

## A first-hand St. Patrick's Day experience from Dublin, Ireland

Written by Jes-c Brandt

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By now St. Patrick's Day is probably just a quickly fading memory and perhaps a few lingering bruises for those who forgot March 17 was a holiday at all. But for me, my first St. Patty's Day in the capital of Ireland is something I'll never forget.

Having spent two months studying in Dublin, I've seen firsthand how special a country Ireland is. Whether in one of the lively cities, at the beach or alongside a herd of sheep in the peaceful countryside, Ireland is a place of endless possibilities. Surrounding the holiday of their patron saint, however, the island really comes alive.

Last week every Irish town I passed through was preparing for the big day. Storefronts were decorated, parades were advertised and the streets and people were decked in orange, green and white.

When I returned to Dublin, I saw people from around the world had flooded the city for a chance to be a part of the celebration. I joke that Dublin is home to so many international individuals that I'd have better luck meeting Irish people back in Massachusetts, but on St. Patrick's Day the city was even more diverse than usual.

Likewise, traditional Irish music is never in short supply here, but last week it was everywhere. It seemed you couldn't pass a single pub that didn't boast live acts. On the eve of the big day, city streets were closed to make room for a huge céilí, where we enjoyed watching professional musicians and step dancers, and even got the chance to learn a few steps ourselves.

The whole week is a grand festival, but of course the highlight of it all was Wednesday—the day they say everyone is Irish. Walking with my parents to city center, the morning started out a little slow, but before long, the streets were packed.

Hours before the much anticipated parade was even scheduled to begin, the route was lined with thousands of people, hoping to snag the perfect spot to view the parade. Some climbed lamp posts or statues, and others had prime seating in windows or on rooftops. My parents, being the good sports that they are, stood waiting with me for hours for a place right by the River Liffey on O'Connell Bridge.

Now standing around for five hours could have very well been a tiresome task, but we couldn't

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have asked for better circumstances. In a real St. Patrick's miracle, we were blessed with an entire day of sunshine and blue skies. And for all the avid people watchers out there, Dublin on St. Patrick's Day has no comparison. So we just took the opportunity to take it all in.

Gingers are rather common in Ireland, but I saw more red heads, and beards—albeit more often than not fake—that morning than I'd seen in all my days combined. And green apparel was found in every form imaginable, from the usual t-shirts, scarves and ball caps to the more curious, including wigs, sneakers, skinny jeans, tutus, leggings and top hats.

Everyone was getting into the spirit, from infants carefully shaded from the sun to the diehard parade goers rolling up in their wheelchairs.

The energy was contagious as the parade drew closer. Performers, as well as some spontaneous crowd renditions, a wildly entertaining stiletto heel dash and a visit from St. Patrick himself kept everyone amused until finally we heard a little boy shout out, "The parade is coming!" and we saw the procession headed our way.

I feel I should mention here that New York City holds the title for the oldest, largest and supposedly the best St. Patrick's Day parade in the world, but I would beg to differ. Themed "Extraordinary World," Dublin's parade was most certainly extraordinary. No description of the color, spirit and creativity of the entries can possibly do them justice. All I can say is I'd recommend everyone see at least one of their St. Patrick's Day parades—it's really good craic.

A week after St. Patrick's Day, flags and balloons can still be seen around the city, but Dublin is quickly returning to its pre-holiday state. The memory of the festival, however, will stick around much longer.