



Ireland's Dingle Peninsula displays a palette of greens softened by wild ocean spray.

Arts, Crafts, and Tasty Treats in Dingle

Ellen Federico

Sitting on a stool at the well-worn full liquor bar and sipping Blue Rose Pale Ale, crisp and dry, with mild notes of rose hips and blackcurrant, I watch as locals—some carrying musical instruments—trickle into Brick's pub and take familiar seats in a corner. More musicians and seasoned travelers arrive. Adrienne, the publican, greets them all like family. Candles are lit on tables and window sills. A wood fire crackles in the brick hearth and taps flow with fresh brews, and everyone's spirits lift as music fills the pub.

I'm in Ballyferrieter, tucked into the rugged Dingle Peninsula, on the west coast of Ireland. Nearby, and buzzing with activity, the six main streets of the colorful port town of Dingle are veined with hidden lanes and streams, all sweeping toward the busy marina. Gulls squawk above charter boats returning from trips out to fish for mackerel, sea bass, or ling. Sailboat masts poke at a cobalt sky, and fishermen on the quays mend tangled nets with bone needles. Quaint it may be, but Dingle is also one of Ireland's busiest fishing ports, and the experience is authentic. Marina parking is \$1.20 an hour from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.,

with free overnight parking. You can walk the entire town in a day.

There's lots to see, do, and buy on this craggy Atlantic peninsula, not all of it in those famous Irish pubs. In fact, local artisans are transforming this once sleepy area of Ireland into a foodie and cultural paradise.

Not surprisingly, in a Catholic country like Ireland, even the ordinary becomes holy. A great photo opportunity is the gigantic "bullaun" stone parked on Goat Street, with holes worn in the top dating from the Bronze Age. It's had more recent applications, too, from a time in the 17th century when Catholicism in Ireland was suppressed. Local resident Diarmuid Begley says, "The stone was used to trick the English from knowing where the Irish were having mass. When folks put sand in a hole, mass was at the beach. When they put water in a hole, mass was by a certain stream."

After that, it's a short stroll across Green Street toward the bell tower of 19th-century Saint Mary's church. Behind it is a wonderful circular meditation garden, inspired by the Tree of Life that leads to the Convent of the Presentation Sisters, now the Díseart Centre of Irish Culture.

Visit the Chapel of the Sacred Heart, with its museum-quality stained-glass windows designed by famed artist Harry Clarke in 1922. They were commissioned by the savvy Mother Superior Ita for a mere 1,000 pounds. My favorite is the image of Mary Magdalene witnessing the risen Christ.

A must-see is the former Sisters' Dining Room, where you can view the massive wall fresco painted by Colorado mural artist Eleanor Yates in 2011. Her intention was to paint a large scale Last Supper embedded with local images. The apostles are all based on local men the artist found throughout Dingle who had just the right face. The chapel is open Monday to Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is \$4 per person.

Arts and crafts are something of a theme in Dingle. Everywhere you turn, it seems, are independent galleries and stores with displays of handmade works on offer. Behind the red door at An Gailearaí Beag (The Little Gallery) on Main Street, home to the West Kerry Craft Guild, is a treasure of sophisticated crafts made by local artists.

Weaver Sue Redican lives something of a hermit's life on Great Blasket Island, offshore from Dingle. There, alone for most of her time, she crafts intricate designs on her loom, using wool dyes made from wildflowers and plants. When asked if she's ever afraid living on her own there, she says, "Only when the tourists come in summer and camp overnight. I prefer the grey seals and birds, or my grandson." You can visit Sue weaving on the island in summer by daily ferry from Dunquin harbor, or view her wall hangings at the Blasket Heritage Centre.

The artists whose work is on display at An Gailearaí Beag take turns running the shop, and they take time to talk to visitors. Peruse displays of pottery, woodwork, paintings, stitched fairies, jewelry, beeswax candles, and magic soaps hidden in felted washcloths by druid priestess Juli Ní Mhaoileoin. Most popular is Juli's "gratitude spray," with essences of lavender, rose, dandelion, nettle, and rosemary.

All that is enough to make anyone hungry. The serene Global Village Restaurant on Main Street prepares modern cuisine with a touch of tradition. Seared local scallops on roasted cauliflower purée, with carrot jam and cloud-light mashed potatoes, are perfect harmony (\$17). The waitress told me that the chef uses ingredients harvested

from his own garden. The food and wine here are outstanding.

Every Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Holyground Farmers Market on Strand Street takes place. It's packed with organic produce, baked goods, chocolates, and jams. That's where I met "Pickled in Dingle" owner Marie Charland, a French Canadian who makes divine chutneys like beetroot and orange. Marie arrived 16 years ago, found a job, and met her husband. He's Fergal Murphy, and he owns Ballydavid Honey. Marie poured Fergal a pint at his local pub, and the rest is pickling history. Now they're regulars at Dingle's annual food, wine, beer, and market festival, which takes place this year October 5 to 7. (See: Dinglefood.com.)

For a special handmade dessert, step into the sky-blue Murphy's Ice Cream shop on Strand Street. Smiling scoopers offer samples to help you decide which flavors to choose. Murphy's ice cream is made from the milk of local cows, local eggs, and a jewel box of fresh ingredients. Pairing their Dingle Sea Salt and Caramelized Brown Bread flavors is heavenly, trust me. For more adventurous palettes, try the refreshing Dingle Gin flavor. Three generous scoops at Murphy's go for \$8. Savoring homemade ice cream while watching a fiery sunset mirrored in the

glass calm of Dingle Bay is a delicious memory.

Castlewood House, a boutique hotel nestled on the bay, is a 10-minute walk into town. Husband-and-wife innkeepers Helen and Brian Heaton operate the best hotel in Dingle, prized for its beautiful rooms with spa bathrooms, and praised for an award-winning breakfast prepared by chef Brian. Inviting interiors are an eclectic mix of antique and contemporary furnishings, with fresh flowers throughout. A gallery of landscape paintings adorns the hallways.

I enjoyed a three-night stay in a harbor-view room, where I could hear the ebb and flow of tides and the caws of seabirds each morning. My most savored memory of Castlewood is the over-the-top breakfast feast. Rise and shine to a royal breakfast of poached spiced fruits, breads, jams, cheeses, and salamis, a menu of full Irish or vegetarian hot dishes, omelets, pancakes, and fluffy porridge paired with brown sugar and Irish whiskey drizzle. Rates start at \$150 a night, including full breakfast. There's free parking on site. Request sea-view rooms, and be aware that the dining room

only serves breakfast or afternoon tea.

Seven miles west, on Sleah Head Drive in Ballyferriter, is Brick's Pub, B&B and Brewery, where owner Adrienne Heslin is publican and brew mistress of the West Kerry Brewing Company. Back in the 17th century, it was common for women to brew barley ales and honey mead, hence the name "alewives." Adrienne turns well water, yeast, and botanicals into

high-quality beer while surrounded by majestic, sweeping views of the Wine Strand and Three Sisters cliffs, where *Star Wars*, *The Last Jedi* was filmed.

With a rich green façade, Brick's Pub, circa 1890, is also a charming, self-catering B&B with a communal

kitchen. High season rates run \$110 a night.

When you sit in the lovely garden behind Brick's, the scents of wild roses and fragrant yeast from the brewery are intoxicating in themselves. Camouflaged in the untamed brambles are striking metal sculptures with extraordinary features. Adrienne is a trained sculptor by trade, in addition to her other impressive titles.

Adrienne's face lights up as she explains how she ended up living on the edge of Ireland. "Love brought me to Brick's," she says. "I met and fell in love with Pádraig Brick in 1992 in Dingle Town, where I'd lived since completing my fine art studies in Dublin." What does she love most about living in Dingle? "The location has become my oasis," she says. "Natural beauty and the coastal setting, along with the mountainous terrain, are quite inspiring."

Call ahead for a tour of the brewery and sample West Kerry classic beer in fruity dark or pale ales. Tip: Live open music sessions are on Friday nights at 9 p.m.

Many of the people who live on the Dingle Peninsula share a simple philosophy of living in balance with nature. My favorite memory is of Diarmuid Begley, a chatty driver and unofficial guide who grew up on the Peninsula. On my last day, he pulled off the road and made me squeeze a fuchsia flower until one drop of nectar fell to the ground. "God's tears," he called it.

Holding the flower, I gazed out toward the roiling Atlantic Ocean and inhaled a deep breath of sea air like a shot of happiness...it must have been the gratitude spray. ■

"Watch a fiery sunset mirrored in the glass calm of Dingle Bay."

GETTING TO DINGLE

Most travelers start their journey at Tralee, from where two scenic routes to Dingle run on either side of the peninsula's mountainous spine. Route 561 runs along the peninsula's south side past Inch Strand. It's a sweeping three-mile beach where surfers brave chilly waves below mountains dotted with cottages, manor homes, and grazing sheep. Alternatively, you can take the dramatic route 560, one of Ireland's highest mountain roads, through the Conor Pass's lush valleys, ancient ruins, and panoramic seascapes. For a round trip, taking one route in and the other one out is the best option.

The closest international airports are at Cork or Shannon, both around a three-hour drive away. Car rental companies are available at either airport—it's the most convenient option for traveling in the region. Low-cost flights with Norwegian



Air serve the Boston-Cork run three times weekly, while Shannon airport offers five direct routes to the U.S. and Canada.