

HERE

Travel Crush of the Week: Sustainable Ireland



SNAPSHOT



Firozah Najmi

Starting July 19th, vaccinated visitors will be allowed to enter Ireland without needing to quarantine upon arrival. Anticipating a rush of visitors from the US and abroad, several new sustainable travel experiences are hoping to reel in plenty of foot traffic.

Ireland is one of the last European countries left on my travel checklist, and as a perennial city girl, I'm craving a certain oneness with nature after a year spent indoors. I'm forever in search of attainable ecological freedom; of farm-to-table food I can manage (though I'm not quite ready to give up my Oreos just yet). It's just like they say: born too late to experience the Paleolithic hunter-gatherer nomad lifestyle, born too early to cultivate a self-sustaining vegan micronation on Mars. Instead, I'll settle for foraging tours staged in the ancient Irish woods of counties Donegal and Clare, where I can source and cook my own food like our ancestors did.



Overlooking the Cliffs of Moher, this lone castle is one of many ancient structures you'll discover in County Clare, Ireland. Photo by [Magda Lukas](#).

When I Say Dream Vacation, You Say Castle

I wasn't born into royalty in this lifetime, but that doesn't mean I can't dream about living in a castle in the middle of a green oasis. At [Dromoland Castle](#) in County Clare in the west of Ireland, I'll awaken my inner Disney princess at this 450-acre estate with over 500 friendly animals who also call the castle grounds home. Now that's Cinderella-approved. With a newly appointed sustainability officer in tow, the castle's management team is constantly coming up with innovative ways for visitors to connect with nature, from birdwatching to wildlife trails.

If spending the night doesn't sound like your fairytale ending, at least check out the summer experiences on offer, such as a foraging expedition with horticulturalist Oonagh O'Dwyer, who teaches guests how to locate, prepare, and preserve the region's herbs, roots, nuts, fruits, and seaweed. Dromoland Castle regularly uses locally sourced ingredients at The Earl of Thomond, the in-house (in-castle?!) restaurant. With the eco-conscious traveler in mind, they've completely eliminated single-use plastics at their bar and dining rooms, they conserve water by operating their own private reservoir, and guests are invited to use complimentary bikes and electric golf buggies to explore the grounds. In addition to growing their own vegetables and herbs, the castle makes their own honey on-site, which is served for breakfast. There are also plenty of vegan and vegetarian options for every meal, plus dog-friendly hotel rooms, making the castle a veritable animal lover's paradise.



The quaint seaside village of Dunfanaghy is a short stroll from Breac House. Photo by [Dmitrij Paskevic](#).

Take A Breac

Hoping for a more modern retreat, but still want to connect with nature in a responsible way? The [Breac House](#) in County Donegal, northwestern Ireland fits the bill. This modern bungalow sits atop Horn Head and enjoys panoramic views of nearby Dunfanaghy village and Sheephaven Bay (plus the northern lights in early fall). Each carefully curated furnishing and piece of decor inside was sourced from local Irish craftspeople, from the rustic wood furniture and framed seaweed prints to cozy textile and charming clay dinnerware. I'll be relaxing in the off-the-grid sauna (using just stone, wood, and water) followed by a rejuvenating seaweed bath, knowing I can trust Breac House's commitment to offering sustainable luxury experiences for eco-conscious modern travelers like myself. Just outside the property, I'll be exploring the coastline, dotted with ancient forests, historic ruins, and Neolithic stone circles.



Forage for fruit, herbs, greens, and mushrooms under the supervision of a trained outdoor guide. Photo by [Annie Spratt](#).

Foraging Frenzy

Dromoland Castle isn't the only venue offering foraging experiences. In fact, there's no shortage of foraging tours available on the Emerald Isle, owed to the hunter-gatherer Celtic heritage. [Sustainable Travel Ireland](#) recommends [Blackstairs Ecotrails](#) for standalone foraging experiences, perfect for those who prefer not to be tied to a hotel itinerary. The Blackstairs complex has a large barn, 50 shepherds' huts (which look like HGTV-perfect tiny homes), a wildflower meadow, and a carefully cultivated rose garden. Owner-couple Mary and Robert White champion slow walking tours, stargazing, and of course, foraging. Mary teaches guests how to find and prepare local edible plants for delicacies like beech leaf liqueur, sorrel tabbouleh, rose petal syrup, and much more. Because foraged ingredients are heavily dependent on seasonality, no two hauls will ever be the same. For example, springtime yields wild garlic, chives, nettles, and primrose. Everything foraged gets cooked by guests—with guidance from staff—and I'm looking forward to plenty of preserved leftovers to take home, not to mention a deepened respect for how our ancestors went grocery shopping.

