

Dublin, Edinburgh, Malta

■ Dublin

Brief history of Dublin

Dublin is the largest city in Ireland and capital of the Republic of Ireland. The earliest reference to Dublin appears in the writings of the Greek astronomer and cartographer Ptolemy around the year A.D. 140. The Vikings arrived in the 10th century and established an important trading post. Christchurch Cathedral was built after the arrival of Christianity in the 13th century. Many of Dublin's principal buildings and its main street layout date from the end of 18th century and the streets of Georgian four-storey townhouses are a distinctive feature of the city's architecture.

The laid-back Irish capital is a somehow harmonious blend of Victorian pubs, rows of elegant Georgian town houses in silvery stone, and glittering modern buildings. With a permanent population of nearly 1.7 million, more than a third of the Irish people either live in or near this city, which explains the great number of restaurants, bars, and shopping opportunities.

Tourist attractions in Dublin

1. Farmleigh House

Built in the late 18th century, Farmleigh was purchased by Edward Cecil

Guinness, a great-grandson of Arthur Guinness, in 1873. The house contains many beautiful features including the Main House area (a fine example of Georgian-Victorian architecture), the Sunken Garden, the Walled Garden, the famous Clock Tower and the Lake and The Benjamin Iveagh Library. The library holds some of the finest examples of Irish bookbinding from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.

2. Science Gallery at Trinity College

Dublin's Science Gallery is a world first. The collision of science and art is the key DNA strand of this international success story now being cloned worldwide.

3. National Museum of Ireland

The Museum displays examples of Celtic and Medieval art, such as the famous Ardagh Chalice, the Tara Brooch and the Derrynaflan Hoard, and the finest collection of prehistoric gold artefacts in Europe.

4. St Patrick's Cathedral

Built between 1220 and 1260, the Cathedral is one of the few buildings left from the medieval city of Dublin. Today, St Patrick's is the National Cathedral of the Church of Ireland and still the largest cathedral in Ireland.



5. National Botanic Gardens

The Gardens, 19.5 hectares on the south bank of the Tolka River, contain many attractive features such as an arboretum, sensory garden, rock garden and burren area, large pond, extensive herbaceous borders, and an annual display of decorative plants including a rare example of Victorian carpet bedding.

6. The National Gallery of Ireland

Today the collection includes over 2,500 paintings and some 10,000 other works, including watercolours, drawings, prints and sculpture. It also houses a renowned collection of Irish paintings. The gallery's highlights include works by Vermeer, Caravaggio, Picasso, Van Gogh and Monet.

7. The Book of Kells

The Book of Kells was written around the year 800 AD and is one of the most

beautifully illuminated manuscripts in the world. Its 680 pages of vellum contain the Latin texts of the Four Gospels. It was written around 800 AD by Irish monks and later buried in the ground for fear of the Vikings. After being eventually rediscovered, it was deposited for safe keeping in Trinity College Dublin in 1653.

8. National Aquatic Centre

AquaZone, at the National Aquatic Centre, is one of the most innovative water parks in Europe. It has Europe's biggest and best water rides and attractions.

9. Dublin Zoo

See many rare and exotic animals living and roaming in a wide variety of natural habitats.

10. Guinness Storehouse

Located in the heart of the St James's Gate Brewery, which has been home to the black stuff since 1759, this massive seven-storey building, a former Guinness® fermentation plant, has been remodelled into the shape of a giant pint of Guinness®. The highlight for many visitors is the Gravity Bar® where they receive a complimentary pint of Guinness® and a chance to relax and enjoy the breathtaking 360-degree views across Dublin City.



■ Edinburgh

Brief history of Edinburgh

It was during the Dark Ages that the name of Edinburgh – at least in its early forms of Dunedin or Din Eidyn (‘fort of Eidyn’) – first appeared. Castle Rock, a strategic fort on the top of one of the area’s extinct volcanoes, served as the nation’s southernmost border post until 1018, when King Malcolm II established the River Tweed as the permanent frontier. In the reign of Malcolm Canmore (1058-93), the castle became one of the main seats of the court, and the surrounding town, which was given privileged status as a royal burgh, began to grow around it.

Medieval Prosperity. Robert the Bruce granted Edinburgh a new charter in 1329, giving it jurisdiction over the nearby port of Leith, and, during the following century, the prosperity brought by foreign trade enabled the newly fortified city to establish itself as the permanent capital of Scotland. Under James IV (1488-1513), the city enjoyed a short but brilliant Renaissance era.

Renaissance to Reformation and modern times. This period came to an abrupt end in 1513 with the calamitous defeat by the English at the Battle of Flodden, which led to several decades of political instability. In the 1540s, Henry VIII’s attempt to force a royal union between England and Scotland led to the sack of Edinburgh, prompting the Scots to turn to France for help: French troops arrived to defend the city, while the young queen Mary was dispatched to Paris as the promised bride of the heir to the royal throne, the Dauphin. While the French occupiers succeeded in removing the English threat, as Catholics, they themselves antagonised the locals, who had become increasingly sympathetic to the ideals of the Protestant Reformation. When the radical preacher John Knox returned from exile in 1555, he quickly won over the city to his Calvinist message. James VI’s rule (1567-1615) saw the



foundation of the University of Edinburgh in 1582. It is in the second half of the 18th century that Edinburgh achieved the height of its intellectual influence, led by an outstanding group that included David Hume and Adam Smith. On July 1st 1999, the Queen formally opened the parliament – its first since 1707 – temporarily housed in the twin-towered Church of Scotland Assembly Halls on the Mound.

On 18 September 2014 Scotland was asked to vote in the Scottish independence referendum. However, the “No” side won, with about 55% voting against independence.

Tourist attractions in Edinburgh

Of all the cities in the world, Edinburgh – the capital and cultural centre of Scotland for over 500 years – is situated in one of the most beautiful locations. Sometimes described as the “Athens of the North”, this famous festival city boasts Greek-style columns on Calton Hill, a wide choice of museums and art galleries, as well as a host of historical gems.

Edinburgh actually consists of two cities: the Old Town, dominated by a medieval fortress, the castle, set on high basalt rock, which overlooks the densely populated labyrinth of narrow alleys and rows of houses; and the New Town, with grand squares, wide avenues and elegant façades.

Some of the finest public and commercial monuments of the New-classical revival in Europe survive in the city, reflecting its continuous status as the capital of Scotland since 1437, and a major centre of thought and learning in the 18th century Age of Enlightenment, with its close cultural and political links with mainland Europe.

1. The Royal Mile

The Royal Mile refers to the road linking Edinburgh Castle and the Palace of Holyroodhouse. It is lined with charming townhouses and historic landmarks. Some of the most popular attractions are to be found at the upper end of the Royal Mile – commonly called Castle Hill – and include Outlook Tower and the Camera Obscura with its outstanding views, the Tolbooth (St John’s Highland Church) with the city’s tallest church tower, Gladstone’s Land, a six-story merchant’s house with pretty ceiling paintings and original furniture, and Lady Stair’s Close, home to the Writer’s Museum displaying manuscripts, portraits, etchings and memorabilia of the poet Robert Burns and writers Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson.

2. Edinburgh Castle

Scotland’s most famous landmark, Edinburgh Castle is one of Britain’s most visited tourist attractions. Highlights include the One o’clock Salute from Half Moon Battery (cannon fire commemorates the tradition of helping ships synchronise their clocks), the impressive Scottish National War Memorial and the stunning collection of Crown Jewels housed in the Royal Palace. Another notable feature is the Stone of Destiny (aka, the Stone of Scone),



famously stolen by Edward I and placed under the English throne in London – only returned to Scotland 700 years later, in 1996.

3. Palace of Holyroodhouse and Holyrood Abbey

The Palace of Holyroodhouse is the Queen’s official Edinburgh residence and has frequently been at the centre of Scottish history: it was where James II and James IV were both married, where James V and Charles I were crowned, and where “Bonnie Prince Charlie” held court in 1745. When the Queen’s away, public access is permitted to the stunning Historic Apartments (former home of Mary Queen of Scots) and the State Apartments, famous for their fine furnishings, tapestries and plasterwork.

4. Holyrood Park: Arthur’s Seat and the Salisbury Crags

At 820 ft, Arthur’s Seat is the highest point in the 640-acre Holyrood Park. The spectacular sightseeing views from the top encompass the whole city all the way to the mouth of the Forth. Another easy climb are the dramatic Salisbury Crags, a series of 151 ft cliffs adjacent to Arthur’s Seat.

5. St Giles Cathedral

Consecrated in 1243, St Giles Cathedral is Edinburgh's principal church. The almost 50 m high central tower with its eight arched buttresses forms a huge crown (the Crown Steeple).



6. The Royal Botanic Garden

Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Garden is the second oldest such garden in Britain. Within its magnificent 70-acres are a herbarium and Britain's biggest palm house, a tropical house with exotic orchids, an alpine house, a terraced moorland garden, a heather garden, and an extensive arboretum with rare giant trees from the Himalayas, North America and China.

7. National Museum of Scotland

Since opening in 2011, the National Museum has become one of Scotland's most popular attractions with close to two million visitors each year. It incorporates collections from a number of Edinburgh's older museums. Highlights include national archaeological collections, medieval artefacts, plus displays focusing on natural history, geology, art, science and technology. Among the 16 galleries, the most interesting of more than 8,000 artefacts on display include Dolly the sheep, the world's first cloned mammal, as well as some of Elton John's more elaborate stage costumes. Traditional museum displays include material from Ancient Egypt, and the infamous Maiden, an early form of guillotine.

8. Princes Street

Busy Princes Street is Edinburgh New Town's main thoroughfare. It extends for almost a mile and is lined with colourful gardens and elegant shops, including the tradition-conscious Jenners of Edinburgh, the world's oldest independent department store. House of Fraser's at the western end is also quite grand, while Princes Mall, with its small shops set among fountains and cafés, offers goods of varying quality. Princes Street's historic landmarks include the 200 ft tall Sir Walter Scott Monument, and the David Livingstone Memorial, a memorial to the missionary and African explorer.

9. Art City: The National Galleries of Scotland

Paintings of Scotland's leading historic figures from the 16th century to the present day can be seen in the National Portrait Gallery, one of Edinburgh's three major art galleries.

10. The Royal Yacht Britannia

One of Edinburgh's newest attractions is the Royal Yacht Britannia. Over the years, this luxurious vessel has hosted numerous famous people from around the world, although none perhaps as famous as the Queen. After more than 40 years serving the Royal Family, the 60-year-old vessel was sent to Leith, Edinburgh's port area, as the centrepiece of the Britannia Visitor Centre. Once aboard, you'll learn about the history of this and other Royal Yachts as you explore the ship's five main decks. Highlights include the Royal Apartments and bedrooms, the lovely sun lounge, and the onboard Royal Deck Tea Room.



■ Malta

Brief history of Malta

Malta has a long and rich history, with evidence of habitation going back to the Neolithic era (4th millennium BC). The country boasts some of the world's most ancient standing buildings (the Neolithic temples), and its strategic location and good harbours in the middle of the Mediterranean have attracted Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Normans, Crusaders, the French and finally the British, whose colonial period lasted until 1964. The Knights of the Order of St John of Jerusalem, also known as the Knights Hospitallers and Knights of Malta, took over sovereign control of Malta in 1530, and by 1533 the Order had built a hospital at Birgu to care for the sick. In 1565, Suleiman the Magnificent, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, mounted a great siege of Malta with a fleet of 180 ships and a landing force of 30,000 men. In response, the Order, with only 8,000 defenders, drove the Ottoman Turks away after a hard siege of several months. After this, the Order founded the city of Valletta on a peninsula, and fortified it with massive stone walls, which even withstood heavy bombing during the Second World War. By 1575, the Order had built a new large hospital known as the Grand Hospital or Sacred Infirmary, in order to continue with its primary mission of caring for the sick. In 1798, the French, under Napoleon, took the island on 12 June, without resistance, when the Grand Master of the Order capitulated after deciding that the island could not be defended against the opposing French naval force. French rule lasted a little over 2 years, until they surrendered to the British Royal Navy, under Admiral Nelson's command, in September 1800.

Great Britain formally acquired possession of Malta in 1814. The island staunchly supported the UK through both World Wars. The island was awarded the George Cross for its heroic resistance during the Second World War. An image of the cross is displayed on the flag.



Tourist attractions in Malta

Malta is the most southerly European country, being 58 miles south of the tip of Sicily and just 180 miles from North Africa. Malta is not a single island, but an archipelago of five islands, Malta, Gozo, Comino, Cominetta and Filfla. Only the first three are inhabited, with Cominetta and Filfla being quite small.

Malta is characterised by the rugged coastline and low hills. There are no rivers on the island. The coastline is peppered with small coves and caves, many only reachable by boat or climbers, but there are several good beaches catering for the summer tourists.

Malta's capital is the grand fortress city of Valletta.

1. Valletta

Described by UNESCO's World Heritage website as "one of the most concentrated historic areas in the world", Valletta is Malta's capital city squeezed into less than one square kilometre of space. From the rich St John's Co-Cathedral, to the pristine 300 year old Manoel Theatre, restaurants, arts, monuments, traditional balconies, shops and malls, museums, forts and bastions, flea markets... Valletta has got it all.

2. Mдина

It is Malta's medieval jewel. Its distinctive narrow winding streets sheltered by imposing walls of nobles houses are simply beautiful and suggestive to stroll in. Hardly any signs of modern development are noticeable and the lamp-lit evenings are surreal.

3. Sun, sand and sea

Even though Malta has a multitude of historic and cultural gems, the sunny weather, some of the cleanest sea anywhere and idyllic beaches remain a main draw for tourists. There are the obvious popular sandy beaches as well as the rugged, but no less beautiful, rocky coasts.

4. Gozo

It is a smaller rural island to the north of Malta, just a half-hour ferry ride away. It is a vivid glimpse into what Malta was up to a few decades ago.

A slower pace of life, welcoming locals, open countryside, raw, rugged coastlines, sleepy unconverted villages and traditional crafts. Gozo's must-see attractions include the Citadella, Ggantija Temples, ta' Pinu Sanctuary and the Dwejra area.



5. Country walks

Spring, autumn and most of winter offer the perfect climate to walk through the rich and varied Maltese countryside.



6. Diving

Thanks to the ideal weather, diving in Malta is an all-year-round sport.

7. Mediterranean dining and nightlife

Malta boasts more than its fair share of inspiring restaurants. Eating the 'catch of the day' under a brilliant night sky is what Mediterranean living is all about.

8. Megalithic temples

These prehistoric monuments are megalithic complexes dating as far back as 3,600 BC. In all, five of these temples are listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites including the oldest known freestanding temples in the world at Ggantija and the underground wonder of the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum.

9. Comino and the Blue Lagoon

Comino is a miniscule island half way between Malta and Gozo. The Blue Lagoon's turquoise waters must be the best spot for swimming and snorkelling anywhere in the Mediterranean.

10. Village religious feasts

The sheer amount of energy, fanaticism and belief that goes into these 'festas' draws in the crowds, both local and foreign.