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SEPTEMBER 15, 2013

# AMERICAN WAY

AMERICAN AIRLINES + AMERICAN EAGLE

## Dear Old Dublin

Ireland's capital city welcomes everyone — even a writer with no guidebook

\*DUB\*

Strolling down CANNON STREET in

CHARLESTON,  
SOUTH CAROLINA

SALUTING  
OUR TROOPS  
(pg. 72)

TWICE MONTHLY

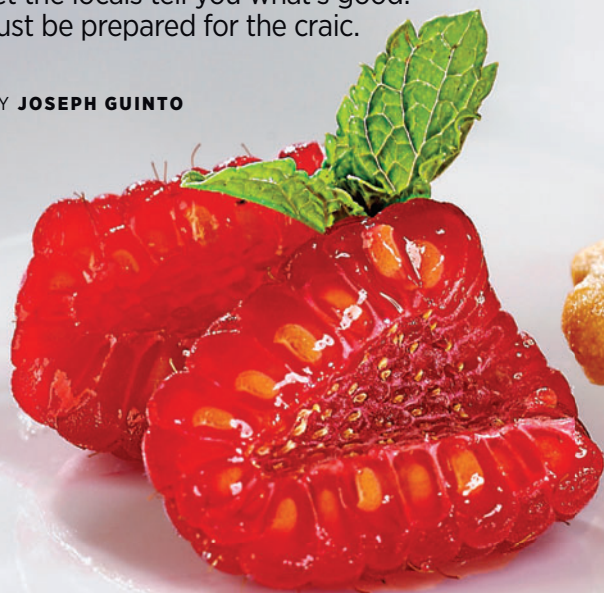


# LOCAL FLAVOR

For a true, authentic experience in

**DUBLIN**, leave  
your guidebooks at home and  
let the locals tell you what's good.  
Just be prepared for the craic.

BY **JOSEPH GUINTO**





**DRINK IT IN:** Art Tea at The Merrion hotel — home to the largest private art collection in Ireland — includes this pastry dish (left), inspired by one of their works. Guinness flows freely at area favorite The Temple Bar (below).



 For more information on visiting Ireland, go to [www.ireland.com](http://www.ireland.com)





**T HIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE THE EASY PART:** Drink a beer in Dublin. Not just any beer: Guinness, the dark, stout beer that has been brewed in Dublin since 1759. Arguably the most famous beer brand in the world. ¶ And yet, I've screwed it up. At the suggestion of a lifelong Dubliner, I've come to the Dawson Lounge, which proclaims itself to be the smallest pub in this city of 1.27 million people and 1,000 pubs, and ordered a pint of Dublin's signature brew. Now, there's a system for properly pouring a Guinness: The bartender — or "barman," as the Irish say — makes two pulls on the beer tap. The first fills the pint glass three-quarters of the way. Then the beer is left to settle. A second pull finishes it with a thick, creamy head. Mess with that system, and you'll have a foamy mess instead of a thin, quaffable beverage. ¶ After I order my pint, the barman makes his first pull, then sets the Guinness down and collects my

hills and craggy seashores. As one resident tells me, "Your people come to Dublin to go to the Guinness brewery and get a motor coach to the country. You think Dublin isn't the real Ireland."

That sounds like a dare. So, challenge accepted, I've set out to get to know the real Dublin — and maybe a bit more about myself. And the best way for a guy having trouble just drinking a Guinness to do that? With the help of a few locals.

**It's a brilliant,** cloudless day when I meet my first expert Dubliner. The city is in the midst of an unusually sunny and warm stretch — so unusual I've even heard reports of people being hospitalized for severe sunburns and heatstroke. The high temperature during my five-night stay: 68 degrees.

Braving this "heat wave" in a checkered blazer, Pat Liddy, a 69-year-old former marketing executive and newspaper columnist who is considered the foremost authority on all things Dublin and who runs his own walking-tour company, meets me in the lobby of the Westbury Hotel, where I'm staying. We take off for Grafton Street, a tony and touristy pedestrian lane that is Dublin's main shopping drag. "You must have coffee

payment. As he turns to get my change, I pick up the beer. A well-dressed Dubliner sitting next to me gasps.

I slam the pint glass back down, sloshing its contents. "Oh," I say. "I'm supposed to wait." The Dubliner looks me over, then leans in and says in a brogue-laced whisper, "This is a lesson. Waiting for your Guinness to settle is how an Irishman learns patience."

It's an embarrassing way to learn. But, then, I've come to Dublin for some education — to discover a side of myself I've neglected.

Ask about my heritage, and I'll likely say I'm Sicilian. But I'm also half Irish — an even split. So it's shameful that although I can point you to the best restaurant in Bologna and the greatest wine bar in Rome, I know little about Ireland and even less about Dublin.

On Dublin, I'm probably not alone. More than 850,000 Americans come to Ireland every year, but, despite Dublin's being home to 40 percent of Ireland's population, many tourists zip through the capital city on their way to Ireland's postcard-perfect rolling



**THE PLUCK OF THE IRISH:** Dublin authority Pat Liddy (opposite page, far left); Tony Grafton Street; Ireland's national sport of hurling takes center stage at Croke Park; a statue that immortalizes Irish poet Oscar Wilde, part of the country's literary tradition



in Bewley's and see the stained glass on the second floor," says Liddy, pointing to a two-level coffee shop with a narrow balcony that has been here since 1927. Minutes later, we arrive in St. Stephens Green, where a sculpture memorializes The Great Irish Famine of the mid-1800s that killed more than 1 million people and prompted another million to leave the country.

"Are you of Irish descent?" Liddy asks, repeating a question I've heard several times since arriving in Dublin. When I explain my Sicilian-Irish heritage he says, "That's ... unique," then launches into a discussion of how, around 1900, some Sicilian immigrants took over organized-crime networks that had earlier been established in the U.S. by some Irish immigrants. I could ask if this is an implication that I'm a criminal, or I could say nothing. I choose the latter, mostly because I'm not a talker. But Dubliners are. Roddy Doyle, a Dublin author, recently put it this way: "Dublin is not a place. Dublin is a sound ... the sound of people who love talking, people who love words, who love taking words and playing with them, twisting and bending them ..."

Whether that chatter is the cause or the effect of the city's great literary tradition, I

don't know, but Dublin boasts four Nobel Prize winners for literature. James Joyce, author of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, wasn't among them, but he is celebrated here. So Liddy takes me to Sweny's, a former apothecary that opened for business in 1847 and that Joyce wrote about in *Ulysses*. Volunteers now run Sweny's as a reading room for Joyce devotees.

We walk on to Trinity College Dublin, a school founded in 1592 by Queen Elizabeth I. There, facing the busy traffic on Dame Street, Liddy points out several "must-see" sites in every direction, each of which touches on a different part of a 1,200-year stretch of Dublin's history, from the Viking settlements in the year 800 to the Irish War of Independence that ended in 1921. "I've been spending the better part of the past three decades trying to convince people to spend three or four nights in Dublin so they can see these sites," Liddy says. "Some of the most significant events in the history of all Ireland happened right here on the streets of Dublin."

**"Dawn-E-gawl! Dawn-E-gawl!"** People are chanting this all around me inside Croke Park, a modern, 82,300-seat stadium, as we

watch very pale men in very short shorts play Ireland's national sport: hurling. I'm here on the advice of Peter MacCann, the general manager of the swanky Merrion hotel. "If you want to really understand Ireland," MacCann tells me, "you have to see hurling. It's the fastest game in the world."

He's right about the pace. It's so break-neck, in fact, that it takes me until halftime to grasp the basics, which are, roughly: On a field more than twice the size of a football field, a bunch of guys with curved sticks try to hit a rubbery, baseball-sized ball either into a soccer-style net or through some goalposts. Meanwhile, a bunch of other guys with curved sticks whack at whoever has the ball or bodycheck them to the ground. It's hectic. It's violent. It's fantastic.

It's also not for profit. Admission fees go to the Gaelic Athletic Association, which funnels money back into developing the sport through youth leagues and building stadiums like Croke Park, the biggest in Ireland and the fourth-largest in Europe. The American capitalist in me wonders: Who would agree to be hit with a stick *gratis* in front of thousands of paying customers?

MacCann offers an explanation. The game, more than 2,000 years old and once





**CELTIC CHARM:** The Temple Bar in the Temple Bar Cultural Quarter; the Long Room in Trinity College Dublin's Old Library; Wicklow Mountains National Park, about an hour outside of Dublin

a means of settling disputes, is played “for pride in your county and love of the sport.”

Okay, but whom to root for? Today’s match is between the counties of Donegal and Roscommon. I go for Donegal (“Dawn-E-gawl!”) only because I know the Irish ballad “Mary from Dungloe.” It begins, “Oh, then fare ye well, sweet Donegal.”

Fare ye well, indeed. The final scoreboard reads: “Donegal 3-20, Roscommon 3-16.” I think that means Donegal won.

**In two old** carriage houses behind a row of the red-brick, Georgian buildings that are an iconic part of center-city Dublin sits L’Ecrivain Restaurant, a fine-dining, Michelin-starred restaurant that’s been serving local dishes since 1989. Here, I ask an awkward question of executive chef and co-owner Derry Clarke: Why are people so leery of the, ahem, cuisine of Ireland? “Irish food has had a bit of a ... reputation,” Clarke says diplomatically. “Ireland was a poor country for a very long time. So here, food was a fuel, not a passion or an enjoyment. That’s changed.”

The shift began in the late 1960s, when Myrtle and Ivan Allen launched a local-food movement from their County Cork inn and

restaurant, inspiring Irish farmers to produce better goods. That, in turn, inspired chefs like Clarke to showcase what can come from that Irish farmland and to connect with the people who work the land — or the sea. Today, he knows almost all of his suppliers personally — down to the fisherman who reeled in some monkfish off the Dublin coast that’s on the menu the night I visit. “It’s very good,” Clarke promises.

It’s also, as the Irish say, “quite dear,” an adorable phrase meaning “expensive.” But, as Americans say, you get what you pay for. And at L’Ecrivain, you get complex dishes that are at once avant-garde and traditionally Irish, like grass-fed lamb with a seaweed tapenade or the stupefyingly good Guinness-and-treacle bread.

Most Dublin restaurants here aren’t cooking at L’Ecrivain’s level but, to my shock, there are many excellent meals to be found. Clarke’s advice: Seek out eateries that, like his, celebrate Irish farmers, fishers and ranchers. “Provenance is the key,” he says.

**American Airlines** offers nonstop service to **Dublin** from **Chicago O’Hare** (seasonally) and **John F. Kennedy** (year-round) international airports.

**The next morning**, I have breakfast with Helen Kelly, a leading genealogist in Dublin. Kelly has put hundreds of people on the path to uncovering their Irish roots and has been especially busy in 2013, which tourism officials have dubbed “The Gathering” — a year-long effort to get local communities all over Ireland to reach out to Irish émigré families all over the world.

As far as I know, the folks in County Tipperary haven’t sent me an invitation, but that’s probably because, until my meeting with Kelly, I thought my Irish ancestors came from County Cork. After Kelly inspires me to do a little digging, I discover my family was actually from Tipperary. Coincidentally, this was also the ancestral home of the man who founded Dublin’s Shelbourne Hotel in 1824. And Kelly, who is the Shelbourne’s “genealogy butler,” says I must visit the Shelbourne’s Horseshoe Bar, which has been serving drinks since the 1870s. “That’s where the beautiful people are,” she says.

The night I visit, the bar crowd is indeed fetching. But, then, as I’m sampling from the bar’s well-crafted cocktail list, I’m surrounded by three native Dubliners who aren’t quite so easy on the eyes: Uncle Ray and his nephews, Donal and Tomas. At least,





**TASTES OF THE TOWN:** Authentic sounds (and stouts) abound at O'Donoghue's. Irish food gets an upgrade at L'Ecrivain.

\*DUB\*

# Doing Dublin

## SEE

**National Museum of Ireland:** This museum, like all the museums the Irish government runs in Dublin, has free admission. The archaeology wing is a highlight, featuring a plethora of artifacts from 300 years of Viking settlements in Dublin.

[www.museum.ie](http://www.museum.ie)

**Temple Bar Cultural Quarter:** Chockablock with artist galleries, tourist shops, restaurants and pubs, this area maintains the original, narrow street plan from medieval times. At night, it can get bawdy.

[www.dublinstemplebar.com](http://www.dublinstemplebar.com)

**Christ Church Cathedral:** This church was completed in the late 1180s by the Norman invaders who finally pushed out the Vikings. The tomb of Strongbow, a nobleman who helped build the church, is here — but Strongbow isn't in it.

[www.christchurchdublin.ie](http://www.christchurchdublin.ie)

**Kilmainham Gaol Museum:** The ghosts of the Irish War for Independence are still said to haunt this hulking prison, built in 1796.

[www.heritageireland.ie/en/dublin/kilmainhamgaol](http://www.heritageireland.ie/en/dublin/kilmainhamgaol)

**Book of Kells:** This gospel manuscript was illustrated elaborately by monks around the year 800 and is housed in the Old Library at Trinity College Dublin. The library's dark-wood, main chamber, the Long Room, is worth the visit on its own.

[www.tcd.ie/library/bookofkells](http://www.tcd.ie/library/bookofkells)

## EAT

**Rustic Stone Restaurant:** This restaurant from TV chef Dylan McGrath would be at home in San Francisco, especially with its raw menu. Don't miss the Irish crabmeat wrapped in a thin slice of mango or the soups served in shot glasses.

[www.rusticstone.ie](http://www.rusticstone.ie)

**Fade St. Social:** You can hit the GastroBar, which serves "Irish tapas"; the main room, which serves flatbreads and a few traditional, meaty Irish mains; or just have a drink at the rooftop bar.

[www.fadestreetsocial.com](http://www.fadestreetsocial.com)

**L'Ecrivain Restaurant:** Michelin-starred, high-end food. In season, the foie gras with rhubarb puree is a standout.

[www.lecrivain.com](http://www.lecrivain.com)

## DRINK

**The Stag's Head:** Sample from the extensive collection of Irish whiskeys at this spot, where you'll find original Victorian-era decor and some of the friendliest, most efficient barmen in Dublin.

[www.stagshead.ie](http://www.stagshead.ie)

**O'Donoghue's:** This weathered pub where the Dubliners got their start in the '60s still has some of the best music in the city.

[www.odonoghues.ie](http://www.odonoghues.ie)

**The Horseshoe Bar:** Unique cocktails aren't always easy to come by in this pint-and-whiskey city, but there's some fine mixology going on in this bar inside the historic Shelbourne Dublin hotel.

[www.marriott.co.uk](http://www.marriott.co.uk)

## STAY

**The Westbury Hotel:** Rooms are spacious and well appointed, and the location right off Grafton Street is unbeatable.

[www.doylecollection.com](http://www.doylecollection.com)

**The Merrion:** Serious luxury in a series of Georgian town houses where the British general who bested Napoleon Bonaparte at Waterloo was born.

[www.merriionhotel.com](http://www.merriionhotel.com)

## DAYTRIP

**County Wicklow and Glendalough:** Just an hour from Dublin, the camouflage-colored mountains of Wicklow rival the scenery anywhere in Ireland, as does Glendalough, a valley town with two lakes and the spectacular remains of a medieval, monastic settlement. It's all best seen on foot.

Book a tour with Walkabout Wicklow.

[www.walkaboutwicklow.com](http://www.walkaboutwicklow.com)

I think it's Tomas. It might be Seamus. The nephews, both in their 50s, introduce themselves in heavy Irish accents that have been soaked with several pints of something. "We're havin' a wake," Tomas/Seamus says — Uncle Ray buried his wife just the day before.

Tomorrow, Tomas/Seamus heads back to Rochester, N.Y., where he's lived for the past several years. "My brother, the rich American," Donal jabs. "He's got to live there so he can have a fancy car and fancy house." If that seems an impolite thing to say at a wake, well, it gets much worse. Unprintably worse. For an hour, the brothers hurl insults at each other and at Uncle Ray, who occasionally bursts into song.

I've never been to a wake this jovial or this surly. "It's just the craic," Donal explains. Come again? "Craic is conversation. It's what an Irishman does in the pub." I tell him that I'm Irish but that I would have no sense for where the line is between the craic and fighting words. Maybe because I'm Sicilian too.

"Look, it's easy," Donal replies. "If something gets real, then this is the rule: You know where the door is, now get out."

Speaking of getting out, the nephews suggest I get out of the city since the countryside is so nearby. The sea cliffs of Howth are reachable by train in just 25 minutes, so I make that my plan for the next day. The mountains of Wicklow, just an hour's drive south, are also mentioned. As it happens, I'd been to Wicklow that morning, led on an astonishingly beautiful eight-mile hike by Dairine Nuttall, a guide from a company called Walkabout Wicklow. "That's a bloody lot of effort to see some trees," Donal says.

Since more of the craic is coming my way, I order a glass of Powers Irish Whiskey. Next thing I know, Donal, who is about 6-foot-1, jabs at me about my height, which is, ah, somewhere south of his. At that moment, either the whiskey or the spirit of Patrick Ryan, my great-great-grandfather from Tipperary, takes over, and I shout back my own unprintably filthy rejoinder.

There's a pause. For the first time, I'm hearing the sound of no one speaking in Dublin. Then, Uncle Ray, Donal and Tomas/Seamus all break out into hysterical laughter. "Hey, Sicilian guy," Donal says to me. "You've just learned the craic!" 🍷

**JOSEPH GUINTO**, a freelancer in Washington, D.C., is thinking about changing his middle name to Ryan.