

Cork named top European destination

Cork city was announced as one of the top 10 European Cities to visit by the Yahoo search engine.

The top ten list was compiled by Yahoo from reviews from the book; '1,000 Great Holiday Ideas'.

The Lonely Planet's 'Best in Travel 2010' also named Cork city as one of the top 10 best cities to visit. Cork continues to be recognised on the worldwide stage as a top travel destination.

The centre of Cork is located on an island between two channels of the Lee River.

City Centre

St Patrick's Street runs through the heart of the city. It offers a host of shopping opportunities and boasts some of Europe's largest retail chains. Oliver Plunkett Street, which runs partly parallel to Patrick's Street, bustles with smaller shops, life and color. Second-hand books, hand-made chocolates, an infinite array of surprises can be found in the alleyways and lanes around this central shopping district. Heading west, one comes to the English Market, the culinary heart of Cork, boasting a huge array of fresh local produce, and tantalising international delicacies. Following St Patrick's Street eastwards leads to the statue of Father Matthew, much respected founding father of the Irish Temperance Movement. Tucked off to the left, one finds the Cork Opera House, venue for national and international theatre, opera, and concerts. The Crawford Art Gallery with its impressive collection to suit modern and traditional tastes is also to be found here. At the other end of St. Patrick's Street lies Grand Parade. A visitor might wish to turn left here, past the cheerful greenery of Bishop Lucey Park, and view the impressive Nationalist Monument, or turn right to ramble along the Coal Quay, with its bustling Saturday open-air market, second-hand shops, and enjoy a pint or a coffee in the spacious, gracious Bodega. One block further west lies North Main Street, and the Cork Vision Centre: situated in the historic St Peter's Church, it offers the visitor the opportunity to really get a feel for the city with a magnificent 1:500 scale model of the whole city.

Further south is the Triskel Arts Centre , a vibrant cluster of gallery, theatre, and drinking spaces, with a Sushi Bar thrown in for good measure. Venturing west, one leaves the inner center of the city, past corner-shops, and pubs, and toward the Mardyke Walk. This delightful stretch, which has been an institution amongst locals for over a century, leads directly to Fitzgerald Park. The Cork Public Museum is situated within the park and offers a wealth of information for those interested in local and national history. Defined by the two channels of the Lee, the city center of Cork has a beauty of its own, easily and best experienced on foot. A stroll along any of the waterways can be surprising and rewarding, while the island itself invites the visitor to lose their way, yet easily to find it again.

North of the City

The "North Side" is defined by hills rising up from the river, and toward the city's more hidden charms. Dominating the landscape is St Anne's Church , the lime and sandstone (two walls built of each) clock tower can be seen from all over the city. One can climb the tower to ring the famous Shandon Bells, and savor the spectacular view from the top. Directly below "the bells" is the old Cork Butter Exchange, now home to the intriguing Cork Butter Museum , and the Shandon Craft Centre. Perched on a more western point of the hill, lies the Cork City Gaol ; this gloomy nineteenth-century prison welcomes the modern visitor with interesting exhibits and audio-visual displays.

On the eastern end, St Patrick's Bridge links the city center with the charming MacCurtain Street, a busy stretch of road offering everything from antiques to ice cream. Worth noting on this street is

the majestic Everyman Palace , venue for local and touring theater productions, and the historic Metropole Hotel , head-quarters for the annual Cork Jazz Festival .

South of the City

The Gothic grandeur of St Finbarr's Cathedral dominates the horizon of Cork's "South Side". This 19th Century Anglican cathedral is as impressive on the inside as the gargoyle clustered exterior. Legend has it that the golden angel, perched on the cathedral's eastern extreme, will blow her horn to announce the ending of the world. In 1999, her two horns were stolen during construction work; they were returned some days later, to the great relief of locals. Nearby, one finds the ruins of the seventeenth-century Elizabeth Fort , a sombre reminder of the Cromwell's era, and the rambling character of Barrack Street, as featured in the film *Angela's Ashes*. The street also offers a number drinking and live-music venues, popular with students of the nearby University College Cork (UCC) . The stately college quadrangle is itself worth a visit, while the fascinating collection of Ogham stones (on public display), and the stained-glass windows of the Honan Chapel, make a visit to the campus an enlightening experience.

The eastern end of the South Side is dominated by the City Hall , from the steps of which President John F Kennedy gave a public address in 1963. To the other side of the City Hall is the bustling docks area, while further out of town parks and walkways follow the river as far as the quaint and curious Blackrock Castle. Currachs (Irish traditional rowing boats), schoolboy eights, and mammoth container ships share this stretch of the Lee, reflecting the tradition and the industry that so define the city.

Beyond the City

Cork also makes an ideal base from which to explore the surrounding area. Buses leave frequently to the famous Blarney Castle. Traditionally, a kissing of the Blarney Stone invests the visitor with the "gift of the gab", though the more reticent guest might prefer a silent stroll in the beautiful surrounding gardens. Cobh (pronounced Cove), is connected by an hourly train to Cork. The Cobh Heritage Centre documents the town's place in history as the departure point for generations of emigrant, commercial and leisure vessels, as well as the last port visited by the ill-fated Titanic. Picturesque, and boasting some of Ireland's finest restaurants, Kinsale is only a short bus-ride from Cork, as is the Jameson Heritage Centre Whiskey Distillery in Midleton. Further afield, the beauties of West County Cork lay just waiting to be discovered.