

Flamin' Phoenix

Did you know that Phoenix Park is the largest urban park in Europe? That it's in Dublin 8? That its name means 'clear water'? That it's flamin' brilliant? RICHARD ASHCROFT reveals the best things to do and see



Phoenix Park Shuttle Bus

There are over 1752 acres of national historic park to explore, so this hop on/hop off service is handy. It operates year round, with a full commentary and stopping at all the major attractions. A day ticket (7am-7pm) costs €2 per adult, €5 for a family and €1 per child. OAPs are free with valid travel pass.

The Zoo

The last couple of months has seen three new arrivals: a cute sea-lion, a wobbly giraffe and a very lively little white rhino. The zoological education department hosts fun children's workshops in July and August - this year the themes are Frogs and Toads and Young Zoologists. Early booking is essential. 474 8900. www.dublinzoo.ie

Farmleigh

An estate of 78 acres bought by the Irish government from the Guinness family in 1999 for a whopping €29.2 million. Since then it has been lovingly refurbished. Walk through the ornamental gardens, have a light luncheon in the Boathouse Restaurant, and afterwards, a tour of the main house. Finish off in the Gerry Cahill-designed art gallery, which holds exceptional historic pieces from the Guinness family, the government collection and the National Gallery. *Thursday - Sunday, 10.15am to 4.45pm. Free of charge.* www.farmleigh.ie

Rent-A-Bike

This friendly operation is situated by Stop 16 on the city bus tour, just inside the Parkgate Street entrance. Rent 'Giant' cycles by the hour (€5), half day (€15) or full day (€20). Kids are welcome - choose bikes with stabilisers, an extra child seat or two-seater kids tow-along buggies (€2.50/hour). You can even hire tandems. Who would look sweet upon the seat? 086 265 6258, www.phoenixparkbikehire.com

Áras an Uachtaráin

This magnificent property is home to our President and contains more than 300 years of incomparable cultural influences, all preserved in the stately architecture, artifacts and antique furniture. Free hour-long tours run on Saturdays from 10.15am to 4pm. Group numbers are limited and it's first-come-first-served. Assemble by the Phoenix Park Visitors' Centre and bring a camera. 617 1000, www.president.ie

The Phoenix Café

This little gem is tucked away by the visitor centre. Fionn Uisce (otherwise known as the Phoenix Café) is a delightful spot for homemade soups, cakes, salads, quiches and other hot dishes. By the way, the best climbing tree in Ireland is just to the right hand side of the café - perfect for kids to lark about on, whilst you relax with a frothy coffee and a slice of hummingbird or lemon drizzle cake. Glorious.

EVENTS THIS MONTH

Monday, August 4th: **Historical reenactment** at Ashtown Castle. 11am-5pm. Sunday, August 24th: **Flower arranging** with Pamela Cafolla at 2pm and 3.30pm. Sunday August 31st: Illustrated talk on the **National War Memorial Gardens** by Park Superintendent Margaret Gormley, 3.30pm. **Children's summer camps** 10am-3.30pm, till August. €10 per child. Book on 677 0095. Information on all events at www.phoenixparkbook.com