



The VERY best of Dublin?

Every year we ask you to nominate your favourite shops, services and things to do in the city. The following 'institutions' are always mentioned. Do they really deserve to be? TREVOR WHITE offers a revisionist guide

THE IVEAGH GARDENS

Each year readers of this magazine say that the Iveagh Gardens are the city's best-kept secret. A legacy of Guinness largesse, these Victorian pleasure gardens are indeed a treat. I love the rosarium, the awkward polar-bear grotto and the statuary. I marvel at the fact that the pathways are wide enough to accommodate two ladies passing each other in full ballgowns. That rectangle with the steep banks at the northern end is not merely a good place for beer on a Saturday afternoon: it's also a sunken archery lawn – the only one in Dublin. But try finding somewhere to munch a sandwich at lunchtime on a sunny day this month.

THE VERY BEST OF DUBLIN? Indeed. Just don't call them a best-kept secret.

THE GATE THEATRE

Despite a location that is marginally more convenient than, say, Lusk, the Gate is world-famous. Our only handsome theatre is full of tourists and rich people from far-flung suburbs like Howth and Killiney; people, that is, who have more in common than their post-codes suggest. They all love a large gin and tonic, period revivals and Irish classics “with a modern twist.” They’re not interested in theatre that is remotely daring or new. Michael Colgan is the laughably smug impresario who keeps the show on the road. While Colgan is a fine argument for refusing to ape the British honours system, he still manages to field some first-rate shows.

THE VERY BEST OF DUBLIN? On balance, yes.

BURDOCK'S

It is said that guests, like fish, go off after three days. At that point we usually send them to Burdock's on the basis that it is A Real Dublin Institution. “You’ll love it,” we say, pushing them out the door. Will they love this venerable fish and chipper? Can anyone really love Burdock's? If you are a tourist you will wonder what the fuss is about. But if you are suffering from acute dehydration (ie a bad hangover) there is something mildly comforting about a parcel of smoked cod and chips with unnatural lashings of salt and vinegar.

THE VERY BEST OF DUBLIN? Only according to the guidebooks. (*Do the people of Dublin agree? See p57*)

PAT LIDDY

Anyone who has been on one of his walking tours will confirm that Pat Liddy is the uncrowned king of the city. Passionate, erudite and modest, he is among the few Dublin ‘characters’ who

deserve to be more widely celebrated. And the punters are beginning to get the message. On a tour of Viking Dublin a couple of months ago – sponsored, to its credit,



THE SHELBOURNE

In the midst of a widely-reported tiff between the landlords and tenants of the Shelbourne, I spotted two of the landlords enjoying a cup of tea in the elegant Lord Mayor's Lounge. Things are not always as they seem at this symbol of Dublin's handsome past. (For a glimpse of its monstrous present, try the Four Seasons.) The Horseshoe Bar is reputed to be a place where politicians and their patrons come to drink. Most of the time it's full of far less pampered creatures. And while it's true that the main bar is packed on a Friday night, it's no longer the bold-print singles scene that tabloid hacks imagine. There is a more restrained buzz these days, less craning of necks. The hotel looks better than ever, and anyone who tells you that they preferred the old dame the way it was pre-renovation is suffering from amnesia or, worse, has succumbed to the tyranny of nostalgia.

THE VERY BEST OF DUBLIN? Yesterday, today and, one hopes, for many years to come.

by Dublin City Council – there were at least 200 people following the great man around Christchurch at 11am on a Sunday morning. On a tour of Jewish Dublin one evening last year there were nearly 300 curious locals. Young and old alike warm to this remarkable man, and I seriously doubt if there is a better ambassador for Dublin.

THE VERY BEST OF DUBLIN? Without a doubt.

THE CHICKEN WINGS AT ELEPHANT & CASTLE

There are many good reasons for avoiding the Cultural Quarter. Few who enter the Temple of Doom manage to emerge unscathed. Vomit, needles, David McSavage and ugly Welsh birds are among the hazards. The chicken wings at the Elephant & Castle, a posh diner with tiny loos, continue to ensure that real-life Dubliners occasionally meet each other within 100 yards of Meeting House Square. Those wings have, however, spawned many imitators. Hence it is now possible to find the same dish (or something very like it) at places such as Tribeca in Ranelagh and Bridge Bar and

Grill. The Bridge rendition is particularly respectful/audacious.

THE VERY BEST OF DUBLIN? Just about.

GUINNESS

They keep trying new things. They don't always work. (Remember Breo?) Thankfully Diageo has the good sense to leave well enough alone when it comes to the original draught stout. Water, malt, barley, hops and brewer's yeast remain the core ingredients in a drink that has done more for Dublin's tourism industry than any man or woman alive today. And while the black beauty is very much a brand these days, it is heartening to note that the Guinness family still has a small interest. One evening I had a drink with Lord Iveagh in Toner's on Baggot Street. Across a crowded pub, Ned, who is very proud of his Irish roots, ordered a couple of pints. He has the sort of voice that Dubs are not inclined to forgive. Punters quickly turned to glare at the Brit. You could almost hear the murmur: ‘Who does yer man think he is?’ How I longed to tell them.

THE VERY BEST OF DUBLIN? Our pride and joy.