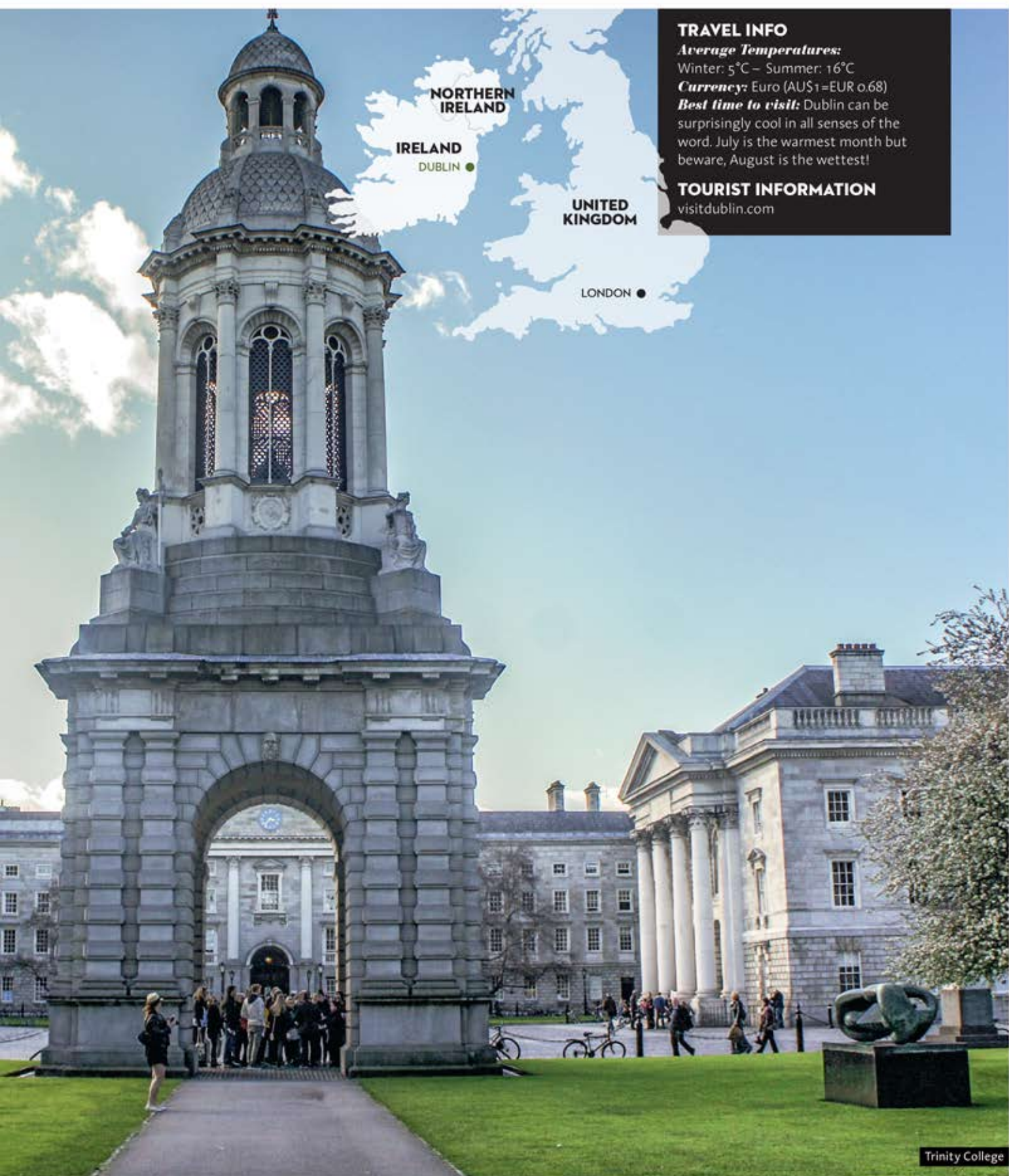
The Rising itself began on Easter Monday April 24, 1916 with the rebels under the command of the socialist leader James Connolly occupying the General Post Office (GPO) in the centre of Dublin, which for six days became their headquarters. In the heavy fighting that ensued the iconic GPO building was gutted as were many of the buildings on the elegant Sackville (now O'Connell) Street thanks to a British gunboat. The massive GPO was eventually rebuilt in its former

glory and in a recently opened exhibition space you can see an immersive experience of the Easter Rising and its aftermath.

When you get back onto Dublin's main thoroughfare (O'Connell Street) cross into Abbey Street near the River Liffey. Here you will find, based in a surprisingly low-key building, The Abbey Theatre, Ireland's National Theatre. The Abbey and the Gate Theatre have played an essential part in Ireland's ability to punch above its weight on stage. The Gate Theatre at the top of O'Connell Street is famous for giving actors like Orson Welles and Michael Gambon their first break and they have championed Samuel Beckett's work like no other company. The theatre auditorium is built into the historic Rotunda (maternity) Hospital. Classical music is no longer heard at the Rotunda public function rooms but once upon a time great soloists like Liszt, Thalberg, Paganini and the Irish composer John Field came here to put their instrument through its virtuosic paces.

It is time to head out west along the River Liffey. Go directly to gaol. Do not pass Go. I have visited many gaols in Australia but Kilmainham Gaol is definitely out of the ordinary. Throughout its 130 years as a prison many leading figures of Irish nationalism were imprisoned and executed here. During the first half of the 19th century, more than 4,000 prisoners passed through Kilmainham awaiting transportation to Australia. Overcrowding became a





NORTHERN  
IRELAND

IRELAND  
DUBLIN ●

UNITED  
KINGDOM

LONDON ●

## TRAVEL INFO

### *Average Temperatures:*

Winter: 5°C – Summer: 16°C

***Currency:*** Euro (AU\$1=EUR 0.68)

***Best time to visit:*** Dublin can be surprisingly cool in all senses of the word. July is the warmest month but beware, August is the wettest!

## TOURIST INFORMATION

[visitdublin.com](http://visitdublin.com)

Trinity College

## Where Handel invented Messiah

It was the Viceroy of Ireland who invited Handel to Dublin in 1742. The composer stayed for four months and premiered *Messiah* in Neal's Musick Hall. The demand for tickets was so high that ladies were asked not to wear hoops in their petticoats while men were requested to attend without swords. Today, the arched entrance to the Hall on Fishamble Street is the only tangible link with the glorious past.

Dublin's other musical hero is the composer John Field (1782-1837), who as a pianist inspired both Chopin and Liszt. He settled in Russia but toured Europe extensively and is credited with inventing the piano nocturne.



Handel's *Messiah* received its second performance at London's Foundling Hospital

problem during the Irish Famine and after the Rising hundreds of men and women were incarcerated here.

The unlawful trials of the leaders of the Rising led to the execution of 14 men in the stone breakers' yard of the prison. James Connolly, who had been wounded in the fighting, was taken from the hospital, strapped in a chair just inside the yard and shot mercilessly. The secrecy and the haste with which the sentences were carried out horrified ordinary Irish people and turned the rebels into martyrs. "A terrible beauty was

**"JAMES CONNOLLY WAS TAKEN FROM THE HOSPITAL, STRAPPED IN A CHAIR AND SHOT"**

born" (to quote WB Yeats' famous poem) and the vision of an Irish Free State caught on.

The tour of the gaol put me in a sombre mood which I hoped to relieve with a visit to a church. Christ Church Cathedral was founded by a Hiberno-Norse king in the 11th century. The Musicians' Corner pays respect to the many organists and cathedral musicians that have worked here over the centuries. The church choir is famous for taking part in the world premiere in April 1742 of *Messiah* with Handel conducting. The two concerts took place opposite the cathedral in a venue on Fishamble street (see above). A bit further up the road, lovers of Irish blues should take note of Rory Gallagher Corner. This is the Temple Bar

district and with its narrow and cobbled streets, many pubs and arty shops it is a firm favourite with tourists.

Head south-east to the magnificent Trinity College founded by Queen Elizabeth I. To see the Treasury and legendary *Book of Kells* may require some queuing, but the Old Library with its 64-metre Long Room and Ireland's iconic ancient harp is well worth the wait. From here you can continue to make your way by foot to the National Concert Hall.

South of Trinity College you arrive in an area steeped in Dublin's literary heritage and blessed with Georgian architecture splendid in its grey sobriety. James Joyce and some of his characters are associated with three pubs on Duke Street. Oscar Wilde lived in Merrion Square as a child, hence the reclining statue in the park opposite. A bit further up on your right is Leinster House, the former Ducal Palace, which since 1922 has been the seat of the Irish Parliament. You now have the option of visiting two legendary pubs. Toner's on Baggot Street is a former grocer's and the only place where Yeats ever drank.

If it's tin whistles, *bodhrans* and *uilleann* pipes you want, O'Donoghue's on Merrion Row offers musical sessions nightly. In the cosy front bar The Dubliners honed their skills in the 1960s. This former spice shop has hosted many other local musicians of renown – people like Christy Moore, Phil Lynott and The Fureys. Get in early or you'll be listening from outside. Just around the corner is St. Stephen's Green and if you fancy some cocktails in a grand setting try the Shelbourne Hotel where the Irish constitution was drafted. In a house just across on Kildare Street Bram 'Dracula' Stoker was born.

The National Concert Hall is just down the road and its main auditorium is practically the only venue in Dublin with an acoustically adjusted environment for a large symphony orchestra. This is the home of the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra and they have very little competition in Ireland. It is unfortunate for Irish classical music buffs, but many promising classical musicians opt to study and find employment in the UK or further afield. The classical music scene in Dublin may be disappointingly small but then there are plenty of excellent alternatives on offer in other, sometimes more traditional musical genres.

Should your visit coincide with the odd ray of sunshine, head south to the charming seaside town of Dalkey (25 minutes by DART rail). George Bernard Shaw had fond boyhood memories of growing up here and James Joyce taught unsuccessfully at a local school. Today music celebrities like Enya, U2's guitarist The Edge and Bono reside in Dalkey and neighbouring Killiney. From a hill in Dillon's Park there is a sweeping view across Dublin Bay, and an even more spectacular panorama towards Killiney Bay and the Wicklow Mountains. Straight in front of you is Dalkey Island with its 9th-century church, its fearsome goats and the defensive Martello tower.

From Dalkey it is only a half-hour walk to the Martello tower in Sandycove where the opening chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses* takes place. The small museum's *pièce de resistance* is Joyce's battered classical guitar. A good singer, Joyce frequently quoted traditional Irish songs in his novels where he also makes many references to operas. ●