

# A BRIEF HISTORY

## and facts about Ireland

Ireland is an island in the North Atlantic Ocean just west of the larger island, Britain, containing Scotland, Wales, and England. The island of Ireland is about the size of the state of Indiana and is divided into two separate countries.

Six counties in the Northeast of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and England are all a part of the United Kingdom. The 26 counties in the South and Northwest of Ireland make up the entirely separate country known as the Republic of Ireland.

- The Irish are one of six remaining groups referred to as the Celts. Within the Gaelic language family, the native Gaelic language spoken in Ireland is Irish. There is also a Welsh language, Scottish language, Cornish language, Manx language and Breton language.
- St. Patrick was a Roman citizen in the 5th century A.D. taken captive as a young man and brought to Ireland as a slave. After his escape he studied in Rome for the priesthood and returned to Ireland to preach Christianity.
- Although the Romans made it all the way to Britain, they never conquered Ireland.
- Viking invaders founded a number of now well-known Irish cities, including Dublin, in the 8th and 9th centuries.
- Prior to the Norman invasion of Ireland in 1169, Ireland was governed by a series of clan systems built on the traditions of Celtic culture.
- Following the Norman invasion, power was gradually consolidated under the English throne. After the Reformation, Penal Laws were established to sharply restrict and even deny political, business, and religious rights to Catholics.
- Protestants and Catholics in Ireland banded together on numerous occasions to attempt to overthrow British rule in Ireland. One such rebellion, the United Irishmen Rebellion in 1798, was immortalized in ballads during the Irish language and music revival of the 19th century.
- When the potato crop failed in the mid-1800s, a million people died of starvation or malnutrition-related diseases. An Gorta Mor, or the Great Hunger, also forced an additional two million Irish to emigrate to countries around the globe.
- The 1916 Easter Rising was the catalyst that sparked the Irish War for Independence, leading to the eventual partition of Ireland and the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922.
- Ireland has produced four Nobel Prize winners in literature as well as many famous authors. Some names you may recognize: W.B. Yeats, Seamus Heaney, George Bernard Shaw, Samuel Beckett, Roddy Doyle, Jennifer Johnston, C.S. Lewis, James Joyce, Oscar Wilde, Lady Gregory, Colm Tóibín, William Trevor, Joseph O'Connor, Edna O'Brien, and Frank McCourt.

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