





INTRODUCTION

Dalkey Castle & Heritage Centre is comprised of a 10th century church and graveyard, a 14th century fortified townhouse/castle, and a modern heritage centre. The facility is owned by Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, and managed under licence by Dalkey Irish Heritage Town Company, a CLG with charitable status.

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council put Dalkey forward for the Bord Fáilte National Heritage Town scheme in 1995. Grant funding enabled the opening of a Heritage Centre in 1998.

The Centre provides an award-winning, uniquely engaging visitor experience to domestic and international visitors with interpretation of the site provided by inhouse trained tour guides and professional actors from Deilg Inis Theatre Company. A number of related products have been developed by the Centre including guided local literary and historical walks, a Dalkey visitor map/guide, two annual literary festivals (Bloomsday and ECHOES) and bespoke luxury evening experiences.

Dalkey Irish Heritage Town Company also provides a management, administration, caretaking and oversight function for Dalkey Town Hall, a community facility, on behalf of Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council.

OUR MISSION

To promote the heritage of Dalkey and the surrounding area to a wide audience and to the highest standards. To abide by our charitable purpose in the promotion of arts, heritage, culture, and education, and to work in partnership with DLRCC to support the delivery of key heritage, tourism, and community objectives.

OUR VISION

We are committed to providing a vibrant, educational, and entertaining visitor experience and to facilitate community use of the town hall in a well-maintained, well-used heritage and cultural facility. We aim to be financially secure, with a sustainable staffing model and to grow visitor numbers annually.

OUR VALUES

- Authenticity a genuine historic place, embedded in its community
- Accessibility welcoming to all
- Creativity presenting heritage in engaging ways
- Nurturing supporting our staff and managing our protected structures
- Partnership working closely with stakeholders

OVERVIEW

Form of governance

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council owns Dalkey Castle and Heritage Centre and has licenced Dalkey Irish Heritage Town CLG (DIHT) since 1995 to operate it as a visitor centre under a Licence and Management Agreement ¹.

DIHT secured charitable status in 1995 which was renewed in 2022. Its charitable purpose is "to continue the development of the visitor centre in Dalkey Castle and the advancement of Dalkey as a heritage town of Ireland, and the promotion of arts, heritage, culture and education."

DIHT operates within the context of its Articles of Association and is supported in its operation by the policies of DLRCC including the County Development Plan, Heritage Plan and Tourism Strategy.

The Articles of Association of DIHT mandate that the company board has representatives from Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (representing elected members and the executive), the local business community, local community, and drama groups.

The buildings/outdoor space

The centre includes:

- a 14th century fortified townhouse/castle
- a 10th century church and graveyard
- a 19th century town hall with a stage which is used for community events and activities
- a modern heritage centre with scaled models and interactive screens in 12 languages
- a writers' gallery introducing the work of writers/creative artists associated with the area

The number and functions of staff

- General manager: Margaret Dunne (FT)
- Administrator: Maeve Kingston (PT)
- Front of House and Training Supervisors: Liz Crossen, Sharon Dooley and Tea Susak (PT)
- Caretaker: Dan O'Brien (PT)
- Digital marketing: Niamh Lynch (PT)
- Four Volunteers: Deirdre Burke, Phil Stokes, Brenda Tracey & Bernadette Stapleton (PT)
- Seven Tour Guides on Community Employment and Tús programmes; Rita Biggs, CJ O'Mahony, Tea Susak, Minota McGillycuddy, Angela Taaffe, Ciarán Farrell & Brendan Maher (PT)

¹ The 10 year licencing agreement is due for renewal in early 2025



Services provided

Dalkey Castle & Heritage Centre is open all year round, 6 days/week, opening at 10.00am on weekdays and 10.30am on weekends. It is closed on Tuesdays, festival times and at Christmas.

The Heritage Centre offers the following services²:

- **Dalkey Castle Living History Experience**; for the general visitor and adapted for the national school curriculum, EFL language schools, inclusive tours for specific groups with additional needs, DEIS school tours, free tours for DLR Spring into Heritage and Summer of Heritage programmes, turais treoraithe ar fáil i nGaeilge den mhórchuid
- Guided walks and tours; Maeve Binchy & Irish Writers Guided Walk, Marvellously Maeve Guided Walk, Nobel Laureates Walk, Guided Historical Walk, Fresh Air and Fun on Dalkey Island
- Literary festivals and seasonal events; Bloomsday (since 2001), ECHOES (since 2017), Halloween and Christmas events
- **Community activities in the Town Hall**; classes, events, rehearsals, performances, meetings, exhibitions, festivals
- Public access to historic artefacts including a Dalkey Township map and Rathdown slab
- Public access to **scaled models** of Dalkey, the building of Dún Laoghaire harbour and Dalkey Island and a **physical and digital interpretation** of the built, natural, and cultural/literary heritage of the local and wider area
- **Filming** location, when/where possible
- Visitor shop
- Training of staff: an 8-module site specific training programme delivered by 3 PT Supervisors who are Train the Trainer, Fetac Level 6 qualified
- Luxury evening experiences: Magical Heritage Evening at Dalkey Castle, Maeve Binchy, The Heart of Dalkey, Discover Dalkey's Literary Legends, ReJoyce, Discover Joyce's Dalkey (currently dependent on upgrade to toilet facilities)

² see Appendix A for details of visitor experience products



Tripadvisor - Sept 2024

Bloomsday Festival: Joycean evening, Schoolroom and Walk (14th-16th June annually).

"If an authentically Joycean shiver down the spine was what you were after, the place to be was Dalkey Castle & Heritage Centre. After a beautifully judged presentation of the schoolroom scene from Ulysses, local guide Joe Dunne led an enthusiastic group to the actual house where the scene is set... And for a brief moment, as we listened to the liquid closing lines" through the checkerwork of leaves the sun flung spangles..."
- Ulysses became a living reality."

Arminta Wallace, Irish Times

"Santa Experience was Amazing - We are from Galway and this has been our 4th annual trip to the Santa experience at Dalkey castle..It's just magical..They put so much effort into it and make it all about the children..I also had big children with me and also included them, it's definitely a family experience for sure..It's very reasonably priced and Santa has a lovely chat with each child at the end..also all the staff are just wonderful and make this day so special for each and every person."

Tripadvisor review, Dec 2024 • Family

The visitor experience

Access to Dalkey Castle is through a structured live performance tour. "The Living History Experience" is provided under contract by Deilg Inis Theatre Company. During a 60-70 minute experience, visitors interact with characters from Tudor times. Performances in the Living History Experience are authentically in English as spoken in the middle-ages in Dublin/Dalkey.

Visitors are also invited to explore scaled models of medieval Dalkey and Victorian transport systems and interactive screens with historical information in 12 languages, including Irish. The Writers' Gallery features the work of 45 writers and creative artists of the area from Bono to James Joyce and Beckett to Maeve Binchy.

Inhouse trained tour guides manage all tours. They lead visitors, give overview introductions to the video and graphic animations, share historical information about the site, the scaled models, the interactive screens, the Writers' Gallery, and other visitor information.

The Centre has won the National Heritage Award (2016), CIE Awards of Excellence (2017, 2018, 2019, 2022, 2023), Fáilte Ireland Customer Service Excellence Award (2018) and has received Tripadvisor 5 stars annually (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022, 2023).

"Genuinely the best tour we've ever been on - HIGHLY recommend! You HAVE to do this tour! It was honestly so amazing!!!! The tour is brought to life by amazing actors who make it so fun and educational - my daughter and I couldn't stop smiling the whole time. I honestly can't recommend it highly enough. All the staff are lovely and kind and it was the best tour we've ever done! Wonderful value for money too! A perfect family activity which lasts 1.5 hours. We'll definitely be coming back!"

Tripadvisor - Nov 2024 • Family

"Bhí cuairt den scoth ag grúpa Céad bhliana ar thaispeántas staire Chaisleán Deilginise le gairid. Treoraithe oilte, cur i láthair idirghníomhach spraíúil ilmhódach agus sonraí suimiúla faoi Bhás agus Beatha sa Mheánaois. Agus é seo ar fáil den mhórchuid as Gaeilge! Bhain na daltaí an-taitneamh as na seisiúin leis na ceardlanna beo."

Evelyn Ní Raghaill Stiúrthóir Choláiste na Tulchann

The Living History Model

The initial trials for a Living History model of imparting historical information, devised by the current manager, Margaret Dunne, were funded by the Blackrock Education Centre, Interreg and later, DLRCC.

The model in use today under Deilg Inis, a professional acting company, was devised in conjunction with Dr Chrissie Poulter, head of devising historical drama at Trinity College, Dublin. Formed in 2003, it was based on the modus operandi of Chance Encounters from Cadu in Wales. By invitation, they came to Dalkey in 2004 and led a three-day workshop on the model.

Later, award-winning writer, Shay Linehan, manager of Deilg Inis, wrote new scripts based on historical research to suit Dalkey Castle site-specific requirements.

Today, costumed actors perform a first person medieval Living History Experience from basement to battlements. The Archer demonstrates his longbow prowess before leading visitors via the Murder Hole to the battlements and the magnificent views. Cook shares medieval recipes - including her favourite, roast goose. The Barber Surgeon can cure many ills. He is prepared for all eventualities and writes out his potions in calligraphy. Sustainable practices are to the fore in the Living History Experience.

Seasonal script variations for Halloween and Christmas have evolved from



CAPITAL AND OPERATIONAL FUNDING

Capital Funding to date

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council put Dalkey forward for the Bord Fáilte National Heritage Town scheme in 1995. Grant funding enabled the opening of a Heritage Centre in 1998. This included 75% grant funding under the State's Operational Programme for Tourism, 25% funding from local businesses, local community and two local drama groups. Dalkey Irish Heritage Town CLG was established to run the facility under licence to DLRCC.

In 2012, 70% grant aid was secured from Fáilte Ireland to upgrade the interpretation systems - the 30% balance was secured by a raffle, donation and DLRCC equally. Capital works and repairs to the buildings outside of day-to-day maintenance are the responsibility of the owner, DLRCC.

Operational Funding

A DLRCC operational grant (€130,000 in 2024) contributes to the centre's overall running costs and mandated obligations of the organisation. The operational grant partially covers:

- DLR CE supervisors' salaries
- DLR CE training and supplies
- Caretaking and administration salaries of Dalkey Town Hall
- Day to day maintenance
- Support of Living History Experience
- Support for literary festivals
- Free DLR Spring and Summer of Heritage tours
- Free tours for DEIS Schools and vulnerable groups

The Deilg Inis Company provides actors for the Living History experience. It is funded by the Community Services Programme administered by Pobal. This is a benefit in kind to Dalkey Castle.

The remainder of the Centre's operational funding is generated by ticket income, shop sales, occasional grants, and facilities hire (cumulatively €265,711 in 2024).

The graveyard grass is maintained under the DLRCC grass cutting contract.

Annual visitor numbers

From 2017-2019, visitor numbers were over 30,000 annually. After the lifting of Covid restrictions in 2022, numbers were 15,000 in 2023 and continue to recover in 2024.



Stakeholders

Dalkey Castle & Heritage Centre engages with many stakeholders: staff and volunteers, domestic and international visitors, Community Employment learners, Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, Deilg Inis Theatre Co., Charity Regulator, local schools, language schools on cultural visits, local community, community activity providers, groups with specific needs, local businesses including hospitality and tourism businesses, drama groups, Dalkey Tidy Towns, Dalkey Community Council, Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, dlr Tourism, dlr Heritage Office, dlr Community, dlr Architects, dlr Arts Office, dlr Events, Southside Partnership, festival organisers and attendees, National Monuments Service, Heritage Council, film companies, and shop suppliers.

"Dalkey Castle & Heritage Centre is an integral and highly valued part of the Dalkey community. They provide a welcoming presence in the town for all comers: locals, visitors, national schools and international students. The tourist experience is to a very high and professional standard. They also reach out to the vulnerable members of the community in an outreach capacity. The manager and staff are always willing to help out all community endeavours. The manager keeps us up to date with a monthly report in our Dalkey Community Council Newsletter which is delivered to 3600 houses in the locality and available online."

Ann Perry, Secretary, Dalkey Community Council. (umbrella body for all community organisations in Dalkey)

"Dalkey Castle & Heritage Centre is visited by The Harold Glasthule annually. The tour is a wonderful experience and the children always thoroughly enjoy it. The guides and actors combine to make the tour both educational and fun. The actors really bring the tour to life, while the guides deliver the historic information in a clear manner. We will definitely be coming back each year!"

Róisin, 6th class teacher, The Harold School, Glasthule

"The Town Hall at Dalkey Castle & Heritage Centre provides us with a wonderful venue to bring the best plays to a local audience. It's important for us to be at the heart of the community and the Town Hall has enabled this over many years. We have also built strong links with the team at Dalkey Castle & Heritage Centre who always provide great support and encouragement to us. We look forward to working together for many years to come."

Colm Kearns, Secretary, Dalkey Players, All-Ireland-winning drama group

Situation Review 2024

The board of Dalkey Irish Heritage Town CLG is very proud of the work of the Centre, the numerous national awards secured for its visitor experience and the adaptation and resilience demonstrated through the challenging years of Covid.

Dalkey Castle & Heritage Centre, however, is at a key point in its evolution. A huge amount has been achieved since it opened in 1998, but there are challenges to be met now in relation to rebuilding visitor numbers, exploring new opportunities, addressing rising costs, securing adequate operational funding, the model and continuity of staffing and the commitment of the building owner, DLRCC, to timely maintenance/repair of buildings. The key challenges are outlined below:

- Visitor numbers are recovering slowly after the impact of Covid. The centre adapted the service to continue operation, when possible, during 2020-2022 and received the Fáilte Ireland Covid quality assurance mark. The ambition is to increase visitor numbers by 5.6% annually for the next 5 years in line with Fáilte Ireland projections.
- The current operational staffing model using Community Employment has been identified as a risk both to current operations and future ambitions changes are needed to ensure a secure staffing model into the future.
- The centre's buildings need proactive facility management by DLRCC. This would include a building survey and scheduled annual repairs/maintenance. Energy and other upgrades are required. At the moment, the roof is badly leaking, affecting the fabric of the building, and requiring buckets to catch water, the church requires vegetation removal, and the toilets require an upgrade.
- Core operational funding is provided by DLRCC, and there is potential to diversify income, including increasing venue hire/filming income and to identify external funders that closely align with the mission of Dalkey Castle.
- The reliance on the DART for visitor access became an issue in 2024 when works at weekends resulted in a reduction in visitor numbers. Other ways to connect the centre to key visitor movement networks are needed including coach and bus connections.
- While Dalkey Castle is a leading visitor attraction, there is significant potential to grow numbers and diversify audience. We will need to continue to work with stakeholders to ensure Dalkey Castle & Heritage Centre is positioned and promoted as a leading visitor attraction in the region.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

OBJECTIVE 1 Deliver and promote our visitor experience

	ACTIONS
1.1	Continue to deliver the award-winning, educational Living History Experience at Dalkey Castle with trained tour guides and professional actors
1.2	Celebrate the rich literary heritage of this area with performances, festivals and guided literary walks
1.3	Develop easy visitor routes to the centre, work to achieve tours with coach operators, local businesses and dlr Tourism
1.4	Enhance outreach programmes to increase diversity of visitors and extend invitation to communities not yet engaged with Dalkey Castle in partnership with dlr Community section/Southside Partnership and social/cultural organisations
1.5	Work with Deilg Inis on its community engagement and outreach objective - strengthening ties with the local community and engaging diverse audiences
1.6	Contribute to joint marketing of all tourism product in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown by DLR Tourism
1.7	Contribute to and avail of umbrella marketing and promotion of Dublin's tourism offering including Fáilte Ireland's Coastal Trail
1.8	Engage with Incoming Tour Operators (ITOA), FAM tours/Tourism industry events to showcase Dalkey Castle
1.9	Enhance connection with Dalkey Island, where possible
1.10	Engage with Dublin hotels to encourage group and concierge visits
1.11	Ensure all exhibits, including interactive screens and the Writers' Gallery, are maintained to the highest standards
1.12	Collect and analyse visitor feedback to continually improve the experience to feed into the National Tourism Grid

OBJECTIVE 2 | Ensure the facility is adequately staffed

	ACTIONS	
2.1	Secure funding to hire staff, reducing over-reliance on community employment schemes and associated risks for operations	
2.2	Secure funding to hire Assistant Manager	
2.3	Provide ongoing training and development opportunities for staff in association with Fáilte Ireland to maintain ambitious standards of visitor engagement and staff wellbeing	

OBJECTIVE 3 | Ensure financial security and growth

	ACTIONS
3.1	Prepare annual budgets, monthly inhouse accounts, and quarterly accounts for board members
3.2	Implement current Licence Agreement and secure a new 10 year Licence & Management Agreement with DLRCC with index linked operational funding to support the facility
3.3	Increase and diversify income through ticket sales, grants, shop sales and venue hire
3.4	Develop and promote new high-spend heritage-based experiences and events including for specialist groups and the Ultralux market/Nighttime economy (dependent on upgrade to toilets)

3.5	Increase visitor numbers annually, aiming for 20,000 visitors within five years
3.6	Develop sustainable funding model to support literary festivals: Bloomsday, ECHOES

OBJECTIVE 4 | Work with DLRCC to ensure historic and modern structures are safe and fit for purpose

	ACTIONS
4.1	Work with DLRCC to ensure one named point of contact is in place in relation to facility maintenance/repair and clarity on DLRCC responsibilities
4.2	Actively engage with DLRCC with a view to ensuring it undertakes an annual building survey/inspections and puts in place a funded annual works programme so that the buildings are maintained to a high standard in a timely and cost effective manner
4.3	Schedule biannual meetings between board and appropriate personnel in DLRCC
4.4	Work with DLRCC to ensure best practice conservation of the archaeological monuments and protected structures forming the centre
4.5	Ensure centre is availing of advice and potential funding from Energy Pathfinder programme

OBJECTIVE 5 | Maintain effective corporate governance

	ACTIONS
5.1	Regularly update and review governance policies, ensuring all board members understand their roles, legal obligations, and management of conflicts of interest, offering training if required
5.2	Conduct annual reviews of compliance with employment and equality legislation
5.3	Ensure timely submission of all statutory returns to the Companies Registration Office (CRO) and Charities Regulator
5.4	Maintain representation on Board from Council, community, elected representatives, and local business community, and seek new Board members as appropriate

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

OBJECTIVE	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR
OBJECTIVE 1 Deliver and promote our visitor experience	 Increase in visitor numbers to reach 20,000 by 2029 Increase in diversity of visitor/repeat visits Increase number of community groups availing of services
OBJECTIVE 2 Ensure the facility is adequately staffed	Funding for increase in staffFunding for assistant manager
OBJECTIVE 3 Ensure financial security and growth	Balanced annual income/expenditure
OBJECTIVE 4 Work with DLRCC to ensure historic and modern structures are safe and fit for purpose	Dedicated contact in DLRCC for maintenanceCosted annual maintenance programmeEnergy use declining
OBJECTIVE 5 Maintain effective corporate governance	Annual compliance with Charity regulatory requirementsNew 10-year licencing agreement 2025-2035

APPENDIX A

Products at Dalkey Castle and Heritage Centre 2024

NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AVAILABILITY/ SUITABILITY
Dalkey Castle Living History Experience	General / Visitor Travel back in time on a fully guided tour of the Early Christian Church, the 14th century Fortified Townhouse/Castle, Heritage Centre, and the Writers' Gallery. Trained guides and costumed actors bring history to colourful life with archery, barber surgery and cookery. Browse the interactive screens with historical information in 12 languages. The above adapted for National Schools as per curriculum The above adapted for EFL Language schools The above adapted for Scoileanna Lán Gaelach where possible. The above adapted for vulnerable/ mobility challenged and people with additional needs. Free tours twice weekly in April, May, July, and August for dlr Spring into Heritage and Summer of Heritage programmes	Day time, 6 days Closed on Tuesdays Suitable for incentives
General Guided Literary Walk	Beginning in the Writers' Gallery, marvel at locations and hear local knowledge on Leonard's Da, Binchy'sPenny Candle, Joyce's Portrait, Shaw's Cottage, Newman's UCD and Hurley's tonic wine à la Flann O'Brien and lots more.	Can be combined with Living History Experience at Dalkey Castle Walk only: min no 6 Must be pre-booked
Maeve Binchy & Irish Writers Guided Walk	Begin your walk in the Writers' Gallery, listening to Maeve on video, describe how she approached writing her novels. Follow her to Finnegans where she had her own lunch table. Joyce, Shaw, Beckett, Flann O'Brien, Leonard, Emma Donoghue, Synge, and Jennifer Johnston will all feature. Finish with readings in the Maeve Binchy Memorial Garden at Dalkey Library.	Can be combined with Living History Experience at Dalkey Castle Min number 6 Must be pre-booked
Marvellously Maeve Guided Walk	Usually for dedicated Binchy fans and at ECHOES	Min number 6. Must be pre-booked
Nobel Laureates Walk	Beckett, Yeats, Shaw and Heaney, Nobel Laureates, all had connections to this area, as did James Joyce who should have been a Laureate! Sometimes, Flann O'Brien and Colm McCann and Emma Donoghue are requested.	International Students of Literature International Writers' Groups Min No 10 and pre- booking essential
Guided Historical Walk	Travel through time from the oldest site in Dalkey at the Early Christian Church to Coliemore Harbour. Find links to Viking, Medieval and Victorian times in buildings and place names.	Can be combined with Living History Experience at Dalkey Castle Min number 6 Must be pre-booked

NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AVAILABILITY/ SUITABILITY
	Travel back in time on sea and land in beautiful Dalkey! The only visitor experience near Dublin city to explore Ireland's amazing history on an uninhabited island, just 500 metres from the mainland. Can add	Can be combined with Living History Experience at Dalkey Castle
Fresh Air and Fun on Dalkey Island		Must be pre-booked Min number 10
	experienced archaeologist to the visit.	Incentives only
		Seasonal experience, weather dependent
LUXURY EVENING EXPERIENCES	EVENING ECONOMY	
Magical Heritage Evening at Dalkey Castle	An exclusive, private heritage evening in a genuine medieval townhouse castle. Costumed actors bring Ireland's history to life. Guests try archery and calligraphy, discover medieval recipes and Irish mead, and play the Bodhran with a champion.	Incentive and Ultralux Minimum number 20
Maeve Binchy, The Heart of Dalkey	An exclusive immersion in the life and times of world-famous author Maeve Binchy in her adored hometown of Dalkey. An insiders' experience that no guidebook can provide! Marvellously Maeve Guided Walk, Dinner (not included) evening Binchy Show. Video interview with Gordon Snell recorded in Maeve's writing studio.	Ultralux category Minimum number 20
Discover Dalkey's Literary Legends	Discover the stories behind some of Ireland's most famous writers in Discover Dalkey's Literary Legends, a specially devised experience featuring a guided literary walking tour, private dinner (not included), and magical theatrical evening, In their own Words	Ultralux category Minimum number 20
ReJoyce, Discover Joyce's Dalkey	An exclusive celebration of James Joyce's Dalkey. Ulysses springs vividly to life featuring live dramatisations, a magical tour (coach not incl) and theatrical performance featuring scenes from Joyce, with music and songs he loved.	Ultralux category Minimum number 20

APPENDIX B

Board members, Dalkey Irish Heritage Town CLG, 2025

Deirdre Black (Chair), DLR appointee

Gerry Clabby (Vice Chair), Drama groups representative

Cllr. Mary Fayne, DLR appointee

David Lawless, DLR appointee

Dr. Susan McDonnell, Dalkey Tidy Towns representative

Cllr Justin Moylan, DLR appointee

Blaithín O'Brien, Dalkey business community representative

Katie Ridge, HR consultant

Company Secretary: Michael Heavey



