

Celebrating Dublin

Joanne Poh explores one of Europe's most understated cities and pays homage to its most well-known natives

DUBLIN is all too often passed over by travellers in favour of the more glamorous English and Scottish cities on the other side of the Irish Sea.

This neglect has perhaps given rise to the charmingly unassuming demeanour of the Irish capital city and its inhabitants. Cobble streets give way to quietly stunning architecture and historical sites are marked with unobtrusive plaques.

Dublin's understated character belies the fact that it has been home to several of the English-speaking world's most well known individuals. England may have the Beatles, but Ireland does have celebrities of its own.

Visitors to Dublin will have the rare chance to touch base with three of Ireland's most famous natives other than the leprechaun.

Hanging out

Visit the James Joyce Centre to pay your respects to the 20th century writer. It organises exhibitions, reading groups and lectures to educate the unenlightened.

Alternatively, you may prefer to pay homage to him by knocking back a Guinness at Mulligan's on Poolbeg Street, a historical pub that has existed since 1732 and was one of Joyce's favourite haunts.

Pubs are a way of life in Ireland. More than just purveyors of cheap beer, they are integral to the fabric of Irish society as coffee shops are on our own shores. Virtually every Irishman is a regular at a local pub, free of pretensions and steeped in cheap grub and ice cold beer.

While Mulligan's has inevitably become a wee bit more modern over the past few centuries, it continues to uphold its reputation as the quintessential classic Irish pub.

Take a seat at the bar counter and be thrilled at the authenticity of the dim lighting and sombre Victorian furniture before the self-effacing humour of the refreshingly down-to-earth bartender brings you back to the present.

The Wilde life

Take a stroll outside the Oscar Wilde House by Merrion Square, where the famously flamboyant author himself resided from the age of one to 24.

The building is a fine example of Georgian architecture and not the only one once occupied by a famous person. Writers William Butler Yeats and

George William Russell lived a stone's throw away and, together with Wilde, contributed to the area's reputation as one of Dublin's most fashionable.

A short walk away is the Trinity College Dublin, which Wilde attended from the age of 17 to 20. One can only congratulate Wilde on the convenience of selecting a college just a 10-minute walk away from home.

Ireland's first university was founded in 1592 and is housed amidst sprawling lawns in some of Dublin's most prominent buildings. The Old Library houses the Book of Kells, an ancient Biblical manuscript created between the sixth to ninth centuries and arguably Ireland's most revered national treasure.

Inspired by the literary air of the last few hours, you may decide to visit the wonder that is the Chester Beatty Library, a museum dedicated specifically to the art of the printed word.

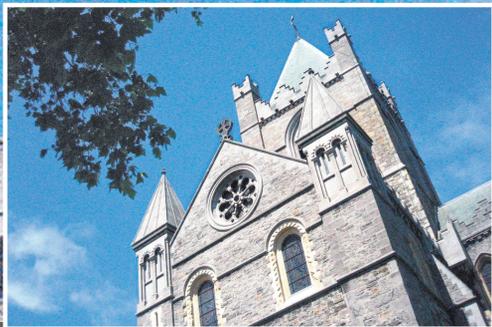
Voted European Museum of the Year in 2002, the museum offers a spellbinding peek into books, manuscripts, prints and paintings from all over the world. Situated in the suitably regal Dublin Castle, Egyptian papyrus scrolls, Islamic calligraphy and medieval Biblical manuscripts are displayed alongside Japanese woodblock prints and Chinese textiles.

Legendary heroine

While visitors from Singapore might be forgiven for thinking that Molly Malone is the name of a franchise of Irish-themed pubs, to the Irish, she is the heroine in a folktale about a beautiful young fishmonger who even has her own folk song.

Although considerably less cerebral than our two famous figures above, she is no less celebrated. The basium statue of Molly Malone on perpetually congested Grafton Street is a tourist magnet. Sculptor Jeanne Rynhart reportedly endowed the iconic statue with an extra large bosom and low cut dress to more accurately reflect reality in the seventeenth century. Those must have been good times indeed.

Continue on down Grafton Street, one of Dublin's busiest shopping areas, and gawk at the buskers and street performers before ducking into one of the many European chain stores lining the street. Everything from Marks and Spencer to Topshop lies in wait. Go on, let yourself go. Oscar Wilde would approve.



Magnificent architecture abounds in Dublin.



On the banks of the River Liffey, which flows through the centre of Dublin.



Trinity College Dublin campus.



Pubs are a way of life in Ireland.



On the streets of Dublin.

Getting there
Singapore Airlines flies to Dublin Airport 2-3 times daily, transiting in London on Aer Lingus, in about 17 hours 25 minutes to 20 hours 40 minutes.



Dublin Castle, which houses the Chester Beatty library. PHOTOS: JOANNE POH

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