



IRELAND

Ireland is the 3rd largest island in Europe and is separated into 2 parts: Northern Ireland (UK) and the Republic of Ireland. Irish culture has had a significant influence on other cultures, particularly with its literature. Strong Irish culture is evident through typical Irish sports, Irish music and the Irish language (Gaelic).

Short Facts

Geography: A ring of coastal mountains surround low plains at the centre of the island. Western areas can be mountainous and rocky with green panoramic vistas. The River Shannon, the island's longest river at 386 km (240 mi) long. Because of its mild climate, Ireland has very lush vegetation which is what gives it its nickname of the Emerald Isle.



Climate:

The climate of Ireland is mild and often wet. It has warm summers and mild winters. Extreme heat or cold is a rare occurrence in Ireland, but usually temperatures average at 4 degrees in the winter and about 15 degrees in the summer.

Government:

There are a total of 32 counties in Ireland. 26 counties make up the Republic of Ireland and the balance (6) make up Northern Ireland. The Republic of Ireland (where you will be placed) is a sovereign state and its capital is Dublin. Northern Ireland is a part of the UK and its capital is Belfast.

Population:

The population of Ireland is about 6.1 million, with about 4.35 million living in the Republic of Ireland. Ireland is a multicultural country and has seen immigration from Poland, Russia, Nigeria, China and Brazil.

Religion:

The primary religion in the Republic of Ireland is Christianity. While all people are free to practice their own religious beliefs, the most dominant religion is Roman Catholic. Religious scripture is often taught in schools. In Northern Ireland, the primary religion is also Christianity; however the more dominant religions are different streams of Protestant.



Economy:

The economy in Ireland has recently changed from being based on agriculture to more modern focuses of high tech industry and investment products. Prices in Dublin tend to be higher than in other cities or towns throughout the country.



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Education:

Secondary education is usually completed when students are about 17 years old. Secondary education is taught at 3 different types of schools: Secondary Schools (owned and managed by religious communities or private organisations), Vocational schools and community schools which are completely funded by the government.

History:

The Iron Age in Ireland is traditionally associated with people known as the *Celts*. The Celts were commonly thought to have colonised Ireland in a series of invasions between the 8th and 1st centuries BC. The Gaels, the last wave of Celts, were said to have divided the island into five or more kingdoms after conquering it.

In the election of 1919, the country declared its own parliament and government, the Irish Republic. It gave all of Ireland complete independence in their domestic issues and independence as far as foreign policy. However, an oath of allegiance to the British Crown had to be exercised; however, it was not until 1949 that the state was declared, officially, to be the Republic of Ireland.



Culture and Gastronomy:

Ireland is known for its traditional "Celtic" music. Celtic music has been the influence and inspiration for other types of music including traditional country style music in the United States and in Canada. Ireland is home to famous artists Sinead O'Connor, U2, Enya, Chris de Burgh, Ronan Keating, the Corrs and the Cranberries to name a few.

Traditional Irish "Social" dancing is done very systematically and is done in formation. Irish dancing is a social tradition but the dances can vary in each community. Irish "performance" dancing (also known as step dancing) is known for its quick leg work and still upper bodies. Riverdance is a popular troupe who performs this type of dancing worldwide.

Ireland's national sports are Gaelic Football (the inspiration for Aussie Rules) and hurling (similar to field hockey). The Irish enjoy a variety of sports though, including golf, soccer and rugby.

School Placement in Ireland:

Students who would like to go on exchange to Ireland must advise YFU upon application if they wish to be exempt from daily religious activities.