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Plan a Wedding in Ireland

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Discover the most romantic places to tie the knot on the enchanting Emerald Isle.

By: Becca Hensley



Photo courtesy of Ashford Castle

Just ask the Irish: Wake up to birds singing on your wedding day and you're destined to live a charmed life together. Spot three magpies en route to the church? Even better. Steeped in Celtic lore and traditions, matrimonial celebrations on the Emerald Isle include a bevy of rituals — from bell ringing to handfasting (tying the couple's hands with ribbon) — certain to channel the luck of the, yup, Irish. Partake in these charming customs at a castle, on a rural estate or amid the finery of an urbane Georgian townhouse.

Ashford Castle, County Mayo

There are turrets and moats aplenty at Ashford Castle, the smoky-grey, 13th-century Guinness family home that guards a Camelot-like lake in thick-wooded County Mayo. Down a *Little Red Riding Hood* path from a fairy-tale village (replete with classic pubs and the ruins of an ancient monastery), this very non-Disneyland resort sprawls across 350 authentic acres. Host a tea party in Lady Adilaun's parlor or dine beneath 11 dazzling Waterford Crystal chandeliers in the George V dining room. Smaller parties (20 guests minimum) celebrate in the library or the antique-festooned Connaught Room. Later, head to the "dungeon" for harp music. Activities abound to amuse your guests — fly fish the rushing River Cong, hunt with the hotel's coterie of falcons or gallivant at the equestrian school (the Royal Wedding Package is \$30,000 for 120 guests and includes a five-course dinner, canapés, a sword for cutting the cake, and more; ashford.ie).



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Photo courtesy of Ashford Castle

The Lodge At Doonbeg, County Clare

Golf aficionados will want to play the lord and lady of the manor house at The Lodge at Doonbeg, a sprawling, Victorian-style country estate defined by its award-winning Greg Norman links course. Here, wedding parties can choose from among 189 individually appointed rooms. Stay in the cozy seaside cottages on the links — or inhabit regal suites in the main house. Set atop a cliff overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, the resort hosts soirees in an ethereal, lantern-lit pavilion. Casual gatherings (think welcome drinks) happen at the *shebeen*, a rustic cottage restored to reflect the Ireland of yore. Here, fiddle-playing, ballad-singing, and line-dancing mesh with simple fare — like hearty stew cooked in a cauldron over a roaring fire (the Lavish Wedding Package starts at \$222 per person and includes a red carpet and sparkling wine welcome, a canapé and wine reception and a midnight snack, the couple's accommodations in an ocean-front room and more; doonbeglodge.com).



Photo courtesy of The Lodge at Doonbeg





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Photo courtesy of The Lodge at Doonbeg

Merrion Hotel, Dublin City

This Dublin hideaway is the sort of place Jane Austen might have written about — it's a fully fledged, former domicile of the 18th-century landed gentry. Composed of four historic townhouses in the heart of Georgian Dublin, the hotel has the ambience of a cossetting drawing room. Here, ensconced amongst elaborate plaster work, Flemish tapestries, polished marbled halls and gold-laced mirrors and an eclectic, first rate art collection, wedding parties can nibble on local fare, such as loin of venison from the nearby Wicklow Mountains or Liscanner Lobster and Dublin Bay prawns. Tie the knot in the Wellington Room, then meander to the terraced gardens for photos. The setting, with its Tethra Spa, elaborate wedding cakes and entertainment that ranges from jazz to harp music, is perfect for intimate groups with a maximum of 90 guests. Host a pre-wedding party in the Cellar Bar, the hotel's original wine vault — or organize a tour of the Guinness Storehouse, Dublin's number-one tourist attraction. Hiking, biking and equestrian pursuits can be organized in Dublin's environs (wedding packages start at about \$2,000 and include ceremony and cocktail reception set-up, some décor, basic flowers, a champagne toast, the couple's accommodations and more; merrionhotel.com).



Photo courtesy of Merrion Hotel

Legally Wedded: The marriage requirements are strict here. Couples must apply for permission to marry and meet with the Registrar in the county in which they intend to wed. Documents such as passports, notarized birth certificates, a marriage application (found at civilregistrationservice.ie), and, if applicable, death certificates or annulment certificates, along with an application fee must be submitted at least three months prior to the intended

ceremony date. The couple may also be asked to submit the following: the intended date of marriage, the type of ceremony, the names and birth dates of the witnesses and details of the proposed officiant and venue. A meeting with the appropriate county registrar's office to explain the intent to marry must be completed five days before the wedding.

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