

Christening SoDa:

Two Days in Dublin

In the bygone days of the fifth edition of Lonely Planet's *Dublin* guide the authors made up the name SoDa to describe an area of cutting edge boutiques, funky little cafes, cool pubs and smart restaurants that conveniently began just south of Dame St. The name just worked and it seemed only a matter of time before SoDa would be on everybody's lips...

Alas that time has not quite yet come. What is certain is that you have to get into this great part of Dublin. It's one of the few parts of the city that *hasn't* been earmarked for regeneration, yet it has grown organically and presents an invigorating mix of old and new, local and international, trendy and grungy. Explore SoDa, from superstylin' South William Street to convivial Camden Street, before the developers take over.

BOOKS & BARS

Kickstart your day with pastries and coffee at **La Boulangerie** (10 Upper Camden Street) before devoting the rest of the morning to Dublin's single best attraction – the **Chester Beatty Library** (Dublin Castle, Cork Hill; www.cbl.ie). The museum houses an extraordinary collection lovingly and expertly gathered by New York mining magnate Alfred Chester Beatty (1875-1968). An avid traveller, Beatty amassed more than 20,000 manuscripts, rare books, miniature paintings, clay tablets, costumes and any other objets d'art that caught his fancy and could tell him something about the world. Not only are the contents of the museum outstanding, but the layout, design and location are also unparalleled, from the ubiquitous café and gift shop to the Zen rooftop terrace and the beautiful landscaped garden out the front.

For an Iberian nibble and a drink, call in at the **Market Bar** (Fade Street), a fashionable watering hole occupying an

old sausage factory. If you can prise yourself away, spend an hour or two at **Shaw Birthplace** (33 Synge Street). Close to the Grand Canal, the birthplace of playwright George Bernard Shaw is now a restored Victorian home that is interesting even to non-literary buffs because it provides an insight into the domestic life of the 19th-century's middle classes. Shaw's mother held musical evenings in the drawing room, and it is likely that her son's store of fabulous characters was inspired by those who attended.

Spend the rest of the afternoon poking in and around **Powerscourt Townhouse Shopping Centre** (59 South William Street; www.powerscourtcentre.com). This absolutely gorgeous and stylish centre in a carefully refurbished Georgian townhouse was originally built between 1741 and 1744. These days it's known for its cafes and restaurants but it still does a top-end, selective trade in high fashion, art, exquisite handicrafts and other chi-chi sundries.

As you have discerning taste, you'll have booked a table at **L'Gueuleton** (1 Fade Street; ☎ 675 3708). Dubliners have a devil of a time pronouncing the name ('a gluttonous feast') and have had their patience tested with the no-reservations-get-in-line-and-wait policy, but they just can't get enough of this restaurant's take on French rustic cuisine.

Dublin's coolest area is naturally where you'll find many of its coolest pubs. There is plenty of choice around here, from the self-conscious trendiness of South William Street to the alternative vibe of Camden Street and the Victorian gems in between. For a good spread of styles, try **Grogan's Castle Lounge** (15 South William Street), **Long Hall** (51 South Great George's Street), **Devitt's** (78

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Lower Camden Street), **Anseo** (28 Camden Street), **Ba Mizu** (Powerscourt Townhouse Shopping Centre) and the **Globe** (11 South Great George's Street).

BARGAINS & BASTIONS

Slide into the day with brunch at **Lemon** (66 South William Street), Dublin's first and best pancake joint. Spend the rest of the morning following your nose around SoDa, calling into **George's Street Arcade**, once a regular market and now a wonderful collection of pokey little shops and stalls.

In the afternoon, aim your sights at **Dublin Castle** (Cork Hill; www.dublincastle.ie). The stronghold of British power here for 700 years is principally an 18th-century creation and more of a hotchpotch palace than a castle proper. Its state apartments and the Powder Tower can be visited as part of a short guided tour, and the grounds are good for a leisurely wander.

As you walk in to the grounds from the main Dame Street entrance there's a good example of the evolution of Irish architecture, ranging from the Norman Tower right through to the uglier-than-sin Revenue Commissioners Building of 1960.

As the sun sets on your trip, grab a couple of drinks in the enormous beer garden at **Bia Bar** (30 Lower Stephen's Street) before enjoying a lazy dinner at **Odessa** (13 Dame Court; www.odessa.ie). If you're still full of life, venture out of SoDa for a traditional live music session at the upstairs lounge of the **Palace Bar** (21 Fleet Street). Whilst there, brag loudly about the brilliant time you've just had in SoDa. No-one will know what you're talking about but maybe – just maybe – that name will finally catch on.

SLEEPING

Budget:

Avalon House (www.avalon-house.ie; ☎ 475 001) Centrally located hostel with pine floors, high ceilings and bright communal areas.

Midrange:

Grafton Guesthouse (www.graftonguesthouse.com; ☎ 679 2041) A B&B with funky design and a friendly welcome.

Top End:

Brooks Hotel (www.sinnotthotels.com; ☎ 670 4000) Small, plush hotel with nouveau classic design and enormous beds.

For more reviews of Dublin accommodation, check out the Sleep section on www.lonelyplanet.com/accommodation.

By Amanda Canning

For the complete guide to Dublin grab a copy of Lonely Planet's *Dublin* guide; or get right under the skin of the city with *Best of Dublin*. Both books are available online at shop.lonelyplanet.com.

