

VISITING NORTHERN IRELAND AND EXPLORING THE RECENT HISTORY



In Ireland, visitors often follow in the footsteps of Celts and poets, exploring ringforts, dolmens and monasteries. Visiting Northern Ireland however is quite a different experience - thanks to the recent history.

Nowadays, media don't report on conflicts and IRA attacks any more - apart from an attack in a Dublin hotel in February. Thus at first sight, Belfast and other cities in the region seem quiet. When visiting Northern Ireland, **many travelers don't even notice the moment they cross the border since there is no visible frontier** between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The past can be seen more clearly on a Black taxi tour through Belfast. The drivers take the visitors around places of conflict - the "Troubles" zones. The Protestant - Catholic conflicts began in the city of Derry and Belfast in 1969 and on 30 January 1972 they escalated with the "Bloody Sunday", a massacre of Catholic demonstrators.

Since the end of the IRA and the peace talks in 1998, the conflict has hardly occurred in the media. Which is why visitors may be even more astonished while on the tour seeing numerous murals and wall paintings in which the fallen people are glorified. The Peace Lines, up to 7.5 meters high walls, which still separate Catholic and Protestant residential areas, are a must-see as well for anyone visiting Northern Ireland.

There have been plans to tear down about 50 kilometers of the walls in Belfast and Derry. However, many of the walls are getting higher. For example, in one of the centers of the conflict in Belfast, between the Irish Falls Road (Catholic) and the Shankill Road (Protestant) two meters of steel and barbed wire have been put on the wall over the past few years. The steel gate on the road between the two quarters is still closed every night.

Visiting Northern Ireland and Belfast ensures a remarkable trip. While the history can be clearly seen in some of the attractions that are often included on the itineraries of guided tours, it is less visible yet still present in the hearts and minds of the locals.

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