



# IRISH GAZETTE



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## Exploring Northern Ireland, Co. Armagh

By Kathy Dougherty

St. Patrick and apples are just two items that make Co. Armagh a fascinating and unique place to visit. First, the apples. Known as the "Orchard County," over 4,000 acres of Armagh's countryside is covered with apple orchards. If you travel through Co. Armagh in April and May, during apple blossom time, or in October during the harvest, evidence for its nickname is everywhere.

The city of Armagh, near the center of the county, is acknowledged as the Ecclesiastical Capital of Ireland, and it's not just because Armagh is built on seven hills like Rome. It was here, in AD 445, that St. Patrick built his first stone church in all of Ireland. Today, Armagh is the seat of both the Anglican Church of Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, where archbishops from both denominations reside.

Not surprisingly, the city is

also home to not one, but two cathedrals named for the patron saint of Ireland. While the spires of the Roman Catholic St. Patrick's Cathedral are visible from miles away, the Church of Ireland's cathedral holds more historical significance. After all, this is the church that St. Patrick built (although it's been through at least 17 restorations since then.) A listing of its abbots and bishops begins with Patrick himself. Another historical highlight is located on the cathedral's outer wall; a small plaque marking the final resting place of Brian Boru, High King of Ireland, who was buried in 1014.

Walking the streets of Armagh is the easiest way to take in everything it has to offer. Just down from the cathedrals and Armagh's main shopping area is the Mall, a lovely, large green lawn surrounded by tall trees. As signage near the Mall explains, it was used as a racetrack

until the late 1700s, when racing was banished and it became a public area for everyone to enjoy. Near the Mall is the Armagh Observatory, founded in 1790 and still a working research facility. St. Patrick's Trian, an interpretive center featuring the story of Armagh, details of St. Patrick's life and an exhibit based on Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver's Travels" (Swift spent time in and near Armagh) is also nearby.

Just outside the city of Armagh, you'll find one of Ireland's most important archeological sites — Emain Macha, now called Navan Fort, believed to be the capital of ancient Ulster. Irish myth, legend and ancient history mix at this green hill surrounded by a grassy moat. The Navan Centre, adjacent to the fort, helps visitors sort fact from fiction.

One more interesting feature in Co. Armagh is the game of road bowls. For some reason this simple yet challenging game is played in only two counties in Ireland — Armagh and Cork. It consists of hurling a heavy, lead ball down a public road for approximately two miles. Whoever reaches the end in the least number of throws is the winner. The matches are typically accompanied by boisterous crowds and heavy betting. Great fun, as long as you're not driving on the road they're using!

*Kathy Dougherty is owner of Northern Ireland Travels, which specializes in creating personalized, self-guided trips to Northern Ireland. For more information visit their website at [www.nirelandtravels.com](http://www.nirelandtravels.com).*



The Roman Catholic St. Patrick's Cathedral in Co. Armagh. This cathedral is one of two named for St. Patrick, the other being the cathedral for the Church of Ireland.