



SUMMER

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ABROAD

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Creativity,  
culture and history pave  
a path from London to Dublin.  
Plus, four European weekend trips  
not to be missed.

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by Shana Ting Lipton photographs by Christian Kerber

# The long journey from Dublin to London has been taken by literary greats ranging from Jonathan Swift to George Bernard Shaw.

And looking out over the pulsing English capital today, it's still easy to understand the lure of such a pilgrimage.

Since 2013, Renzo Piano's 1,000-foot skyscraper The Shard has been London's proudest perch. Although its 72nd-floor viewing platform may be a tourist's first stop, Londoners know that the Shangri-La hotel's 52nd-floor bar offers a special perspective of the often gray but always creatively vibrant city. It's an ideal starting point for a "reverse" land and sea trek from London—a metropolis of golden ages—to Dublin, a city that has weathered Ireland's post-2008 recession and emerged reinvigorated.

A reverence for history paired with the creative drive to keep moving forward are central to this mobile tale. So a predeparture toast at GÖNG Bar, above London's iconic Tower Bridge, seems apropos. Drinks of choice? An Alfred Hitchcock-themed infusion adorned with a silhouette of the English director and the Fleming Sweep, an homage to Sam Mendes (*James Bond*)—both among the lounge's Director's Cut cocktails (some of which levitate; others that come with movie-worthy props).

## LONDON — to — SWANSEA, WALES

Another Bond figure—a bronze statue of Paddington, the traveling Peruvian bear from Michael Bond's children's books—bids travelers farewell by Platform 2 of his namesake railway station. The whistle blows and the train is off, barreling through Reading and green South West expanses, punctuated by red brick houses and flinks of cows. The crossover into Wales is clear when a sign for Newport station, translated into Welsh as "Casnewydd," slides into view.

The final stop, Swansea, is the second-largest city in Wales. Its Maritime Quarter—consisting of pristine, flat, sweeping beaches—is a favorite spot for destination weddings. Parts of the marina are also in the throes of development.

Likewise, with hotelier and Swansea City Football Club director Martin Morgan at the helm, the Morgans hotel, a former port authority building

cornerstoned in 1902, has become a trendy luxury boutique hotel. Its rooms take their names, such as Admiral Fitzroy and Zeta, from vessels once registered at the docks. Not only is the middle name of Catherine Zeta Jones (a native of nearby Mumbles) said to have originated in the ship, but she and Michael Douglas have stayed at the hotel.

Dylan Thomas may, however, be Swansea's most enduring star, as evidenced by a statue of the poet near the National Waterfront Museum and Dylan Thomas Theatre. The Dylan Thomas Centre, which features permanent and temporary exhibits, was opened in 1995 by U.S. President Jimmy Carter, a Thomas fan who fished in West Wales. Travelers can follow in the poet's footsteps—from his birthplace in the Uplands suburb to the Norman-built Swansea Castle, whose courtyard housed the *South Wales Daily Post*, where he was a junior reporter.

"There's a huge writing community in this area," says Jo Furber, literature officer of the Dylan Thomas Centre. "And there are loads of events in different pubs." No Thomas tour would be complete without popping into his beloved watering holes, like the traditional pub in the Queens Hotel and the hip, quirky 17th-century No Sign Wine Bar for (liquid) literary inspiration: One of its popular local ales is on tap.

## SWANSEA — to — WEXFORD, IRELAND VIA FISHGUARD

Dylan Thomas may have metaphorically sung "in his chains like the sea," but after a scenic two-carriage train ride to Fishguard Harbour, the open waters beckon travelers aboard a Stena Line ferry. For £18 extra, you can access the private Stena Plus lounge, where comfy armchairs, bottomless glasses of wine and tea treats sweeten the sea crossing, which can be rough if weather doesn't comply. The more common ferry ride from Holyhead to Dublin tends to be smoother, but travelers may miss out on the South East Irish scenery—verdant stretches of County Wexford.

After docking in Rosslare, it's a 15- to 20-minute drive to Rathaspeck Manor, a meticulously restored luxury Georgian B & B nestled within its own (publicly accessible) par 3, 18-hole golf course.



OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The Holly Bush Pub in London; Kenwood House and Gardens in London; Paddington Station; Hook Lighthouse in Wexford; Gilbert Scott Bar at London's St. Pancras Renaissance Hotel; The Maritime Quarter in Swansea, Wales; Morgan's hotel in Swansea; The ferry from Fishguard Harbour, Wales, to Rosslare, Ireland; St. Stephen's Green in Dublin. PREVIOUS PAGES: The Merrion Hotel in Dublin; London's Tower Bridge.



By the entrance to the grand country home, a whimsically hued gatehouse reveals the artistic inclinations of owners Mick and Betty Cuddihy.

The free-standing Dolls House—an ephemera-accented cottage rental that the couple and friends recently redecorated—is the funky little sister to the main house. The latter, an exquisitely styled historically listed property, features a rare fireplace by 18th-century British architect Robert Adam, as well as a reindeer head that has been on loan every Christmas for decades to the Irish Agricultural Museum and Johnstown Castle for holiday festivities. The public castle grounds are rich in natural beauty and a “national treasure,” says Mick Cuddihy. Pebble and woodland paths and three lakes are a refuge for peacocks.

This sense of community and tradition permeates both Rathaspeck Manor and nearby Wexford

Town. “There’s a friendliness to Wexford people,” says Betty, a hometown girl who met husband, Mick, in the local pub. She explains that Dubliners snapped up second homes in the area and this helped spur its development. “We have some beautiful restaurants that we didn’t have 20 years ago.”

One such eatery is the laid-back Cistin Eile—located on Ireland’s narrowest main street—which is emphatically dubbed by the Cuddihys (and one Wexford cabby) the “best restaurant in town.” Dublin chef Warren Gillen presides over the restaurant, which boasts top-quality, mouth-watering (often) locally sourced meats—for which Ireland is renowned—with guinea fowl croquettes and 10-hour cooked beef among the tastiest dishes.

Steps away, on the Crescent Quay, another source of town pride stands tall: a statue of U.S. revolutionary-era naval officer Commodore John

Barry. In 1963, U.S. President John F. Kennedy laid a wreath on this monument on a visit to his County Wexford family home. The Kennedy Homestead, 40 minutes away in New Ross, is open to the public, and Mary Kennedy Ryan’s grandson Patrick Grennan even participates in its larger tours.

#### WEXFORD, IRELAND — 10 — DUBLIN

On the rails from Wexford through County Wicklow, large picture windows display one of the most spectacular train views: oceanfront on the left; lakes and pastures on the right. Not far beyond this grassland is the setting that 19th-century painter John Faulkner brought to life in *The Valley of Glendalough*.

One might even glimpse the artwork in person

at Dublin’s The Merrion, a five-star hotel with a collection of paintings nearly as impressive as its two-Michelin star chef, Patrick Guilbaud.

Most of the works are by Irish artists, from Robert Ballagh to J. B. Yeats (whose paintings also have made appearances at the nearby National Gallery). The stylish historic hotel—which also has a contemporary garden wing—was built around four Georgian townhouses, one of which was the birthplace of the Duke of Wellington.

In a drawing room beneath a French chandelier and ornate golden sconces, visitors can experience some of the paintings as an art-loving homeowner would, thanks to the hotel’s Art Tea. The first course of the thoughtful presentation includes traditional finger sandwiches and scones. Course two features a trio of skillfully designed pastries that are inspired in color, shape and spirit by on-

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP, LEFT:** Warren Gillen, chef and owner of Cistin Eile restaurant in Wexford, Ireland; Rathaspeck Manor in Wexford; Sitting outside Kaph coffee shop in Dublin; A wall mural at Trinity College in Dublin; Kaph coffee shop; Johnstown Castle and Gardens in Wexford; Dublin’s Kerlin Gallery; The Merrion Hotel in Dublin; Swansea’s Maritme Quarter; A dish of dried goat cheese on beetroot at Cistin Eile; Rathaspeck Manor golf course.

# When in Europe

Escape the urban crowds and spend a weekend exploring picture-perfect villages outside of Rome, Amsterdam, Paris and Lisbon.



Perugia

## PRETTY PERUGIA

A weekend in Italy's hill country.

Two hours north of Rome, surrounded by the rolling hills of Umbria, Perugia is the easy-to-love hilltop capital of the region known as the "green heart" of Italy. Like Tuscany, its neighbor to the north, Umbria delivers the Italian dream: the bucolic vistas and beautiful villas, the fine wines and rustic hyperlocal cuisine. But not yet on the radar of the visiting masses, Perugia still feels like a discovery with its shadowy *centro storico* (historic center) and maze-like jumble of cobblestone alleys, stone stairways and grand piazzas lined with magnificent palazzi.

Check in to the Hotel Sina Brufani, an elegant property beside the main pedestrian drag, Corso Vannucci, where the basement's glass-bottomed pool reveals Etruscan ruins below. Dive deep into the city's ancient history at the Pozzo Etrusco, an Etruscan-era well dating to the 3rd century B.C. At the Rocca Paolina fortress, explore a subterranean labyrinth of medieval streets and squares preserved beneath more recent construction above. And visit the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, housed in the handsome 13th-century Palazzo dei Priori, to study the Renaissance oeuvre of Perugia's most celebrated painter, Pietro Vannucci, known as Perugino.

As enticing as any sight is the hearty local cuisine. After *aperitivo* at one of the bars along Corso Vannucci, locals retire to intimate trattorias to feast on vegetable

frittatas and Umbrian prosciutto, spit-roasted suckling pig and pastas laden with wild boar ragu. Reserve a table at Osteria a Priori, a bilevel restaurant serving the best products of the region: superb salumi platters, crostini smeared with rustic country pâté and house-made stringozzi, a shoestring-shaped pasta usually served with an aromatic sauce of porcini and black truffles. Wash it all down with a bottle of Sagrantino di Montefalco, a sought-after Umbrian red. An on-site bodega stocks many of the hard-to-find ingredients, from biodynamic Umbrian olive oil to bags of fagiolina del Trasimeno, a rare Etruscan-era legume cultivated outside the city.

Italians will note that Perugia is most famous for what's produced at the Perugina chocolate factory: Baci, the chocolate-and-hazelnut confection named after the Italian word for kiss. A tour of the factory ends with a chocolate tasting session, worth the price of admission alone. But Perugian chocolate also can be sampled in frozen form at Cioccolateria Augusta Perusia, a gelateria scooping rich flavors with varying concentrations of cocoa. Or in layer-cake form at Pasticceria Sandri, a landmark pastry shop dating to 1860. Or in myriad forms at the annual EuroChocolate festival, one of the continent's largest chocolate exhibitions that's well worth timing a trip around (this year, October 13-22).

—INGRID WILLIAMS



The No Sign Wine Bar in Swansea, Wales

site artworks. The service is far more sophisticated than what one Oscar Wilde literary character had in mind when he said: "Tea is the only simple pleasure left to us." But the Dublin-born writer's notoriously fanciful persona is embodied in a painted statue close by, in Merrion Square.

The general vicinity—home to one of Ireland's top galleries, Gormleys, and to Davy Byrne's, the pub immortalized by James Joyce in *Ulysses*—has historically been the center of the compact city. After the 2008 economic downturn, struggling business owners eventually dusted themselves off and rebuilt around a then-affordable, destined-to-be-trendy adjacent neighborhood. That enclave—around South William, Lower Stephen's, Exchequer and George's streets, punctuated by the indoor-outdoor marketplace of George's Street Arcade—is today the buzzing and central Creative Quarter. As its name implies, inventive energy is its foundation.

"There is an extremely intelligent, strong community of young artists that have been making and showing work internationally, but they're based in Dublin," says Darragh Hogan, a director of the Kerlin Gallery, which along with The Douglas Hyde Gallery is one of the city's landmark art spaces. With Ireland known for its literary powerhouses, he says, visual artists have remained in the shadows, which has facilitated a creative flourishing.

As for the Creative Quarter, its days in the sun have given way to higher rents. So some artists' studios have gone elsewhere, Hogan says, adding that the southside swath of Donnybrook is a hub for emerging fashion designers, singling out Havana as a particularly edgy boutique.

Dubliners maintain such edge with a newfound passion for coffee—a craze that has seen high-caliber brew cafés crop up in recent years, Kaph and CoffeeAngel among them. And the past decade also has witnessed a restaurant renaissance.

"The Dublin food scene has changed. People are trying new concepts, new

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Texel

## DUTCH ISLES

Texel is the Netherlands' North Sea natural treasure.

Famous for everything from wooden clogs to tulips, urban canal boats to fine art, the Netherlands is also home to the Dutch Wadden Sea Islands, a chain of five inhabited islands located in the North Sea. With 30 kilometers of sandy beaches, Texel (pronounced TESS-el)—the largest of the Wadden Islands—is the ideal destination for a unique mix of wildlife reserves, shopping and nightlife, quaint villages and even its own winery. And it's just a few hours from Amsterdam.

Buses run on Texel and cars also are permitted, but the island is a dream for cyclists, with miles and miles of bike trails winding you through its dunes, forests, beaches and many, many sheep. Bikes can be rented at several points around the island, including Rijwielverhuur Veerhaven Texel, located within walking distance of the ferry that brings visitors from the mainland. You also can rent scooters, bikes with children's seats and in some locations tandem bikes at daily or weekly rates.

Texel is home to seven villages, each with its own charm. The seaside resort De Koog is the tourism heart of Texel, complete with shops and cafés to explore as well as several hotels, holiday homes and even furnished tents. The beach itself is accessible from the town center by foot and

offers holiday-goers the chance to rest on a beach chair or, for the more adventurous, take advantage of the sea breeze and go kitesurfing.

Farther north in De Cocksdorp, Texel's youngest village, is the Eierland Lighthouse, Texel's most recognizable landmark. Built in 1864, the lighthouse was needed to put a stop to the many shipwrecks caused by the rough North Sea waters.

Texel's majestic system of dunes along its west coast is home to a plethora of plants and animals. In 2002, a 4,300-hectare area of the island, including the dunes and the island's forest—was designated a national park. The national park also encompasses De Slufter, a large salt marsh plain situated between two naturally formed sand dikes and perhaps Texel's best-known nature area. Today, the protected Duinen van Texel National Park is ideal for biking and horseback riding, and it also has wheelchair-accessible paths.

Reaching Texel from Amsterdam takes approximately two hours: Take a train from Amsterdam to Den Helder, where bus No. 33 will take you directly to the ferry to Texel. From the ferry terminal, you can get bus No. 28 to De Koog. —TRACY BROWN



Colmar

## COLORFUL COLMAR

France's Alsace region has charm to spare.

If you have more than a few days in Paris, venture outside the capital and visit the Alsatian town of Colmar. For a weekend outing, Colmar ticks a lot of boxes: It's about two and a half hours by TGV, breathtakingly photogenic, perfectly contained for hours of exploring and rife with incredible regional food and wine.

Within Colmar's historic core, narrow streets are lined with ancient buildings in vibrant colors contrasting dark timber frames, while potted flowers and foliage adorn structures throughout. You'll see a mix of medieval and Renaissance architecture, and the 16th-century Pfister House is a stunning example of how elements from both eras were incorporated into the building style.

En route to the canals of Little Venice, take in the picturesque Place de l'Ancienne Douane and the Schwendi fountain, a sculpture by Statue of Liberty artist Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi paying tribute to the man who brought the Tokay grape to Alsace. (For more Bartholdi, visit his birthplace and museum by the cathedral.) If it looks familiar, it's rumored that the opening scene of the animated *Beauty and the Beast* was inspired by the square. Carry on to the waterways of Little Venice, then go for a boat ride to soak up the magical views.

Colmar is more than just a fairy-tale

—CYNTHIA DEA

town, however. It's home to the Unterlinden Museum, one of France's most visited museums outside of Paris and renowned for its medieval and Renaissance treasures. Unterlinden houses the Isenheim Altarpiece, a 16th-century work of art that, like Colmar, has switched between French and German control throughout its history. After a recent and much-needed expansion, the museum now shows off its impressive modern art collection as well.

The cuisine also is steeped in its Franco-German heritage. Take the hearty *choucroute garnie*: It's similar to German sauerkraut, except that the cabbage is cooked in wine and served with sausages, various cuts of pork and potatoes. Order it at a *winstub*, a traditional Alsatian tavern; Wistub Brenner is a local favorite. For lighter fare, *flammekueche alsacienne*, or tarte flambée, is flatbread spread with crème fraîche and topped with onions and lardons. Order dry riesling or aromatic gewürztraminer served from distinctively fluted bottles.

For something sweet, *kugelhopf*, a bundt cake mixed with almonds and raisins soaked in brandy, from a bakery such as Pâtisserie Gilg is a must. Or take in all the culinary offerings at once and visit the covered market to peruse and taste the local treats, specialties and produce.



Óbidos

## ONLY IN ÓBIDOS

A dose of history, just outside of Lisbon.

Ask anyone in Lisbon about a day's escape, and you'll get a roster of beaches. "You must visit the *praias!*" your Portuguese pal exclaims. Everyone there has a checklist.

And you will. But that's all too easy and can be done in an afternoon from the city. Instead, embark on a history lesson: "I think we will visit Óbidos," you say. Óbidos is not a beach, so your friend will pause, recalibrate, then say: "Ah, Óbidos... great pick. It is remarkable."

And how: An hour's drive north of Lisbon and slightly inland, Óbidos is a walled-in

town, a former trading port just off the Óbidos Lagoon, which itself extends to the Atlantic. Óbidos was founded in 308 B.C. by the Celts, then passed between the Romans, Visigoths and Moors and eventually was claimed by the Portuguese in the 12th century. While the walls and surrounding excavation sites indicate Roman establishment, Óbidos' lasting impression is one of midmillennium Portugal.

Rent a car, take the Rapida Verde bus or the regional train. The town sits atop a hill—your

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## SUMMER ABROAD

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things,” says Dublin-born celebrity chef Dylan McGrath, who opened Rustic Stone in 2010 and Fade Street Social in 2012. He received a Michelin star at his restaurant Mint, but like others in Dublin, it was shuttered by the recession. Another neighborhood eatery in his stable, Brasserie Sixty6 (opened in 2005), survived.

His multilevel modern Irish restaurant/tapas bar Fade Street Social, on the corner of trendy Drury Street, was born of the economic downturn and is today an accessible, bustling Irish food destination known for new twists on classics such as Irish lamb stew. Not long after Fade Street opened, it was joined by new restaurant additions such as Super Miss Sue and Luna.

McGrath attributes the successful rebuilding of Dublin’s restaurant scene to a sense of camaraderie, resourcefulness—and Irish pride. “Buying Irish became so much more important to people,” he says.

Whether it’s a unique new take on classic eats in Dublin; guarding local traditions while reliving historic architectural spaces in Wexford; reimagining an old port authority in Swansea; or honoring timeless filmmakers through modern mixology in London, a thread runs through this rail and ferry expedition. An appreciation for the past, coupled with a creative vision of the future, brings a dynamic but fleeting present moment to life. ▼



Castle of Óbidos

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Lisbon-trained legs have prepared you for this—and is accessible via Porta da Vila, a grandiose, Portu-Gothic tiled gate that once kept intruders out. Now it’s an invitation to the past, to a terra-cotta town tucked below a 900-year-old castle. Everything is hugged by the castle’s walls, a perimeter you can circle for a full vantage.

That castle has been converted into a *pousada*—a historic but luxurious inn—though its conversion compromises nothing on your visit. Instead, meander through Óbidos’ labyrinthlike streets, making your way to Santa Maria Church at the town center. From there, shop main street Rua Direita for mementos, but also for tapas or

*ginjinha*. (It’s a sour-cherry liqueur that is so distinctly sweet here that it gets its own name: Ginja de Óbidos. Get it in a chocolate cup, then chase it down with the cup itself.)

Visit any time of year, though a late-July to early-August cameo will put you at the center of Óbidos’ annual medieval reenactment festival. If you come by car and crave a round of golf (or a massage), head to the coast. You’ll tee off on the greenest of courses at Royal Óbidos Spa & Golf Resort.

And from there, you can see the Atlantic. In fact, you’ll be close to two Óbidos municipality beaches: Rio Cortiço and Bom Sucesso (which also careens along the lagoon). You must check them out.

—ADAM HURLEY

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