

Is Northern Ireland beautiful? Do Irish people speak Irish? And what exactly is Gaelic football? Read about Northern Ireland and find out!

Northern Ireland is one of the four countries in the United Kingdom, with England, Scotland and Wales. It is to the north of the Republic of Ireland, on an island next to Great Britain. Around 1.8 million people live in Northern Ireland, which is about three per cent of the population of the UK. The capital city is Belfast. Another name for Northern Ireland is 'Ulster' or 'The Six Counties' because it is made up of six regions or counties.

In Northern Ireland you can find beautiful beaches, forests and mountains. You can visit the Giant's Causeway, a UNESCO World Heritage Site: here, about 40,000 columns were formed after a volcanic eruption. Most of them are hexagonal and some of them are 12m tall. Films and TV series such as *Dracula Untold* and *Game of Thrones* are filmed in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland was a place of conflict between people who wanted to be part of the Republic of Ireland, people who wanted to be part of the UK and people who wanted Northern Ireland to be a separate country. In the 1990s there was an important peace process and the violence and conflict stopped. The Northern Ireland Assembly and the UK Parliament decide on the laws in Northern Ireland.

Language

Nearly everyone in Northern Ireland speaks English. A small number of people speak Irish Gaelic, an old Celtic language which is very different from English. The other regional language is Ulster Scots, a variation of English which is spoken in Northern Ireland and is similar to Scots spoken in Scotland.

Music

You can hear all types of music in Northern Ireland including traditional Irish music, jazz, rock or pop. In summer Belfast has music festivals like Belsonic and Belfast Vital. Many international artists play at these festivals, including bands from Northern Ireland like Snow Patrol, Ash and Two Door Cinema Club.

Sport

Northern Ireland is a popular place to go walking or do outdoor activities such as mountain biking, coasteering (climbing up rocks and jumping into the sea) or zorbing (rolling down a hill in a giant PVC ball). Football, rugby, cricket, hurling (a sport similar to hockey) and Gaelic football are all popular. Gaelic football is similar to rugby because players can touch and kick the ball. For most sports, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland join together in the same team when they play in international competitions. However, football is different and Northern Ireland has its own national team and football league. Some players from Northern Ireland play for teams in the English or Scottish leagues.

Food

The best-known dish from Northern Ireland is the Ulster Fry, which is bacon, eggs, sausages and soda bread. Some versions include tomatoes, mushrooms or baked beans. It's called the Ulster Fry because everything is fried in a pan. It is also eaten with Irish potato bread.

Symbols

St Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland and Northern Ireland. St Patrick's Day, on 17 March, is a very important celebration in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland with parades, concerts, music and dancing. Another important symbol is the shamrock, a green plant with three leaves. It is the symbol of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.