

Guinness, the clover and the flag

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St Patrick's Day, is a very special day in Ireland. Apart from being the only "bank holiday" that does not fall on a Monday, it is also, and maybe above all, the day when the whole country stops and pours into streets to celebrate its patron saint. It is a peaceful, albeit deafening invasion, when adults and children dress up in the colours of the Irish flag, green, white and orange, or wear the clover, the symbol of Ireland, and every corner of the city, even the nation, is coloured green. In the streets of the capital, Dublin, there is a parade of floats, similar to the carnival floats in Italy, with music, dancing and thousands of colours, not only of the clothes, but also of the skins, demonstrating the multitude of nationalities that now make up the Irish society. And this variety of civilisations and cultures is also to be found on the floats, and in the flags accompanying the parade.

This year's parade is maybe more heartfelt, there is maybe a greater desire to get away from the everyday routine and to celebrate, at least for one day, after all of the problems that the nation has faced recently, the "shocking" end of the Celtic Tiger, with all of the social implications and tensions, the scandals involving the Irish Church, and a future that is still uncertain.

Even the uncertain weather and the grey sky over Dublin have not prevented the masses from blocking the centre in order to participate in the parade.

Among the crowd, you will find a great variety of people, from the true Dubliner from the "north side", who you would have difficulty in understanding, even if he was sober, to the group of young people who have come from the midlands, the countryside, to experience a day of vitality in the big city, from the Italian emigrant, who is now perfectly accustomed to the Irish habits, to the tough old man, who, maintaining his composure with all of the noise, heads determinedly for "his" local, for a good pint of the dark stuff, and to listen to some good old traditional music.

And then, there is one symbol of this emerald isle without which this would all be incomplete, namely Guinness, the pitch black stout, with its sour taste, the first mouthfuls of which do not appeal to the Italian palate, used, as it is, to refined wins, but which gradually win you over; in fact, Guinness is nicer in Ireland than in the rest of the world.

With their vitality and desire to have fun, their constant smile, an openness and innate predisposition to socialise, the Irish resemble the Mediterranean and Latin peoples more than the serious and unemotional Anglo-Saxons.

For one day, Ireland comes to a halt, dresses up in party clothes and celebrates in the streets, waving flags, drinking Guinness and trying to imagine sunnier climes.

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