



The Irish culture has many different meanings. There is no set definition of Irish culture but there are a few symbols which are unique to Ireland. Ireland is often called the 'land of saints and scholars' referring to the golden age of monastic learning, or 'the emerald isle' referring to the green landscape.

## The Irish Flag

The flag was first introduced by Thomas Francis Meagher in 1848 who based it on the French tricolour. However, it was not until after the Easter Rising of 1916, when it was raised above the General Post Office in Dublin, that tricolour came to be regarded as the national flag. The flag was adopted in 1919 by the Irish Republic during its war of independence and subsequently by the Irish Free State. It was given constitutional status under the 1937 Constitution, which established the Republic of Ireland.

The green section in the flag symbolises the older majority Gaelic tradition of Ireland, made up mainly of Roman Catholics. The orange represents the mainly Protestant minority. The white in the centre signifies a lasting truce between the two cultures and living together in peace.

## The Constitution

Bunreacht na hÉireann, the Constitution of Ireland, is the basic law of Ireland. No law can be passed which does not agree with it. The Constitution can be changed only by a referendum in which every citizen of Ireland, over the age of 18, is entitled to vote. The Constitution was passed in a referendum on the 1st July 1937. The Constitution is available in English and Irish at: [www.constitution.ie](http://www.constitution.ie)

## The National Anthem

Amhrán na bhFiann or The Soldier's Song is the national anthem of the Republic of Ireland. The anthem was written in English by Peadar Kearney in 1907, and the Irish lyrics, were written by Liam Ó Rinn. The song became the official state anthem in 1926.

The song is regarded by some nationalists as the national anthem of the whole of Ireland, and it is therefore sung, for example, at Gaelic Athletic Association matches held anywhere on the island. The anthem consists of 3 verses and a chorus but generally only the chorus is sung.

Some Unionists however, reject this use of Amhrán na bhFiann, and at international games played by teams that

represent both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland the song Ireland's Call is sung instead of, or as well as, Amhrán na bhFiann.

## Popular songs

An unofficial anthem which is sung at many sporting events is The Fields of Athenry. It tells the story of a man who is convicted of stealing food during the Great Famine who is convicted and transported to Australia.

## The national symbol

The harp is a symbol of the Irish State. It is used by Government Departments and Offices. It also appears on all Irish coins. The harp is engraved on the seal of office of the President and it is also on the flag of the President of Ireland.

For more information on the flag, constitution, anthem and symbol of Ireland go to [www.taoiseach.gov.ie](http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie).

## The national holiday and the shamrock

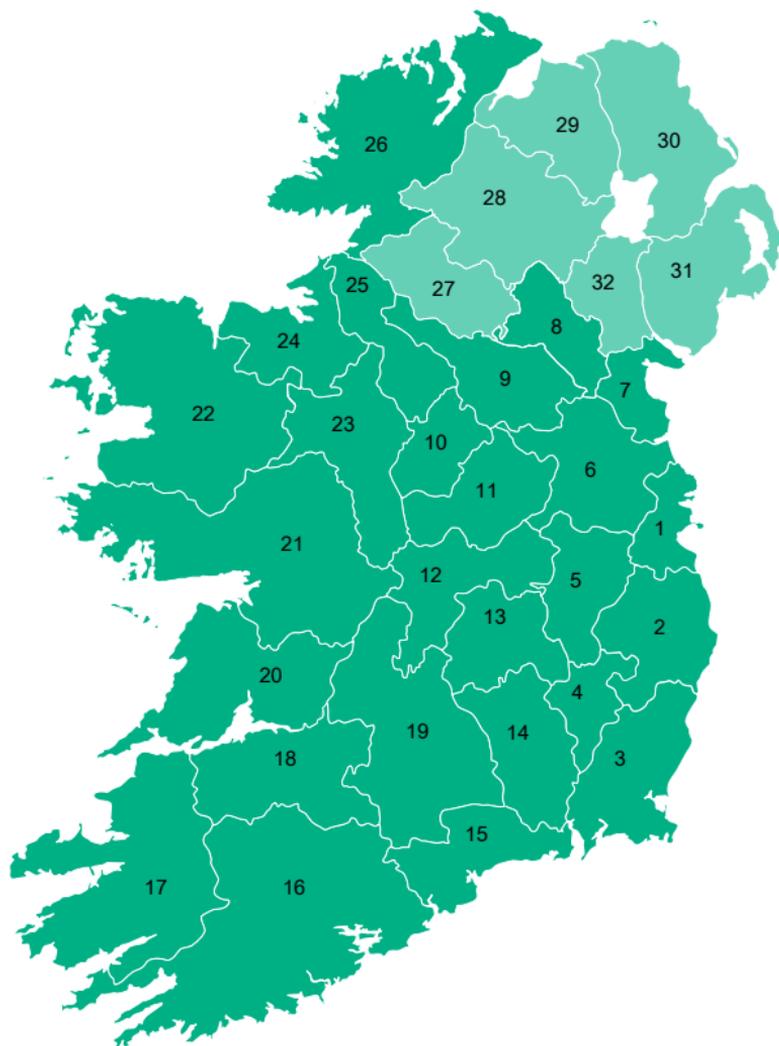
March 17th is St. Patrick's Day and it is the National Holiday in Ireland. St. Patrick is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland and March 17th is the date that St. Patrick is said to have died. St. Patrick's Day parades are held in most towns in Ireland and in a number of countries throughout the world

to celebrate the national holiday. Many people wear a plant called 'shamrock' on St. Patrick's Day. It is an unofficial but perhaps more recognised symbol of Ireland. It is said that St. Patrick used the three leaves of the shamrock to explain the Christian concept of the Trinity.

## Popular Culture

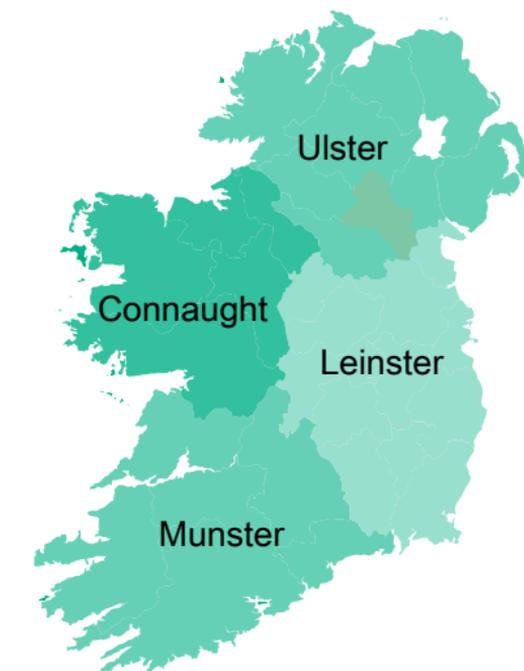
Popular culture in Ireland is very similar to many other Western countries in terms of TV, cinema and popular music and literature. However, one aspect of popular culture in Ireland that makes it somewhat different to other cultures is pub culture.

The term 'pub' refers to a 'public house' or bar. While there is a recognised issue of over-consumption of alcohol in Ireland, pub culture is about more than just drinking. Typically pubs are important meeting places, where people can gather and meet their neighbours and friends in a relaxed atmosphere. The character of pubs varies widely according to the customers they serve, and the area they are in. Since 2004 it is illegal to smoke in an enclosed place of work in Ireland, including pubs.



## Republic of Ireland

- 1 Dublin
- 2 Wicklow
- 3 Wexford
- 4 Carlow
- 5 Kildare
- 6 Meath
- 7 Louth
- 8 Monaghan
- 9 Cavan
- 10 Longford
- 11 Westmeath
- 12 Offaly
- 13 Laois
- 14 Kilkenny
- 15 Waterford
- 16 Cork
- 17 Kerry
- 18 Limerick
- 19 Tipperary



- 20 Clare
- 21 Galway
- 22 Mayo
- 23 Roscommon
- 24 Sligo
- 25 Leitrim
- 26 Donegal

## Northern Ireland

- 27 Fermanagh
- 28 Tyrone
- 29 Derry
- 30 Antrim
- 31 Down
- 32 Armagh

## Geography

Many Irish people view themselves and others in terms of what part of Ireland they are from. Ireland is divided into 32 counties. This is most evident during inter-county GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) matches, where fans dress in the specific colours of their county. The Republic of Ireland consists of 26 counties, and Northern Ireland of six. It is also traditionally divided into the four provinces of Connaught, Leinster, Munster and Ulster. Ulster contains 9 counties, 6 of which are in Northern Ireland and 3 of which are in the Republic of Ireland.

A few important points about Ireland's geography

- Ireland's highest mountain is Carrantuohill in County Kerry
- Ireland's longest river is the Shannon
- Ireland's largest lake is Lough Neagh in Ulster

## Irish society and migration

Traditionally Irish society has been one of emigration. For hundreds of years more Irish people left Ireland than immigrated to Ireland. The most notable periods of emigration were following the famine in 1845 and more recently in the 1950s and 1980s when large numbers of Irish emigrated to look for a better life. This has changed since the late 1990s

when the economy of Ireland improved dramatically. Since then many people have immigrated to Ireland. The Census in 2006 estimated that 1 in 10 people in Ireland were not Irish citizens; this figure included a significant proportion of UK citizens.

Although emigration has been a constant feature of Irish society, the late 1990s also saw a trend of Irish emigrants returning home to live in Ireland. Many millions of people around the world particularly in the UK, USA, Australia, Canada and New Zealand claim Irish ancestry. For many generations most Irish people have had family that live in other countries, something that is now also characteristic of immigrants to Ireland.

## Customs

Like any other country there are customs and traditions which are particular to Ireland.

### Greeting people

Irish people have the reputation of being very friendly. Generally people will shake hands when they meet for the first time. Friends will hug or just say hello. Sometimes people will kiss on the cheek if they know each other well. People

generally make eye contact because it is a sign of trust and that you are interested in what they are saying.

### Time keeping

Sometimes it may seem as if time keeping is not very important in Ireland. Generally when someone arranges to meet you at 8pm this will usually mean 8.15pm or later. Irish people, in general, are very relaxed about time.

### Manners

People will generally say 'please' and 'thank you', for example, when getting off a bus most people will thank the bus driver.

People also usually queue in line and wait their turn, for example, in a shop.

### Travellers

Travellers are an indigenous group who have been part of Irish society for centuries. Travellers have distinct cultural values and traditions as well as their own language, Cant. Historically, Travellers played a role as bearers of culture including music and storytelling. There are approximately

25,000 Travellers in Ireland with many others along with their descendents living in the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Traditionally, Travellers lived by the road side and moved from place to place. Travellers are involved in scrap metal recycling, market trading and horse dealing. Gradually a number of Travellers settled in housing estates but many more continue to live a nomadic life. In 2002 the Irish government made camping on public or private grounds a criminal offence which has impacted on Traveller life.

Travellers have and continue to experience a high level of prejudice and discrimination in Irish society. There are a number of Traveller organisations who campaign for Travellers' rights in Ireland:

Pavee Point

Telephone: 01 8780255

Email: [pavee@iol.ie](mailto:pavee@iol.ie)

Website: [www.paveepoint.ie](http://www.paveepoint.ie)

Irish Traveller Movement

Telephone: 01 67965 77

Email: [itmtrav@indigo.ie](mailto:itmtrav@indigo.ie)

Website: [www.itmtrav.com](http://www.itmtrav.com)

Crosscare Traveller Inclusion

Telephone: 01 8360011

## Media in Ireland

There are four main television channels in Ireland: RTE1, RTE2, TV3 and TG4 (Irish language).

There are a number of national radio stations including: RTE Radio 1, 2FM, Lyric FM, Newstalk, Today FM.

There are 3 national broadsheet papers:

The Irish Times, the Irish Independent and the Irish Examiner

For more about Culture and Society visit our website:

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