

ENTHRAL mine ears! In fact, the only way to stop the gab beguiling in a land that bore the likes of Joyce and Wilde - but won't bore you - is to get lost in a pair of glinting Irish eyes, set fair in a fresh lad's face. The age of consent in this nation of boy bands and Euros is seventeen for all persuasions. A quarter of Ireland's four million inhabitants live in Dublin, whose gay scene is friendly, playful and eccentric, straddling the River Liffey.

Frankie's Guesthouse (8 Camden Place; Tel: 00353 1 478 3087; www.frankiesguesthouse.com), is a delightful, exclusively gay affair in a pretty Georgian terrace mews offering hefty Irish breakfasts and overseen masterfully by the colourful character that is Frankie. Over the river and next to Out on the Liffey bar (see below), **Inn on the Liffey** (21 Ormond Quay Upper, Northside; Tel: 00353 1 677 0828) offers river views and free admission to its own in-house Dock sauna (again, see below).

Saunter along **Grafton Street** off College Green for shops; dawdle on **St Stephen's Green**; amble around **Trinity College**; mosey by **The Liffey**; do the **James Joyce Trail**; explore **Dublin Castle**; watch a play at the world-famous **Abbey** (www.abbeytheatre.ie), **Gate** (www.gate-theatre.ie) or **Gaiety** (www.gaietytheatre.com) theatres; and for queer culture, pay homage at **Oscar Wilde's House** (1 Merrion Square) where the self-declared genius spent several formative years with his family up to the age of twenty one.

Apart from all the shops and boutiques along Grafton Street, you may find **Basic Instinct** (60a South William Street; www.basic-instincts.com) of use for your mags, videos, leather and rubber requirements - something for all knobs and knockers.



Starting south of the river, the revamped **Stonewall Café** (18 Exchequer Street; Tel: 00353 1 672 7323) is a mixed but favoured homo haunt serving simple yet stylish food at good prices. This area is a particular boon for veggie queens, with bustling **Cornucopia** (19 Wicklow Street; Tel: 00353 1 677 7583) over the road offering cheap pulses and gruels - wind enough to hoist your sail - or try the pricier **Juice** (73 South Great George Street; Tel: 00353 1 475 7856) around the corner for that authentic New Age Queer feast treat.

Due north in the revitalised riverside Temple Bar, the mixed **Front Lounge** (33 Parliament Street; Tel: 00353 1 670 4112) style saloon gets almost completely overrun by gays on the upper level. Smooching your lover boy in a comfy sofa for all the straights below to view, it's a great daytime chill zone or the perfect spring board for the night ahead.

Just over the river and in stark contrast, **Out on the Liffey** (27 Ormond Quay Upper; Tel: 00353 1 872 2480) is best described as "unpolished". Pretensions barred, it gets particularly cruisy and men-only on a Saturday. Staying on the north bank and just round the corner, you're soon back in style again with "straight friendly" **GUBU** (7-8 Capel Street; Tel: 00353 1 874 0483) setting the trend with

crowds of bright young things propping up its long bar in between smiling and laughing and making trips to the cosy loos. Just along the road, pop into **Yello** (61-63 Capel Street; Tel: 00353 1 878 3371), the newest gay style bar in town: bright and clean with friendly staff and service to your table.

Back across the river and **The George** (89 South Great George's Street; Tel: 00353 1 478 2983) is the scene's oldest and biggest bar - a tried and tested trouper. Attracting all sorts with its timeless mix of karaoke and drag, it expands upstairs - most notably on a Saturday - from which gallery you can gaze down upon carefree gays shimmying away beneath.

Legs still left on you? Well there's no shortage of clubs to cheat the night. Newly re-opened **HAM** at the POD (Harcourt Street; Tel: 00353 1 478 0225; www.pod.ie) is the main venue on a Friday: an unusual cavernous space, fit for both grooving and boozing and as cruisy as you fancy with some young Liam, Seamus or Ronan. If it's Monday it's **SLAM** (Powerscourt Townhouse, South William Street; Tel: 00353 1 677 0014): a darned good laugh - all ages but not least those naughty student stop-outs.

Boilerhouse (12 Crane Lane, Temple Bar; Tel: 00353 1 677 3130) is the largest, busiest sauna in town with all the booths and trappings imaginable, though some still swear by the smaller **Dock** (21 Ormond Quay Upper; Tel: 00353 1 872 4172) attached to the Inn on the Liffey just back over the water. But if you like to work up a sweat outside, then cruise straight to the **Papal Cross** monument after dark in Phoenix Park north-west of centre - arguably the Pope's most tangible legacy following his visit a few decades ago.

BLARNEY BLOKES

ADRIAN GILLAN guzzles gay gab in Dublin's queer city where the boys are so pretty.



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