

Blarney Castle: Kissing The Stone [C1]

Ricevere il dono dell'eloquenza in cambio di un bacio: è possibile, al Blarney Castle, in Irlanda. L'impresa, però, è tutt'altro che semplice...

Some people come to Blarney Castle to research their family history, hoping to find links to the powerful McCarthy clan that built the structure and once ruled parts of Ireland. For most, however, their interest lies at the top of the castle. Up here, set in a wall just below the battlements, is the Cloch na Blarnan, or Blarney Stone. People come from all over the world to kiss the stone, which is said to grant the gift of eloquence. Do these people believe in magic, or just want to capture the moment for social media? Whatever their reasons, more than a quarter of a million people every year climb the steep, narrow stone staircase and, holding a metal rail on each side, hang upside down above a drop of thirty metres. There are many stories about how the Blarney Stone acquired its magical reputation. Paul O'Sullivan, who is the marketing manager at Blarney Castle and Gardens, knows them all. Speak Up met with O'Sullivan, who explained that the origins of the stone's legendary power are shrouded in myth. **Paul O'Sullivan (Irish accent):** The great thing with Irish stories and myths, there's always variations to the story. So I suppose, I tell you the story and then you tell it to the next person, there's a slight change, and then it goes from there. So the Blarney Stone is seen as an altar stone that was given as a gift to the lord of the castle, and he built it into the outer battlements at the top. So the only access originally was on the outside. Nowadays, we kiss it on the inside. So the way you kissed it is very different. There's a lovely story with that, in that the lord at the time he had a slight speech impediment and he was walking near a body of water. Now, some stories say a lake, some say a river; we have both on the estate, so it's plausible it could be either, and he saw a woman drowning in the water. He pulled her to shore and she was the witch that lived in the Rock Close, which is our oldest garden. And as a thank-you, the witch said, "If you kiss the famous stone, it'll get rid of your speech impediment." So that's where the gift of eloquence or the gift of gab comes from. Or as we say nowadays, "If you kiss it, you can talk yourself out of any situation."

HANGING AROUND

In order to kiss the stone, visitors have to hang upside down with the help of a Blarney Castle assistant. In the excitement, items like hats and glasses have, on occasion, slipped and fallen. Even with metal grab rails to hold on to, it looks a little dangerous, especially if you have a fear of heights. Fortunately, as O'Sullivan explains, it's all perfectly safe: **Paul O'Sullivan:** The hanging upside down kind of stems from the original way, the old way of doing it. So, as I said earlier, the access was on the outside. So to get there, you had to be held by your ankles upside down over the outside of the battlement's wall. Now, as you can imagine, our health and safety officer or our insurance company would not be happy with that idea. So what they did is they cut a section of the wall on the inside, and the way you do it now is a lot safer. So you lie down on your back now, you're held by a member of staff, you hold on to two bars behind you, and then you slide down at a slight angle to kiss the stone.

KISSING

Blarney Castle receives around half a million visitors each year. More than half of them come to kiss the Blarney Stone. That's a lot of kissing! Fortunately, the stone is cleaned regularly for hygiene purposes. But in an age of technology and science, what really motivates people to hang upside down to kiss a piece of ancient stone? **Paul O'Sullivan:** You get a lot of people whose job involves talking. So it might be that they have a big presentation at work... and then you get people, then... they're naturally shy or quiet and they're coming hoping to gain that gift. And then I suppose, look, as we've got to in modern times, you kind of have these Instagrammable moments now that people want to partake in and, you know, hanging off the side of a castle kissing a stone is a fairly unique thing to do.

CELEBRITIES

Through the years, there have been many celebrity visitors, including politician Sir Winston Churchill, Mick Jagger, actors Sofía Vergara and Eddie Redmayne, and former Irish footballer Roy Keane. But the person who has kissed the stone more than anyone else is O'Sullivan himself, as he explains: **Paul O'Sullivan:** We get a lot of TV shows, travel shows... things like that. I would bring a lot of guests around as well and generally, they'll ask me, "Do you want to go first and show us how it's done?" I think I probably do it about fifty times a year, and I'm working here eighteen years. So I don't think anyone's kissed it as much as I have, to be honest.

IMPRESSIVE RUINS

Today, Blarney Castle is a **roofless** ruin, a relic from another age. Long after it was abandoned as a place to live, however, the castle retains a special atmosphere and its rooms echo with the glories, mysteries and battles of the past. **Paul O'Sullivan:** It kind of is what it is now really in the sense of it's **bare** rooms, they're not decorated. Now, we do have information points within all the rooms to say what the rooms are, we have sketches or artists' **impressions** of what the rooms would have looked like. But everything is accessible, so the **dungeons** and the caves beneath the castle are there. We have rooms like the **Murder Hole**, the Great Hall, the Earl's bedroom, a number of garderobes, chambers, and then we have, in the centre column then, you have the family room, the banqueting hall, and the chapel.

THE MURDER HOLE

One of the **features** visitors are most curious about is the **ominously**-named **Murder Hole**. It is O'Sullivan's favourite part of the castle and he explains how it was used to deter **unwelcome** visitors. **Paul O'Sullivan:** A very simple feature. So basically, if the castle was under attack, they entered into the first little chamber within the castle door, there was a square hole cut into the ceiling and basically soldiers would have **dropped** rocks, hot oil, anything

they could down on top of people. So I kind of make the joke to people that that would have been the warm welcome to Blarney at the time.

TAKE AWAY

Visitors to Blarney Castle come from all over the world, and everyone has their own unique experience. But what do O'Sullivan and his team hope that their guests will take away with them from their visit? **Paul O'Sullivan:** The important thing for us would be that they'd got the Irish welcome that they would expect. And then after that, the beauty of the place. It is beautiful. You know, even if you don't go to the castle and kiss the stone, I think people would be taken aback by the beauty that we have here on site.

Glossary

- **shore** = costa
- **ankles** = caviglie
- **taken aback** = sorprendere
- **rail** = corrimano
- **speech impediment** = disturbo del linguaggio
- **witch** = strega
- **talk yourself out** = tirarsene fuori parlando
- **insurance company** = compagnia assicurativa
- **to partake in** = partecipare a
- **ruled** = regnare, dominare
- **fairly** = piuttosto, abbastanza
- **roofless** = senza tetto
- **bare** = spoglie
- **dungeons** = sotterranei
- **unwelcome** = indesiderati
- **dropped** = rovesciare
- **to grant** = concedere
- **narrow** = stretta
- **drowning** = annegare
- **metal grab rails** = ringhiera di metallo
- **at a slight angle** = con una leggera inclinazione
- **impressions** = interpretazioni
- **gift** = regalo
- **climb** = scalare
- **it'll get rid of** = sbarazzarsi di
- **features** = caratteristiche
- **ominously** = minacciosamente
- **take away** = portare via
- **battlements** = merlature
- **drop** = precipizio
- **slight** = piccolo
- **gab** = eloquenza
- **stems** = derivare

- **health and safety officer** = responsabile della salute e della sicurezza sul posto di lavoro
- **shrouded** = avvolgere
- **lie down on your back** = sdraiarsi sulla schiena
- **shy** = timidi
- **steep** = ripida
- **upside down** = a testa in giù
- **slipped** = scivolare
- **Murder Hole** = buca assassina