



Image courtesy Tourism Ireland

# Of poets and pints

A tour of Dublin's pubs dishes out literary history and pints of Guinness in equal measure.

Text **Charukesi Ramadurai**

Did you know that author and playwright Oscar Wilde boxed for his alma mater, Trinity College? And Oliver Goldsmith, of *The Vicar of Wakefield* fame, also wrote the popular nursery rhymes *Jack and Jill* and *Hickory Dickory Dock*? I came upon these interesting tidbits of trivia during an evening spent on the Dublin Literary Pub Crawl—a perfect mix of everything the Irish capital has to offer: history, architecture, green open spaces and literature, all washed down with pint after pint of glorious beer.

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▲ Above: The Dublin Literary Pub Crawl is the brainchild of Colm Quilligan (left). Facing page (top to bottom): A statue dedicated to one of Dublin's literary greats, James Joyce; Established in 1822, The Duke is one of Dublin's oldest pubs.



Pubs were, and still are, to Dublin what coffee houses were to Vienna—social and cultural hubs. And for many writers, their favourite watering hole was a haven, and sometimes, even a muse.

### Tales and ales

Dublin has produced four Nobel Prize winners for literature (William Butler Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, Samuel Beckett and Seamus Heaney), and has been home to literary greats such as James Joyce, Bram Stoker and Oscar Wilde. In a nod to this rich heritage, it was designated a UNESCO City of Literature in 2010.

The Irish capital is also home to over 850 pubs. As the joke goes, “How do you cross the city without passing a pub?” The answer, credited to James Joyce: “Go into every one of them.” Pubs were, and still are, to Dublin what coffee houses were to Vienna—social and cultural hubs. And for many writers, their favourite watering hole was a haven, and sometimes, even a muse.

We cannot, of course, go into every one of them this evening, but we aim to cover as much ground as we can. I reach The Duke at 7:00 pm sharp; the crawl begins on a promising note as Colm Quilligan, the brains behind the event announces, “At the end, you won’t be too drunk, but you won’t be too sober either.”

Our group—about 10 of us—meets in the ‘snug’ on the first floor of The Duke, a room that is just as small and cosy as the name suggests. Every pub has one, although the idea behind it is now redundant. Till the middle of the 20th century, women were barred from entering pubs, a rule supported by the Roman Catholic Church to “prevent the spread of vice”. It was only in the 1940s, when the men went away to war, that women were grudgingly allowed into these hallowed premises, and even then were relegated to a small, segregated area—the snug.



Christophe Boisvieux/age fotostock/Dinodia

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Colm and his colleague Frank get the audience to loosen up a bit with their rendition of 'Waxie's Dargle', a traditional Irish folk song about local candle-makers. Then they don black bowler hats and enact a scene from Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, ending with a quote from a London reviewer at the time it was first performed: "The only play ever seen in which nothing happens—twice." While the Irish take great pride in their famous literary works, they are not beyond laughing at them too. The duo proceed to enact a bar brawl from *Ulysses*, claiming that this is the most familiar scene from the quintessential Irish novel, "since it is in the first chapter, and few people get beyond it".

### A spot of history

From The Duke, our motley procession heads towards Trinity College, which Colm calls "a cultural stop without a drink". Standing in the front courtyard facing the grand buildings, he talks about its illustrious students, who included Oscar Wilde. The writer hated the college, referring to his classmates as a "dreadful lot" and dropped out to study at Oxford instead. But during his days here, he refined his drinking skills, following in the footsteps of other literary greats before him like Oliver Goldsmith.

Our next stop, which Colm conversely declares a "drinking stop without culture", is O'Neills, housed in a beautiful Victorian building. This bar is filled with locals and tourists, swigging away after a hard day's work. The vibe is warm and friendly, and the pub itself is a warren of several tiny rooms and nooks (including, of course, a snug). It has existed, in some form or the

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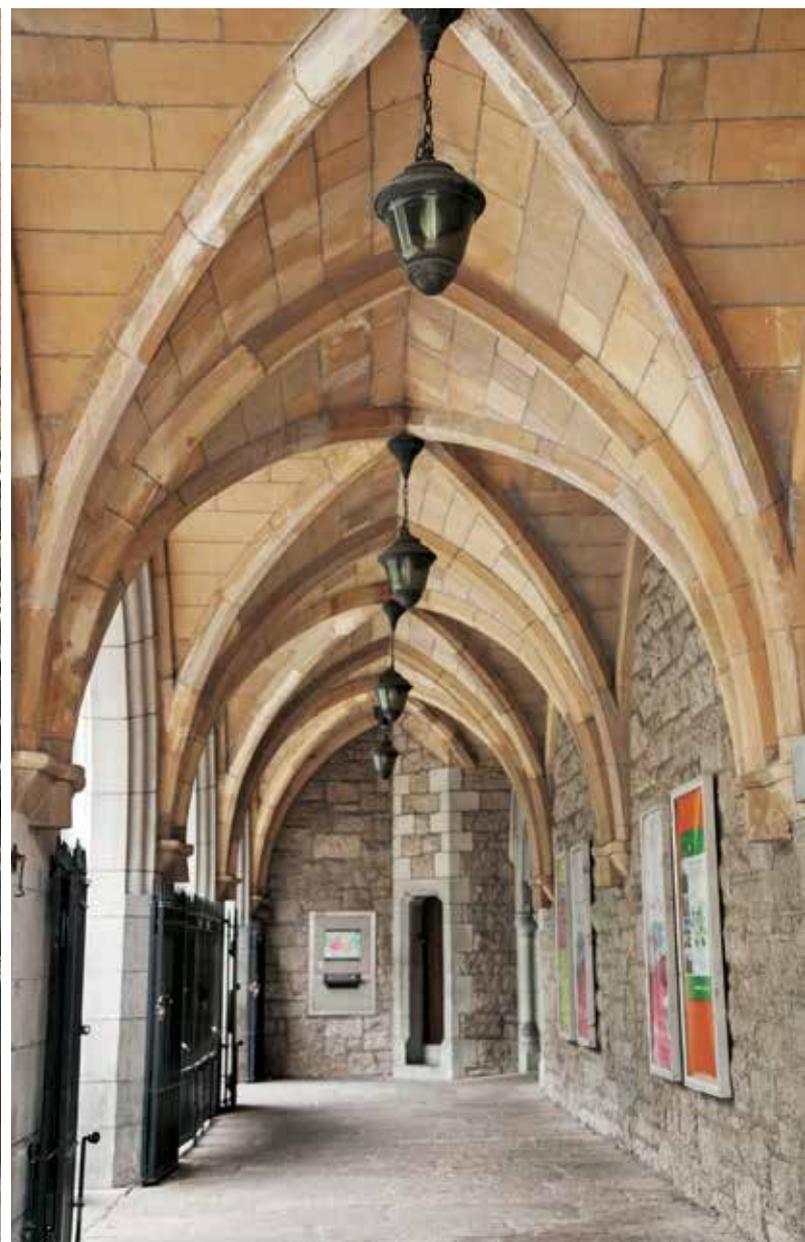
▲ Above: Colm and his colleague Frank perform a scene from *Waiting for Godot* to an enthralled audience.

Below: Trinity College is the alma mater of several illustrious writers such as Oscar Wilde and Oliver Goldsmith.





Kevin George/age fotostock/Dinodia



Kevin George/age fotostock/Dinodia

other, at the same spot for over 300 years, with a reputation for serving some of the best beer in the city. Here we are joined by Jessica, another of Colm's colleagues.

By the time we leave O'Neills, a few pints of Guinness have gone down, and while we are not actually crawling yet, we are walking very slowly. Although the origin of the term 'pub crawl' is from another university town, Cambridge, Colm says, "There have always been pub crawls in Dublin, even way back in the 17th century, when Trinity students went rampaging through the city's taverns, narrating from the works of classical Greek and Latin poets." Colm should know, given that he founded this modern version of the pub crawl over 20 years ago. Not surprisingly, the Dublin Literary

Pub Crawl is one of the most popular activities for any visitor to the city. That the guides are all professional actors with a passion for literature, only serves to enhance the experience.

#### Political brews

From O'Neills, we walk across to the Protestant St Andrews Church, built in 1665 but closed in the 1980s thanks to dwindling patronage. Today, it serves as the Dublin Tourism Office, still providing guidance to the masses, although not of a spiritual nature. On the pavement outside the erstwhile church, Colm and Jessica perform a hilarious scene from *Strumpet City*, James Plunkett's story about a massive industrial strike in the early 20th century in Dublin, known simply as the Lockout.

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▲ Top (left to right): Housed in a Victorian building, O'Neills boasts not just of an ample number of beers on tap but also an enviable whiskey collection; The 17th-century St Andrews Church has been repurposed as the Dublin Tourism Office.

▼ Bottom: Known for its seafood, the trendy Davy Brynes is a gastro pub that finds mention in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Below: One of Ireland's most iconic symbols, Guinness is an Irish dry stout that originated in the brewery of Arthur Guinness at St James's Gate, Dublin.



Hoffmann Photography/age fotostock/Dinodia

The scene is a dialogue between two of the strikers, Toucher Hennessy and Rashers Tierney, both begging on the street for a spot of beer money. Rashers gives Toucher a quick lesson on spotting the difference between a Catholic and a Protestant, so he could customise his appeal. Colm and Jessica embody the parts with their gestures and accents, taking us back to a time when the city was full of great strife.

Following that is another halt for more beer and more stories at The Old Stand, once a haunt for political activists and now favoured by professionals in finance and law. Our final stop for the night is at Davy Byrnes, a trendy bar known for being featured in several scenes in *Ulysses*. Its other claim to fame is that Samuel Beckett lived in a room above it during his student days at Trinity. However, I like Davy Byrnes best as the pub where novelist Brendan Behan uttered his famous line about him being a “drinker with a writing problem”.

Through the walk and the pub stops, Colm has been throwing pop quiz questions at us. Finally, in front of Davy Byrnes, the winners get coveted Dublin Pub Crawl T-shirts as prizes. Of course, most of us stay back for that one last pint and

exchange notes about the experience. It has been a long—and entertaining—walk and I am glad to rest my feet. But I cannot complain; Colm had warned us that the whole thing takes over two hours “depending on how fast you walk and how slow you drink”.

## Fact file

### Getting there

Jet Airways offers daily flights to Abu Dhabi from several Indian metros including Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad and Kochi. From Abu Dhabi, take our codeshare partner Etihad Airways to Dublin.

### Accommodation

The Fitzwilliam is a trendy hotel located close to the main shopping areas. The cosy Brooks Hotel is another popular choice, also ideally situated with plenty of shopping and eating options nearby.

### For more information

Log on to [www.dublinpubcrawl.com](http://www.dublinpubcrawl.com) and [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie)



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