

Dublin tales

NIAMH MARTIN uncovers a trove of literary treasures for children in UNESCO City of Literature, Dublin.

As we turn to leave, a friendly looking man in a big green hat whispers gently, "don't annoy the fairies". And with a wink and a grin, he is gone. We're in Dublin and have just taken a tour of the National Leprechaun Museum, situated in the city centre.

Mythical Ireland

The 45-minute tour here is a great introduction to Irish Myths, Folklore and Legends for families with kids aged six and over. We discover from our tour storyteller why leprechauns are only found in Ireland and why fairies chose Ireland as the place to go underground. The sense of enchantment makes us tingle as we make our way through "the other world" hearing stories, some of which are true, we are told, but all of which are real. It feels magical, and very typical of our encounters in this enchanting city.

Outdoor fun

Dublin is brimming with centuries of storytelling and mythology, and we don't have to look far for literary-related family activities in this very walkable city. Across the River Liffey, we seek out "The Giant's Garden", a playground on Merrion Square named after a story by illustrious writer Oscar Wilde. Inspired by mythology, *The Selfish Giant* is a moral tale about what can be gained by thinking of others and ends with the Giant allowing the children into his garden. As we approach the playground, loud peels of children's laughter ring out. It's a wonderful noise and we immediately feel our spirits rise a couple of notches – just as the Giant's must have too. Across the road is Oscar Wilde House, a museum, where Oscar lived and wrote this story.

Modern Irish children's writers

With our tummies rumbling, we visit the Museum of Literature Ireland (nicknamed MoLI, after Molly Bloom from Joyce's *Ulysses*). Located on busy St. Stephen's Green, we find a secret garden and excellent café within, providing unusually peaceful surroundings in the centre of a capital city. We explore the museum and make the most of the family-friendly Litlab (on level four), where children are encouraged to get creative, write their own stories or produce some artwork. The older kids soak up the children's exhibitions and displays of Irish young adult writers such as Derek Landy (*Skulduggery Pleasant*) and Eoin Colfer (*Artemis Fowl*). MoLI is a superb place to get a better understanding of just how deep literature is embedded in Ireland's DNA. It's a place where past and present Irish literary worlds exist simultaneously. Don't leave without seeing the first unbound edition of *Ulysses*.

Goths and ghouls

As evening approaches, we go to the Viking area of Dublin and its dark, brooding streets to see what inspired Bram Stoker's Gothic classic, *Dracula*. For older kids, a visit to the crypts at St. Michan's Church will delight.

Here, five long burial vaults show the mummified remains of Dublin's most influential families (from 1600-1800). Stoker is known to have visited St. Michan's, perhaps feeding his fertile imagination about the afterlife. Tours of St. Michan's Church are on Tuesdays and Thursdays only, on a drop-in basis, with tickets available to purchase on arrival.

It's just a 10-minute walk to St. Patrick's Cathedral, where Jonathan Swift, author of

Illuminated icon

Book a slot to see the Book of Kells, a 9th-century illustrated manuscript of the Bible. The ancient masterpiece is an icon of Ireland's cultural and literary heritage. It is housed within Trinity College, while the Long Room in the Old Library it is being redeveloped.

Gulliver's Travels, was Dean. A guided tour reveals Swift's tomb and highly entertaining stories explaining why he wrote the story that has become a children's classic.

Pages of fun

Our base is Motel One, located opposite Jervis tram stop on Abbey Street. The hotel is themed on *Ulysses*, and family rooms are available, making it a perfect stay for a literary tour of the city. For families who enjoy books, Dublin is simply a wonderland, where literature feels like something you can take part in. Have fun spotting the numerous writer's statues dotted around the city, the bridges named after Nobel Literature Laureates and the famed bookshops (Winding Stair, Chapters, Books Upstairs). You can even share pizza with famous writers at Milano's where an extensive wall mural featuring Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett covers the restaurant. ▲





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02 National Memorial Merrion Square © Fionn McCann
03 Trinity College Dublin
04 Statue of Oscar Wilde in Merrion Square