

# Northern Ireland: Facts



Northern Ireland is the smallest country in the United Kingdom. It makes up part of the UK along with England, Scotland and Wales, but is situated on an island in Western Europe called Ireland. Northern Ireland takes up one-sixth of Ireland, while the rest of Ireland is an independent nation, the Republic of Ireland.

Despite its small geographical size, Northern Ireland is a country of culture, producing famous writers like Seamus Heaney and C.S. Lewis as well as noted actors like Liam Neeson, James Nesbitt and Kenneth Branagh.

## Top ten facts

1. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, but it makes its own laws. The Parliament buildings of the Northern Irish government, in Belfast, are called Stormont.
2. After Scotland, Northern Ireland is the second most sparsely populated country in the UK.
3. In 1921 the island of Ireland was divided into two parts. Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom and the rest became known as the Republic of Ireland.
4. Sometimes Northern Ireland is called Ulster, the ancient name of that part of Ireland.
5. Although English is the most popular language in Northern Ireland, Chinese is the most widely spoken minority language!
6. Northern Ireland is divided into six counties: Antrim, Armagh, Derry (Londonderry), Tyrone, Fermanagh, and Down.
7. Lough Neagh is a huge lake in Northern Ireland – in fact it's the biggest lake in the British Isles and every county except Fermanagh touches the shores of the lake!



8. The Giant's Causeway is a famous rocky area of the coast in County Antrim. It's made up of thousands of hexagonal blocks of rock, formed by ancient volcanic eruptions.

9. Belfast is the capital city of Northern Ireland. The land that Belfast occupies has been occupied since the Bronze Age!

10. The population of Northern Ireland is about 1.8 million.

## Did you know?

With an average of 157 wet days a year, it rains less in Belfast than it does in Scotland, but the capital of Northern Ireland is still wetter than Dublin, the Irish capital!

The world-famous ship the Titanic was built and launched from Belfast Harbour. At the time it launched, it was the largest man-made moving object on Earth! The Titanic was built by the Belfast shipyard Harland & Wolff in 1911. The RMS Titanic sadly sank after hitting an iceberg on April 15 1912, on her very first voyage.

Although Northern Ireland is sometimes called Ulster, the ancient name for the part of Ireland, the old Ulster actually included areas that are now part of the Republic of Ireland.

Northern Ireland is clearly home to the young! Almost 46% of the total population of Northern Ireland are under 30 years old.



As in the rest of Ireland, there are no snakes or toads in the country!

At its closest point, Northern Ireland is only 13 miles across the sea from the Scottish coast. Apparently, on a clear day you can stand in Antrim, look across the water and see houses in Scotland!

The Northern Ireland football team has qualified for three world cups, in 1958, 1982 and 1986, and George Best is considered one of the most famous players to come from the country. Other sports legends to come from Northern Ireland are snooker player Alex Higgins and Formula One racer Eddie Irvine.

Mark these sentences as T (True) or F (False).

- ☐ Northern Ireland is in Great Britain.
- ☐ Actors Liam Neeson and Kenneth Branagh are Irish.
- ☐ The Stormont are the Northern Irish Parliament buildings.
- ☐ Northern Ireland is the most sparsely populated country in the UK.
- ☐ The island of Ireland was divided into two parts in the early 1900s.
- ☐ There is a Chinese-speaking community in Northern Ireland.
- ☐ Northern Ireland is divided into six provinces.
- ☐ Lough Neagh is a huge lake surrounded by every county.
- ☐ The Giant's Causeway is made up of volcanic rock.
- ☐ The capital of Northern Ireland is Belfast.
- ☐ It rains more in Dublin than in Belfast.
- ☐ The Titanic set sail on its first and last voyage from Belfast Harbour.
- ☐ Almost half of the population of Northern Ireland are under 30 years old.
- ☐ On a clear day, Scotland can be seen from Northern Ireland.
- ☐ Northern Ireland has played three football World Cups.



## About

Northern Ireland is the smallest country in the United Kingdom. It makes up the United Kingdom, along with England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland is situated on an island in Western Europe called Ireland. In 1921 Ireland was divided into two parts. Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom and the rest became known as the Republic of Ireland.

☐ About 800 years ago, the Kings of England gained control of Ireland, but years later, the Irish managed to get rid of most of the English! But in the mid-1600s, the famous English military leader, Oliver Cromwell, took over all of Ireland. Since England was Protestant while Ireland was Catholic, there was a lot of hostility between both sides.

By the 19th century, many people living in Northern Ireland were Protestant and had English roots. And this is where problems arose as most people in Northern Ireland didn't want independence like the rest of Ireland did. The people who wanted an independent Ireland became known as republicans or nationalists because they wanted Ireland to become a republic, a government where people come together to make laws. The people who didn't want independence for Ireland were referred to as unionists because they wanted to retain their union with the UK. ☐. By 1921, the UK agreed to recognise Ireland as an independent nation, but kept Northern Ireland under the Government of Ireland Act.

But this didn't stop the problems, unfortunately. The reason why? Republicans were willing to continue to fight to make Northern Ireland part of the rest of Ireland while Irish unionists were willing to fight to prevent it. ☐. The crisis escalated in 1969 when British troops were sent in to prevent religious violence between the Protestants and the Catholics. ☐. Bloody Sunday was one of the most significant events of the Troubles. It took place on the 30 January 1972, when British soldiers shot 28 civilian citizens and 14 people died.

☐. It was an agreement between the British and Irish governments and most political parties in Northern Ireland about how Northern Ireland should be governed. Following a referendum in Northern Ireland in 1998, the National Assembly for Northern Ireland was established. The UK government has transferred a wide range of powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly. This means that local politicians instead of MPs (Members of Parliament) in London, now make key decisions on how Northern Ireland is governed.

Religion has been the cause of many tensions in Northern Ireland. Most people in Ireland are Christians, but in Northern Ireland they predominantly belong to the Protestant Church, whereas in the neighbouring Republic of Ireland, most people belong to the Roman Catholic Church. ☐.

Even though he is the Irish patron saint, St Patrick was actually born in Britain not Ireland! Some believe he was kidnapped as a teenager and brought to Ireland. St Patrick was credited for bringing the religion of Christianity to Ireland. St Patrick's Day is celebrated annually in Northern Ireland as it is in the rest of Ireland on March 17. ☐.

Agriculture is one of Northern Ireland's most important industries and there are currently over 29,000 farmers.

Belfast is the largest centre of population, with more than a third of people in Northern Ireland living in or near the capital. Londonderry or Derry is the largest city after Belfast. It is found in the northwest of the country beside the River Foyle.

Like the rest of the UK, the pound sterling is the currency of the country.

English is the most commonly spoken language but Irish (or 'Irish Gaelic') is also significant, as well as a language known as Ulster Scots. With more people from other countries moving to Northern Ireland, other languages like Chinese, Urdu or Polish are also becoming more common.

One of the most popular meals in Northern Ireland is known as the 'Ulster Fry': bacon, egg, soda bread, sausage, potato bread, mushrooms, fried tomato and baked beans! ☐. Traditional dishes include champ (mashed potato with spring onions), farl (potato bread) and boxty (potato cake).

☐ The most popular are football, gaelic football and rugby union, although athletics, boxing, cricket, golf, hurling (an outdoor stick-and-ball game similar to hockey and lacrosse and traditional in Ireland) and snooker are also popular.

Some sentences have been removed from the text above. Match them to the corresponding blank by writing the letter in the corresponding box.

- A) The clashes between the two sides were known as the Troubles.
- B) It is a public holiday and celebrations generally involve public parades and festivals, and the wearing of green clothes or shamrocks.
- C) The unionists lived mostly in Northern Ireland.
- D) Northern Ireland enjoys its sport!
- E) Northern Ireland's history is a little complicated!
- F) The Belfast Agreement, also known as the Good Friday Agreement because it was reached on Good Friday, 10 April 1998, was a turning point.
- G) Potatoes are a key ingredient in the food of Northern Ireland.
- H) This has caused many problems between the two religions that exist in Ireland, but things are changing.
- I) There were lots of protests and riots.



