

CROSSING OVER:
Take a selfie on
Ha'penny Bridge



The joys in blue

Eugene Costello takes his daughter Evie to discover Dublin's cultural and historical delights

“WHEN I die, Dublin will be written in my

heart.” So said Ireland's greatest literary hero, James Joyce, though, like so many Irish writers, he became an exile, living in Trieste, Croatia, Paris and finally Zurich, where he died in 1941, aged 58.

It's not just the author of Dubliners for whom the city holds a fascination – my parents were country folk and, now well into their eighties, still talk of the excitement they felt as youngsters at the prospect of ‘going up to Dublin’. Over the past couple of decades, Dublin has become a buzzy kind of place that draws tourists from all over the world. But whether you live in the city, or are visiting from ‘the country’, it's a city that merits a few days' exploration.

The first thing to do is get your accommodation sorted. I planned a few days in the capital with my 12-year-old daughter, Evie. We settled upon the Clayton Hotel Cardiff Lane – it's in a great location, a short walk from Sir John Rogerson's Quay on the east side of the city centre and just a few minutes' walk from Pearse station on the DART (Dublin's light rail service). It's a comfortable, four-star hotel that caters for business types during the week and tourists at weekends, no doubt drawn by the swimming pool in the basement, as well as the location.

The first thing we did was to buy a Leap Visitor Card, to take care of all our public transport travel. We went for the three-day option for unlimited use of DART and bus, including getting from the airport into town. The second essential preparation for our three-day jaunt was to invest in the Dublin Pass that allows you fast-track entry to an enormous range of attractions, if you're serious about your sightseeing. It's around €130 for dad and daughter for the three days, but worth every penny for getting under the skin of the city.

On our first morning, it was off to the Sir John Rogerson's Quay to board a pleasure boat run by Dublin Bay Cruises. We struck lucky with the weather during our visit, so I was not the only sun-blushed, fair-skinned Celt on board as we pootled off around the bay, first down to Dún Laoghaire, an altogether more upmarket place than

when we used to roll off the ferry from Holyhead on our return ‘back home’ for summer in the 1970s. We clambered back aboard and up to Howth. It's a beautiful trip around the hilly promontory, with a smattering of fine houses at the clifftop of Howth Head, before rounding into Howth Harbour and the picture-postcard prettiness of Howth village. A stroll along the quayside and its numerous restaurants

was as much as we needed to work up an appetite and we settled on the restaurant at The Market at Beshoffs.

We used our Dublin Pass for a hop-on, hop-off city tour

I went for a plate of oysters and a seafood platter the size of Evie's head, that came with a piece of beechwood smoked salmon, an Armada of prawns, some calamari, some crab... they'd trawled the Atlantic, the Med and the Irish Sea (specifically, Dublin Bay) for me, so the least I could do was to Hoover up every last morsel. A friend had joined us and the bill

for the three of us was €100, including a couple of pints of the black stuff, which seemed more than reasonable. Another stroll after lunch took us as far as the Bloody Stream, a picturesque pub by Howth station. By now, it was a blazing hot day, so a few more pints of the black stuff and a top-up of the Irish tan before jumping on the DART back to Pearse. Heavenly altogether...

The following morning, we used our Dublin Pass to jump on a hop-on, hop-off bus tour. It meanders around the Georgian splendour of the Southside, past Trinity College and St Stephen's Green, up along St Patrick's, Christ Church Cathedral and Dublin Castle, through the tightly-packed terraces of the traditionally working-class neighbourhood of The Liberties. Here, Evie was thrilled to see a horse tethered to a rope on a patch of scrub – some stereotypes are there for a reason, so it would seem. After the Guinness Storehouse brewery experience, we headed up past Heuston station and Collins Barracks (named after Michael, the republican hero), then Phoenix Park. It's a cracking place, all wide boulevards and open spaces – the park is the largest enclosed public space of any capital city in Europe.

Evie was at me to get a move on, as we were heading for the zoo. Regardless of one's views on the ethics, Dublin Zoo

is much less constrained than others, such as the one in London's Regent's Park. Beautifully landscaped, it's more like a cross between a safari park and a zoo. The stand-out for us was the area called African Savanna. Its low walls mean you can get up close to the animals – giraffes and zebras wander around and they share the plain with a large family of rhinos, oryx and what appeared to be a solitary ostrich. We spent three hours here and only left because we had arranged to meet a friend for dinner.

For day three, we wandered along the River Liffey and took the obligatory photos of us on the famous Ha'Penny Bridge, before heading back to EPIC, The Irish Emigration Museum, in the docklands. This is truly a multimedia extravaganza that brings the famine and the diaspora to vivid life in a way that absorbs and fascinates young and old alike. (For what it's worth, Evie's favourite exhibit was the Rogues' Gallery, that evoked such characters as Ned Kelly and Typhoid Mary in a way that was both fun and informative). Then it was off by DART to, first, Bray, a pleasant Victorian seaside resort that is all villas and guesthouses looking out across the Irish Sea.

We then hopped back on the DART for an evening in the lovely village of Greystones. This stretch of the ride is



EXCELLENT:
Burrito Box

one of the most beautiful I know, with the line hewn out of rocky escarpments and across viaducts, clinging to the side of the cliff, with the sea just yards beneath your window. At Greystones we met a pal for a few pints of Guinness in The Beach House, a light and airy boozer overlooking the harbour. We dined on excellent fare from the Burrito Box, a converted horsebox in the boatyard beside the pub, that serves up some of the best Tex-Mex this side of El Paso. As we took in the sunset over the shimmering water, I could only think of the ending of Joyce's Finnegans Wake, bringing the reader and, as with this piece, back to the beginning. Dublin, where journeys begin and end: “along the riverun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us back... to Howth Castle and Environs.”

✦ Eugene Costello is founder and editor of The Curious Traveller. Visit www.thecurioustraveller.co.uk

FAMILY AFFAIR:
Eugene and Evie
explored the
capital by boat



HIDDEN TREASURE:
Howth Harbour



ESSENTIAL DUBLIN GUIDE

- A Leap Visitor Card costs €19.50 for three days' unlimited use of the DART rail system, LUAS (tram) and bus services. Order yours at www.leapcard.ie
- A twin family room in the Clayton Hotel Cardiff Lane costs from €179. Also check other hotels in the group, since there are 18 of them, including two at the airport. For offers, visit www.claytonhotelcardiff.lane.com
- A three-day Dublin Pass costs €89.30 for an adult and €41.80 for a child. Visit www.dublinpass.com
- Aer Lingus flies daily from Kerry to Dublin from €40.99 one-way and from Donegal from €29.99, twice daily, including all taxes and charges. Visit www.aerlingus.ie

CALL OF THE
WILD: Check
out Dublin Zoo



Natural Mourne thrillers



Enjoy the challenge of a rough terrain, says **Daragh Keany**

THE Mourne International Walking Festival celebrates two decades of outdoor enjoyment and discovery next weekend, when this award-winning, three-day annual event returns on Friday June 22.

The festival celebrates the Mourne Mountains area – its sweeping slopes, granite peaks, stunning coastline views, weaving trails and popular rest spots continue to captivate thousands of walkers, hikers and strollers.

This year's special event will feature a range of routes suitable for people who are just starting out, those keen to put their best foot forward, plus more experienced walkers who are used to treading a rougher terrain.

Launched by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, the annual festival welcomes hundreds of individual, group and family walkers of every age and ability. You can choose from nine routes and they have been carefully planned to impress at both low and higher levels.

The Mourne Mountains have already been recognised as the ‘Best Walking Destination’ in Northern Ireland by WalkNI.com, which credits the area for its unrivalled network of paths and tracks, providing walkers with incredible opportunities to explore. The Mourne International Walking Festival has also won the WalkNI ‘Favourite Walking Event’ award for two consecutive years.

The walking festival features a variety of self-guided lowland treks, including more strenuous mountain climbs, ranging in distance from 10km to 40km, so everyone is encouraged to gauge what would be most suitable for them.

There is also a chance to celebrate your walking achievements by attending the special Life and Sole Swing Social Event on Saturday June 23 at McCann's Bar in Newcastle. A tasty hot buffet meal will be provided and a céilí band will be on hand for those still keen to stay on their feet. Visit www.eventbrite.co.uk and key in ‘Mourne International Walking Festival’.

The Mourne International Walking Festival runs from Friday June 22 to Sunday June 24th. Visit www.visitmournemountains.co.uk



ADVENTURE:
Choose from
nine routes