

The “Luck of the Irish”:

The history, folklore, meaning and mythology of Irish luck



Many symbols of Ireland, as well as we Irish ourselves, are associated with luck. So we thought we would take a closer look at *“The luck of the Irish”* and luck in Irish folklore, the meaning, mythology, and language. Read on to find out more.

Where did the “Luck of the Irish” phrase come?

Many will be familiar with the phrase “luck of the Irish” but perhaps don’t know it’s origins and true meaning! The story goes that the term dates back to the 19th century gold rush in the western United States. Many of the successful miners were Irish immigrants or Irish Americans, working hard to make their fortune.

What is the meaning of “Luck of the Irish”?

These immigrants and first generation Irish-American prospectors were, sometimes disparagingly, said to have “the luck of the Irish” when they made a strike or were successful. The unsaid assumption being that it was luck rather than knowledge, hard work, or skill that brought riches. The association with luck stuck, but has thankfully lost the disparaging meaning in the intervening years! Now the phrase is used with no insulting undertone.

Luck in Irish Folklore

The Irish association with luck may have also come from the amazing array of superstitions in Irish folklore and culture. Some of these superstitions may be quite ancient and draw their roots to pre-Christian Ireland thousands of years ago. There are over **9000 entries** that

mention luck in the National Folklore collection! A quick perusal of some gives this substantial but by no means exhaustive list:

- Don't get married in the month of May - very unlucky!
- Break a mirror, and you will have seven years of bad luck. This one could go back to the Romans, who believed the reflection held the soul.
- If a bird entered the house, it was very bad luck indeed as a death in the family was on the cards.
- But if a bird, specifically a robin, happily hangs out near your back door, you have good luck on the way.
- Salt spilled on the table means a fight is brewing. Bad luck!
- An itchy nose also means you have a fight in your future! Bad luck.
- An itchy left hand means you will come into money. Good luck, indeed.
- An itchy right hand means you will have to hand over money soon. Bad luck!
- A four-leaved clover is a lucky find, and [shamrocks](#) are good luck charms

So are Irish people lucky?

We certainly seem to think so! Ireland regularly [scores near the top of the table](#) in the world happiness index. We live in a beautiful place, surrounded by wonderful culture and community. And though [we do complain about the weather quite a bit](#), as a nation, we seem to look for rainbows with the rain!