

Visiting Cork on the Southwest Coast of Ireland by Patricia Arrigoni

CORK, IRELAND – While Beverly Mann’s excellent article on Ireland did mention Cork (ITN June 2005), I would like to add a little more information on this city’s selection as the 2005 European Capital of Europe by the European Union. I took a side trip to Cork in April 2005 from Kenmare where I was attending a three day conference. I had paid my own way to Ireland to attend the conference, but the Irish Tourist Board hosted a small group of people who were interested in visiting more of the country. Since my ancestors came from Cork, that was a priority for me.

Driving down to the southwest coast of Ireland, we came upon this city nearly hidden from the world for the past fifty years. A former important trading center, Cork had been slowly dying. Jobs were scarce and the young people were immigrating to the U.S. and Australia. Residents of Cork today consider it a miracle that the city in the past eight years has emerged as the “Celtic Tiger” displaying new energy and growth. They credit it to the end of the fighting with the IRA.

By the time I visited Cork the celebrations and performances celebrating the selection of the city as the 2005 Cultural Capital of Europe were well underway. This city of 160,000 was booming. Two-hundred million Euros had already been designated to improving the infrastructure of the city including new large sidewalks to accommodate pedestrians and street performers. Fifteen million more Euros were being spent during the year on culture. 300,000 visitors had already attended actual events held in the first four months.

Cork has produced famous writers, poets, song writers, musicians and artists who are currently hosting their European counterparts in their “Rebel County.” Thirteen books of foreign writers are being translated into English by thirteen Cork writers. There are poetry readings in café bookstores, gallery exhibits, dancing performances and studio exchanges. In addition visitors are finding traditional opera, classical and sacred music programs, outdoor theater, film festivals, a Jazz Festival, and the International Choral and Fold Dance Festival. There are children’s festivals, twenty-four hour reading sessions, crafts, architecture, food, visual arts, and sporting events..

I found Cork a delightful city built on an island situated in the River Lee. This mighty river has been a blessing and curse over the centuries as it allowed the Vikings, Greeks, Africans and others to invade. Today in this now peaceful city, visitors will find river channels, meandering tributaries and innumerable bridges to explore. In addition there are unexpected flights of water steps, quaysides, archways and stone walls. The views can be spectacular of the city and surrounding hills.

My accommodations were actually just outside the city in the Maryborough House Hotel (Maryborough Hill, Douglas), in a traditional manor house with modern guest rooms built in a park-like setting. My room had twin beds, a desk, TV, small glass table, chair and dresser. Single, \$189; double, \$248. Tel: 353 (0) 21-4365555; Fax: 353 (0) 21-4365662. For more information on County Cork: www.corkkerry.ie.