

DINGLE, IRELAND

IT MUST BE DINGLE!

TUCKED AWAY IN THE SOUTH-WEST CORNER OF IRELAND IS ONE OF THE EMERALD ISLE'S GREATEST TREASURES. DINGLE IS EXACTLY THE IRELAND TOURISTS WANT TO SEE, PRETTY, UPMARKET, TRADITIONAL, AND WITH A SENSE YOU'LL FIND THE CRAIC EVERYWHERE YOU GO.

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"Foxy Johns must be the only pub in the world where you can buy a hamper and nails with your Guinness."

There is a kind of knowing 'in-joke' based loosely around an old photograph of a huge flock of sheep crammed into the main street of a small town in the west of Ireland – the caption reads 'It Must Be Dingle.'

Legend has it these were also the first words uttered by trans-Atlantic flier Charles Lindbergh as he sighted land for the first time since leaving Long Island – though quite what led him to that conclusion is not recorded.

Whatever, the phrase lives on, hinting that this pretty little harbour town in Co Kerry is a sort of living embodiment of the Irish joke – all rural, backward and blissfully unaware.

But, like all self-effacing put-downs the gag only works because the reality is



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actually the polar opposite.

Ireland is in the throes of a post-boom economic collapse and the Irish are doing a lot of soul-searching as belts get tightened and hatches get battened. Dingle, however, seems almost uniquely to be bucking the recession trend.

Today 'It must be Dingle' has a whole new meaning.

Stroll through Dingle and you will find a raft of restaurants serving food which shames many of their big city counterparts, hotels and guest houses who's owner's know that quality not corner-cutting is going to pull them through, oh, and pubs. Lots and lots of pubs. There were 52 at last count, and this in a town with a population of about 2000 – that's one pub for every 38 residents. And they are all slightly wonderful in their own unique, and occasionally surreal ways. Take Foxy Johns, surely the only pub in the world which is simultaneously a hardware store? Or Hannie Agnes (Han-

ny's) on Green Street, until recently also the town's coffin maker, or Dick Macks higher-up Green Street which still looks like the shoemakers it was. Then there's the music, great Irish music from great Irish musicians at An Droichead Beag, John Benny Moriarty's, The Singing Salmon, and oh, just about everywhere.

But, Guinness notwithstanding, Dingle is essentially a family destination. Ventry Beach close by is a perfect child friendly beach fringed by dunes and shallow, gentle waves. Inch Strand, about 10 miles drive away, is similarly family-friendly.

The Harbour is worth a visit on its own. Not only is it picture-book pretty with tiny fishing boats as far as you can see but it is home to Dingle's secret weapon – Fungie the Dolphin. Fungie is a bottlenose dolphin who swam into Dingle Harbour in 1984 and has been charming boatloads of tourists ever since. He genuinely seems keen to interact with the tourists and is a must-see attraction.

And so to the weather, which can best be described as changeable. It's by no means terrible, but if you see a family heading to the beach carrying high factor sunscreen and, er, raincoats then you'll know.... it must be Dingle.



For more information check out www.discoverireland.com



► Safe harbour: Dingle's sea front is picture book pretty

Live it large at the Food Fest

The first weekend of October the streets of Dingle come alive with the fourth annual Dingle Peninsula Food & Wine Festival (1-3 October).

Featuring 'taste trails', cookery demonstrations, oyster tasting, wine tastings and tutored workshops (including, bee-hive keeping, growing your own food, hen keeping and coffee tastings.) Festival-goers will be able to buy 'taste tickets' and sample local cuisine in 40 locations from pubs to galleries to shops to restaurants. The festival will also host the annual Blas na hÉireann, Na-

tional Irish

Food awards. Now in their 3rd year, these all-Ireland awards celebrate the quality and imagination of the best Irish food producers, with gold, silver, and bronze medals in over 30 categories, for companies creating the best-tasting foods made in Ireland. There will be a special showcase for winners, creating the biggest and best farmers market in the country. Check out www.irish-foodawards.ie and for full

Information on the festival see www.dinglefood.com

WHERE TO EAT



GLOBAL VILLAGE
Upper Main St

► Chef Martin Bealin learned his trade across the world before setting up in Dingle a decade ago. Often credited with helping Dingle reinvent itself as a culinary hotspot. Eat here and understand why. Excellent.



OUT OF THE BLUE
www.outoftheblue.ie

► Odd, shack-like appearance on the harbour front belies superb high-end cuisine and thoughtful wine list. It's seafood only and it's very fresh – if the boats don't go out the guys don't open the doors.



REEL DINGLE FISH
Holy Ground

► This is what they call in Ireland 'a chipper' – a simple take-away place specialising in fish and chips. But Reel uses ultra fresh fish from the harbour and traditional cooking methods. Unbelievably delicious.

Stay SOUTHBOUND HOLIDAY COTTAGES

www.southboundholidaycottages.com

► A series of purpose-built luxury houses, sleeping up to 10 people, just minutes away from the main street. Spectacular bay and mountain views, high-spec fixtures and fittings, hot tubs, spa and kids club. Brilliant hassle-free holiday living.



► Prawn to lose: But this fella's loss is Dingle's cuisine's gain